



2 Kuwait Red Crescent shifts attention to poor in Kuwait



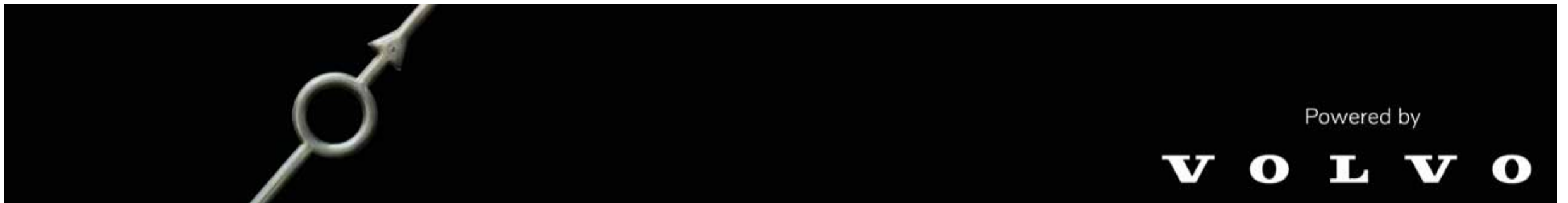
9 Afghan refugees mark 40 yrs in Pakistan in 'mini Kabul'



13 Asian plane makers struggle to take off in crowded market



Giggs, Scholes and instant noodles: Vietnam takes potshot at World Cup



Qatar says talks to end Gulf row were suspended in Jan

Saudi: Iran must change behavior before any talks • Clash over US' global retreat



MUNICH: (From left) Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Thani, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, Oman's Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi and US Senator Chris Murphy attend a panel discussion during the 56th Munich Security Conference (MSC) yesterday. — AFP

MUNICH: Qatar's foreign minister said yesterday efforts to resolve a bitter Gulf dispute had not succeeded and were suspended at the start of January. The discussions began in October on a row in which Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt severed political, trade and transport ties with Qatar in mid-2017.

"It's been almost three years," Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said at the Munich Security Conference. "We were not perpetrators and are open to any offer to resolve this problem. Unfortunately efforts did not succeed and were suspended at the beginning of January and Qatar is not responsible for this," he said.

Also at the Munich conference, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said yesterday no private messages or direct contact had taken place to ease tensions with

Iran and that Tehran first needed to change its behavior before talks can happen. "Until we can talk about the real sources of that instability, talk is going to be unproductive," Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud said.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday traded barbs with European leaders over diminishing Western influence, rejecting as "grossly over-exaggerated" their claims that Washington had retreated from the global stage. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Pompeo sought to assuage European anxiety over the transatlantic bond under an unpredictable President Donald Trump, saying: "The West is winning and we're winning together." But he was immediately contradicted by French President Emmanuel Macron, who warned of "a weakening of the West".

Continued on Page 24

Saudi fighter crashes in Yemen, Houthis say plane shot down

RIYADH: A Saudi fighter jet crashed in conflict-torn Yemen, the Riyadh-led military coalition backing the government said yesterday, as the country's Iran-backed Houthi rebels claimed to have shot it down. The Tornado aircraft came down Friday in northern Al-Jawf province during an operation to support government forces, the coalition said in a statement, in a rare crash that marks a setback for a military alliance known for its air supremacy.

The statement released by the official Saudi Press

Agency did not specify the fate of the crew or the cause of the crash, which comes amid an upsurge in fighting between the warring parties that threatens to worsen Yemen's humanitarian crisis. The Houthi rebels said they will release footage showing the launch of its "advanced surface-to-air missile" and the moment it downed the jet. "The downing of a Tornado in the sky above Al-Jawf is a major blow to the enemy and an indication of remarkable growth in Yemeni (rebel) air defense capabilities," Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdelsalam tweeted.

The insurgents reported multiple coalition air strikes yesterday in the Houthi-controlled area where the plane went down as local residents gathered near the wreckage, according to the rebels' Al-Masirah television. The bombing raids left "dozens" of people dead or wounded, Al-Masirah added, a report that

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Defiant Man City to fight 'flawed' European ban

NYON, Switzerland: Manchester City have been banned from European competitions for the next two seasons for "serious financial fair-play breaches". UEFA announced on Friday, with the verdict immediately contested by Pep Guardiola's English champions. City, who were also fined €30 million (\$32.5 million), announced they were appealing the suspension to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) "at the earliest opportunity".

"Manchester City is disappointed but not surprised by today's announcement by the UEFA Adjudicatory

Chamber," the club said. "The... flawed and consistently leaked UEFA process he (the UEFA chief investigator) oversaw has meant that there was little doubt in the result that he would deliver...Simply put, this is a case initiated by UEFA, prosecuted by UEFA and judged by UEFA. With this prejudicial process now over, the club will pursue an impartial judgment as quickly as possible" at CAS.

Guardiola's City face Real Madrid in this season's Champions League last 16. Announcing the ban a UEFA statement declared: "The Adjudicatory Chamber has imposed disciplinary measures on Manchester City Football Club directing that it shall be excluded from



Continued on Page 24

Erdogan, Trump discuss ways to end crisis in Idlib

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday discussed with US counterpart Donald Trump ways to end the crisis in Idlib, Syria's last major rebel bastion, and condemned Damascus' attacks there, the Turkish presidency said. "Stressing that the regime's most recent attacks are unacceptable, the president and Trump exchanged views on ways to end the crisis in Idlib without further delay," the presidency said in a statement after the two leaders spoke on the phone.

The situation in Syria has become more tense as Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad intensifies his assault on Idlib backed by Moscow air power. Hundreds of civil-

ians have been killed while 800,000 Syrians have been forced to leave their homes to flee the offensive since December, according to the United Nations. Turkey has 12 observation posts in Idlib as part of the 2018 Ankara-Moscow agreement made in southern city of Sochi.

Erdogan threatened to attack Damascus if regime forces did not go back behind the borders of the Sochi deal by the end of Feb after 14 Turks were killed by Syrian regime shelling in Idlib this month. Relations between Turkey and the United States have been strained over multiple issues including Syria but it appears the Americans are trying to capitalise on the tensions over Idlib between Ankara and Moscow.

US special envoy for Syria James Jeffrey came to Ankara earlier this week, and voiced Washington's support for Ankara's "legitimate" interests in Syria and in Idlib. But Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu earlier yesterday insisted that Turkey-Russia relations "shouldn't" be affected by differences of opinion over Syria.

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Local

Adan Hospital nuclear medicine unit: Gradual progress in service, medical research development

Kuwait Times interviews Head of Nuclear Medicine Department at MoH

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Nuclear and molecular imaging and related sciences are key components of Kuwait's nation building since the 1970s, providing fundamental insights in the health and wellbeing of individuals. Kuwait has a vision to improve the level of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging services up to international standards, as well as be locally acknowledged with the aim of improving patients' health within Kuwait, where over 1.3 million are covered with the service.

Adan Hospital nuclear medicine has gone through remarkable changes and continuous modernization since the health ministry took over it from a private administration in 2015, and currently has five of the latest gamma CT-scan cameras, a positron imaging device associated with CT-scan for molecular imaging, an integrated radiology pharmacy, thyroid clinic, thyroid activity meter and a carbon-14 device for stomach germ tests.

Patients have undergone several medical tests at the nuclear medicine department over the past five years with a remarkable gradual increase in numbers in 2019, when 5,248 tests were conducted including over 1,920 cardiac stress tests, 1,417 stomach germ tests using carbon-14, 415 molecular imaging tests and 465 thyroid and radioactive iodine tests.

Adan Hospital's nuclear medicine department is the Ministry of Health's (MoH) only nuclear medicine unit to be awarded UKAS 2008 and ISO 2015 quality certificates for three consecutive years, which had a huge impact on the comprehensive management of nuclear medicine services. It also has an online patient appointment service with a maximum waiting list of 48 hours for all nuclear medicine tests and a maximum of 14 days for molecular imaging, which paves the path towards turning into a paperless unit to match Kuwait's strategy of digitalizing health services.

Adan Hospital's nuclear medicine has effectively contributed to introducing nuclear medicine services through holding



Dr Iman Al-Shammeri

Dr Aisha Al-Qattan

The nuclear medicine facility at Adan Hospital is one of eleven in Kuwait. Its mission statement is to be a nationally recognized center of excellence, matching the international standard with the aim of further improving the health of Kuwait's patients

local conferences and workshops such as a CT-scan workshop, thyroid workshop, the nuclear medicine week, holding several lectures and practical training for specialized doctors registered with the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialties (KIMS) in collaboration with the devices' manufacturing companies' local agents, which all resulted in having a highly trained team to provide medical services.

Nuclear medicine has also achieved effective progress in terms of research and development including research on coronary heart disease, lung cancer with a blood test for vital signs, childhood hyperinsulinemia, checking patients' exposure to radiation during CT-scans, treatment and imaging of the synovium of the knee joint with E90 using the CT-scan aided positron device and 3D printing of medical applications.

Nuclear medicine has also received research grants from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), and research results were published in prestigious international journals including the Journal of Medicine, Journal of Internal Medicine, International Journal of Recent Scientific Research in the US and many others.

The nuclear medicine facility at Adan Hospital is one of eleven in Kuwait. Its mission statement is to be a nationally recognized center of excellence, matching the international standard with the aim of further improving the health of

Kuwait's patients. Kuwait Times spoke to Dr Iman Al-Shammeri, Head of the Nuclear Medicine Department at the Ministry of Health.

Kuwait Times: What are the services and facilities you provide to your patients at the nuclear medicine department?

Al-Shammeri: Nuclear medicine under my headship started in Nov 2015 with a gamma camera and a staff of around 12 people only. This nuclear medicine department at Adan Hospital was run by the private sector from 2005, and was turned over to us in 2015. They completed the project, so the next step was to turn over the facility to us. It was a BOT project. We took over the facilities and started recruiting staff, physicians and technologists - now we have more than 60 people in my department.

KT: What is the latest technology here that you are using that is comparable with international standards?

Al-Shammeri: We are proud to provide the latest technology procedure in the world like positron emission therapy-computed tomography (PET-CT). We use it for cancer patients, and also for other things, especially in screening and diagnostic imaging. The unit accommodates five state-of-the-art SPECT and SPECT/CT cameras, a PET/CT suit, well-equipped radiopharmacy, thyroid clinic and associated facilities. It's like a radiology department, but we differ from radiology in many aspects.

Radiation penetrates the body to create images, but at our nuclear department, the source of radiation is the patient themselves. We inject the patient with radiation or it can be taken orally, and the person starts radiating and will be detected with the gamma camera. PET is a type of nuclear medicine procedure: it means that a tiny amount of a radioactive substance - called a radiopharmaceutical (radionuclide or radioactive tracer) - is used during the procedure to assist in the examination of the tissue under study.

KT: So this is not a treatment facility?

Al-Shammeri: Technically no, but we have physicians, nurses and medical technologists here. Our work is 10-20 percent therapy; treatment is at the hospital - we are more into imaging and diagnosis. Treatment is mainly for benign thyroid cases, thyrotoxicosis or cancer, and is always at the huge facility at Sabah Hospital (Kuwait Cancer Control Center). We now have 11 nuclear medicine centers all over Kuwait in all seven governorates. Sheikh Jaber Hospital also has such facilities. In the 80s, we only had two nuclear medicine facilities - one in Mubarak Hospital and the other in Sabah Hospital. In early 2000, the total increased to eight, and now 11. The latest were in Jaber Hospital, which opened last year, and in Sabah Hospital.

KT: Give us a breakup of patients.

Al-Shammeri: In 2019, we recorded

5,248 patients at Adan - half of them Kuwaitis. We are second after KCCC in terms of the number of patients. In other areas, 70 percent of the patients are expats. Also, male patients are always more than female patients. Our services here are 100 percent supported by the government.

KT: How is the training and development in your department?

Al-Shammeri: We have a very good lineup of staff, and I can say we are almost 70 percent Kuwaiti. Kuwaitization is real in our department and I am happy that the staff is satisfied. We have programs for continuous learning and training for the doctors, technologists, nurses and physicists.

KT: Kuwaitis normally go abroad seeking medical treatment - can a facility like this lessen the burden?

Al-Shammeri: Our facilities are complete with advance technology - if before we used to send them abroad just for diagnosis, nowadays we conduct diagnostics here and send them for treatment. We show the result of the tests and we send them together with the scanned images, so they are happy - it's a testimony of success. We have programs like seminars and workshops to educate and arm people with knowledge. We promote our department in schools and malls to make them realize that we value their health.

KT: What other activities do you have in nuclear medicine?

Al-Shammeri: Nuclear medicine is progressing actively in research and development, including in coronary artery disease, lung cancer and biomarkers, pediatric hyper-insularism, CT dose audit, Y90 PET/CT synovectomy and 3D printing for medical applications in association with other specialties nationally and internationally, and has been successful in receiving a number of research grants from KFAS. Nuclear medicine is also involved dynamically in organizing conferences and workshops such as CT workshop, thyroid workshop, in-house teaching and trainings.



—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KRCS shifts attention to poor back home

KUWAIT: National philanthropic associations, namely Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), have pursued humanitarian activities abroad but some attention has been shifted to aiding cash-strapped families in Kuwait. Heeding His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's guidelines, more philanthropic tasks were performed last week, coinciding with the State of Kuwait national days' celebrations. Kuwait Red Cross Society (KRCS), one of the top national relief organizations, has turned attention to the domestic level, intensifying efforts to help children of low income families, the handicapped, the sick and the widows.

"Our delight with the national celebrations is unlimited," said Maha Al-Barjas, the KRCS Secretary General, in a press statement after distributing various kinds of assistance to poor families at Al-Shaheed Park, marking the National Day and the Liberation Day. Each year, number of families participating in the national celebrations increases, she has said, affirming that the society will continue to help these families with various programs.

In line with the State of Kuwait's "Al-fazaa" (An Arabic old term for mobilization) to relieve stricken Syrian families in winter, President of the International Islamic Charity and Amiri Diwan Advisor Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq called for donations to help relocated Syrians in North Syria and refugees in Lebanon. Dr Maatouq, also special advisor of the UN Secretary General, said Syrians displaced from beleaguered region of Idlib, Northwest Syria, are experiencing "a horrific humanitarian tragedy," noting their urgent need for food, drinking water, medicines, milk for children, blankets, tents and heating utensils. Some of these hungry families have been wandering astray in uninhabited areas, looking for shelter and food amid snowfalls and biting cold. The charity is pursuing its winter campaign, dubbed "their life under zero," designed to secure the relocated Syrians' needs, such as erecting a makeshift town, named "life town," to house 1,800 Syrian families, at a cost of KD 333 (\$1,000) per residential unit. Moreover, it delivered aid for Syrian refugees in the Lebanese border town of Ersal.

The International Islamic Charity has recently sheltered 600 Syrian families from Hama countryside in cement units, delivered meals to 6,900 families, one million gloves of bread, one million liters of clean water, 1,000 food parcels, 100 heaters, 500 heating fuel rations and 3,000 boxes of children milk. Shedding further light on hardships of the dis-



KRCS President Dr Hilal Al-Sayer with Kuwaiti doctors.

placed in northern Syria and the refugees in the Lebanese Bekaa valley, Dr Maatouq said snow and rain caused power outage, formed ponds of mud and fly on the camps' alleys making refugees' movement and transfer quite difficult.

In Jordan, the KRCS was active again, executing a relief program for aiding 500 Syrian refugee families. The program is part of a campaign, launched last week, to provide food and medical aid. A team of Kuwaiti doctors and surgeons conducted operations for 50 cases. Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, the KRCS president, said the latest society activity in Jordan was intended to provide clothes to Syrian families. He added that the medical team would conduct other surgeries to treat illnesses in various patients' organs at a rate of 45 operation in three days. Elaborating, Dr Sayer has indicated that the Kuwaiti Red Crescent is expanding its relief medical program globally, reaching the sick among refugees and the needy in Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Gaza, Yemen, Iraq, Sri Lanka, in addition to those in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. At the local level, it will pursue philanthropic tasks in Kuwait, with support from the political leadership, Dr Sayer has re-affirmed.

Dr Abulatif Al-Turki, a consultative doctor of kidney and urinary tract surgery at the Amiri Hospital, said the Kuwaiti medical team succeeded in conducting a large number of surgeries and operations in a record short time, treating patients of chronic and physical abnormality cases. Meanwhile, KRCS



A Kuwaiti doctor operates on a Syrian refugee in Jordan.

board member Dr Khaled Al-Sebeeh has said the society launches throughout the year programs and campaigns to enhance the public health awareness, latest of which was issuance of guidelines on protection against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Kuwaiti Ambassador Aziz Al-Daihani, who inspected the team makeshift hospital affirmed that the Kuwaiti relief operations for the Syrian refugees would continue, also re-noting that this humanitarian approach is in line with instructions from His Highness the Amir.

Shedding further light on the KRCS winter campaign for the Syrian refugees in Jordan, Barjas said the provided materials include blankets, heating devices, coupons to purchase fuel and food portions. In addition to the assistance distribution, the society held in coordination with the Jordanian Red Crescent a celebration for Syrian children - during which gifts were distributed. Moreover, the Kuwaiti society is keen on providing psychological support for the refugees, said Dr MUSAED Al-Enezi, the KRCS legal and refugee affairs department. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti Qualitynet company organized a charity race for children, involving more than 1,000 children. Proceeds of the activity will be allocated to help students of short-strapped families.

In Geneva, the State of Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and International Organizations, Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim, delivered the annual, voluntary Kuwaiti contribution, worth \$3 million,



Humanitarian aid distributed for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). For its part, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) has also signed with the ICRC a memo to back up some humanitarian programs. —KUNA

Zain offers latest technology solutions to Alghanim Industries

To provide Kuwait's biggest retail stores with networking and security services

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, will offer Alghanim Industries with the latest technology solutions to provide a number of the company's biggest retail stores in Kuwait with the most advanced innovative services in networking, information security, and telecommunications infrastructures.

The announcement came during Zain's participation as a Strategic Sponsor in the Kuwait Tech Expo 2020 at the Kuwait International Fair in Mishref, with the presence of Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Alghanim Industries Director of Corporate Communications Abdullateef Al-Sharikh, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, as well as the executive management teams from both companies.

Zain will offer a wide range of the latest technology solutions to a number of retail stores and global brands that are part of Alghanim Industries in Kuwait. The solutions, mainly in networking, information security, and telecommunications infrastructures, include SD-WAN cloud solutions for networks management, 4G LTE Internet connectivity services that can be upgraded to support 5G technology later, integrated VSaaS surveillance solutions on Zain's secure cloud for video recording, storage, remote viewing, and management alerts, and more. Zain will also offer Cisco Meraki access point services for smart and efficient network managing, UPS battery backup solutions in case of power outages, several infrastructure and networking services, and much more.

Commenting on the collaboration, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "we are proud that Alghanim Industries is one of Zain's biggest corporate customers today. The company currently benefits from our Zain Business Data Center's services, and our collaboration today represents a step forward to expand this partnership and offer more of the most advanced services and solutions to power Alghanim Industries' digital infrastructure. This is especially that as it is one of the biggest and oldest leading companies in Kuwait and the region."

Marzouq added: "the offering of these services and solutions comes as part of our commitment at Zain to offer the latest and most advanced solutions to Kuwait's business community, whether large companies or SMEs, and as per the highest international standards. This commitment comes in line with our digital transformation strategy through which we aim at empowering a more efficient business sector in the Kuwaiti market."

Marzouq concluded: "Zain recently received the Management and Operation Data Center Certification by Uptime Institute - the IT industry's most trusted and adopted global standard for the proper design, build and operation of data centers, making it the first telecom operator in Kuwait and the third in the region to receive this prestigious certification. Our certification by one of the world's leading advisory organizations comes to demonstrate our leadership and commitment in adopting the highest international standards for our data center, which ultimately reflects on the quality and efficiency of our services targeted at the Enterprise Segment within the Kuwaiti market. For this, we greatly value the trust of Alghanim Industries in Zain's leadership."

Alghanim Industries Director of Corporate Communications, Abdullateef Al-Sharikh, commented: "Alghanim Industries is always searching for the best solutions to serve its growing customer base. Throughout our expansion plans, we have been fortunate to collaborate with a leading telecom provider like Zain. Their comprehensive digital solutions are both innovative and pioneering, offering a large company such as Alghanim Industries the opportunity to meet its ambitious expansion plans and growing customers' demands."

Zain recently announced its strategic sponsorship of Kuwait Tech Expo 2020, considered Kuwait's biggest event for technology and telecommunications services. The event aimed at offering effective solutions to the country's various bodies with the aim of serving the community's needs.

Zain's support to the event came to affirm its commitment in being present at the various activities and programs that contribute to pushing the national economy wheel and achieve the country's developmental goals, especially those centered



KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Alghanim Industries Director of Corporate Communications Abdullateef Al-Sharikh and Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti at Zain's booth.

around technology and telecommunications. As the world goes through comprehensive digital transformation, Zain expressed its commitment and readiness to be a main contributing partner of Kuwait's digital transformation journey.

Through its dedicated booth at the Kuwait Tech Expo 2020, Zain showcased its capabilities as an active partner in empowering a smart life, a safe community, and an efficient business sector to achieve the goals of the Kuwait National Development Plan (New Kuwait 2035), which is based on five expected outcomes and seven key pillars. Zain considers itself a main partner

in the achievement of this plan.

Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects, as well as further pushing the entrepreneurial community's growth in the country. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive print through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of entrepreneurship and innovation.

National library council holds first meeting



KUWAIT: Kuwait National Library's advisory council held its first meeting recently with the presence of Kamel Suleiman Al-Abdul Jaleel, Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCAAL).

Speaking on the occasion, Abdul Jaleel congratulated the council members on the trust they earned from

Information Minister Mohammad Al-Jabri, and stressed the importance of the council's role. Meanwhile, the council's chairman Professor Sultan Mohayya Al-Daihani thanked minister Jabri and secretary general Abdul Jaleel for their trust and stressed that all council members were highly qualified in various sciences needed such as information technology,



culture, media, libraries and archiving.

The council members include Bahaa Abdul Qader Ibrahim, former historical documents and libraries director in the Amiri Diwan, Suad Abdullah Al-Ateeqi, Al-Babtain Library's General Manager, Hamad Abdul Mohsen Al-Hamad, authors' association member, Dr Abdullah Mohammad Al-Hajri,

History Professor at Kuwait University, Basma Al-Safar, assistant dean for libraries at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Budoor Khaled Al-Mutairi, Editor-in-Chief of the Berwaz news website, and Nassar Saleh Bulabqa, information services and digital library manager at Kuwait National Library.

Advanced technique to treat spinal column fractures

By Abdullatif Al-Sharaa

KUWAIT: Intervention radiology, spinal column and chronic pain consultant Dr Waleed Al-Hajji revealed a new and advanced technique called balloon technique to treat spinal column fractures resulting from bone weakness and osteoporosis, adding that it has a high success rate and in record time of 30 minutes only for each area treated. It also has astonishing results in the treatment of fractured vertebra.

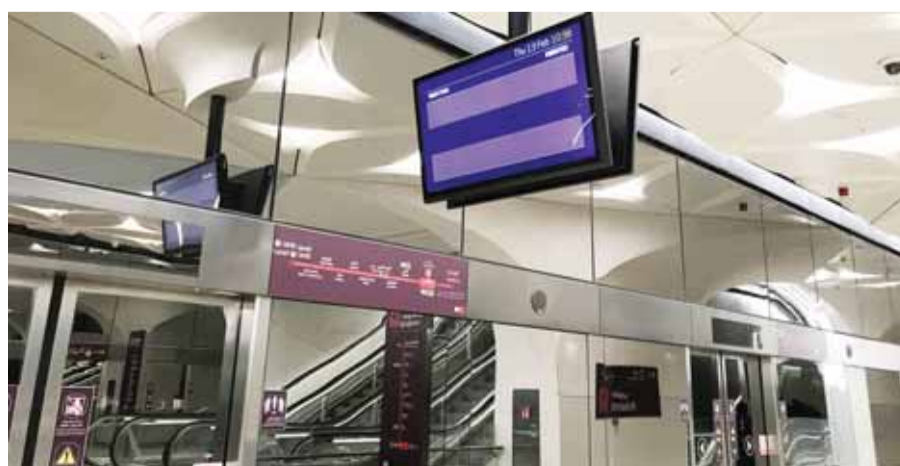


Dr Waleed Al-Hajji

Hajji said the operation is carried out by inserting a needle, and when it reaches the problem area, a balloon at the tip of the needle is inflated to fill the empty area of the brittle bone and restore the vertebra's lost body due to the fracture. The inflated balloon's empty space is then filled with medical cement material through a technique of slow injection to avoid any leakage or complications.

Hajji said this operation gives the fractured vertebra more solidity and gets fantastic results immediately after the procedures. He said this technique represents a quality move in spinal column injuries due to its many advantages that spares time and effort. He said there are many reasons for the spread of bone disease in society, headed by increasing traffic accidents and osteoporosis in women. He said this technique serves the elderly to a great extent because it provides comfort and safety for the patient, and does not require high doses of anesthetics. The surgery is done under local anesthesia without incision and does not take a long time.

Doha Metro: Convenient and easily accessible transportation system



DOHA: Doha Metro is one of Qatar Rail Company's projects which provides a convenient and easily accessible transportation network in the Qatari capital and its suburbs, in preparation for hosting the FIFA

World Cup in 2022. Currently, the first phase of the system is in service - which includes three out of four metro lines. The metro consists of 37 stations, while future stages will include additional lines. — KUNA

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Sunset at Bahrat Hoshan. — Photo by Mohammad Al-Saleh (KUNA)

Minister inaugurates Gulf pavilions, Turkish village at heritage festival

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KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah visits the Saudi pavilion. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah inaugurated on Friday pavilions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and Turkey village in the Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village, as part of the Gulf heritage festival, sponsored by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah, General Supervisor of the Heritage Village Advisor Mohammad Dhaif Allah Sharar and Village Director Saif Al-Shallabi accompanied by a large number of dignitaries and visitors toured the Gulf pavilions and the Turkish village. Sheikh Ali told reporters, after the opening ceremony, that festival shows and helps preserve Arabian Gulf's civilization heritage and strengthens bonds among Gulf peoples. Activities in the festival are considered a first-hand look into traditional household tasks, manufacturing, and heritage work that used to take place in the past, he said. In a separate statement, Sheikh Ali noted that this village is considered an important part of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village due to the amount of exhibitions and arts, namely the Turkish civilization exhibitions, which boost cooperation between the two countries. The minister also



The Saudi pavilion at the heritage village.

said the festival and Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village have become a setting for exchanging Gulf, Arab, and Islamic cultures. — KUNA



Turkish music troupe performance.

Kuwait Prime Minister meets Azerbaijani President, PMs, other senior officials

Kuwait reiterates support to UN efforts in Syria



MUNICH: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met Friday with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev at the headquarters of the Munich 56th Security Conference held in Germany. His Highness then received a group of the international NGO 'The Elders' on the sideline of the Conference. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled also received Romanian Prime Minister Ludovic Orban, as well as Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama. Moreover, His Highness received Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Bin Abdurrahman Al-Thani, Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Zeina Adra and US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper.

His Highness the Prime Minister also met yesterday with President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev at the headquarters of the 56th Munich Security Conference currently held in Germany. Furthermore, His Highness met with the President of Estonia Krestu Kaljulaid. On the sideline of the conference, His Highness received Kurdistan's Prime Minister Masrour Barzani and the Prime Minister of the Netherlands Mark Rutte. His Highness also received Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia's Prime Minister, as well as Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. Moreover, His Highness met with Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Yusuf bin Abdullah, Oman's Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs. Attending the meetings were Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr

Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and National Security Apparatus Chief Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met Friday with United Nations Special Envoy to Syria Geir Pedersen on the sidelines of the 56th Munich Security Conference. During the meeting, Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad reiterated Kuwait's support to the UN envoy's efforts to help restore security and stability in Syria. In the meantime, the UN official hailed Kuwait's great role and humanitarian contributions to alleviating the suffering of Syrian people.

Furthermore, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad met with Josep Borrell, EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Strengthening bilateral relations and discussing latest regional and international developments took place. Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser also met with Finland's Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto and Jeppe Kofod, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, as they discussed bilateral relations and recent regional and international developments. Moreover, the Kuwaiti top diplomat received Nikos Christodoulides, Cyprus's Minister of Foreign Affairs, as they discussed topics focusing on issues of mutual concern to further develop relations.

Also on the sidelines of the conference, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad held talks with Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn, German Minister of State Niels Annen, Yemeni Foreign



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with President of Estonia Krestu Kaljulaid.

Minister Mohammad Al-Hadhrami, UK Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development James Cleverly, Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Chingiz Aidaarbekov, Maltese Foreign Minister Evarist Bartolo, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Al-Hakim and Greece's Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias, Ambassador of Kuwait to Germany Najeeb Al-Bader, Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Mohammad Hayati attended the meetings.

The 56th Munich Security Conference (MSC-2020) kicked off at Hotel

Bayerischer Hof in Munich on Friday in the presence of more than 500 leaders in the fields of politics, business, academia and civil society from Europe and other parts of the world. They include 30 heads of state and government and more than 100 ministers of foreign affairs and defense. Led by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's delegation to the event includes Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Chief National Security Bureau Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah as well as other senior officials. — KUNA

Philippine union slams lifting of labor ban to Kuwait

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Trade Union Congress of the Philippines strongly rejected lifting the ban on sending domestic helpers to Kuwait. TUCP Chairman Raymond Mendoza said that the decision made by Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello and the Department of Labor and Employment's board of directors to lift the ban came hastily and without thinking about its consequences, nor achieving justice for the Filipina maids who had died in Kuwait. Mendoza added that both the Philippines foreign ministry and DOLE know that domestic helpers are the weakest amongst Filipinos working in Kuwait. "They should have waited until the trial was over before lifting the ban," he underlined.

Motorist killed in collision

A Kuwaiti was killed after his vehicle collided into a truck along Fahaaheel Expressway, said security sources, noting that the citizen was seriously injured and died on arrival at the hospital, while the other driver sustained only minor injuries.

Woman found dead

A Kuwaiti woman, in her thirties, was found dead in her apartment in Salwa, said security sources, noting that one of the victim's friends had reported the matter to the police. Initial investigations suggest that the

woman might have been murdered. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

MoH bonuses, promotions

The health ministry announced allocating KD 12 million for its employees' excellent performance bonuses for 2019, said informed sources, noting that the ministry is currently listing the deserving employees' names to finalize it by next month and pay the bonuses by April at most. In another health-related concern, MoH promoted 700 employees working in pharmaceutical and allied medical services to higher positions with various job titles. The sources elaborated that the promoted employees include 77 radiology and nuclear medicine technicians, 22 in food and nutrition, three in psychological treatment, eight in the hearing and speech department and six decontamination technicians.

Mask exports halted

Well-informed sources said MoH had made a recommendation to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to temporarily stop exporting and re-exporting all kinds of face masks. The sources added that accordingly, Minister Khaled Al-Roudhan issued a ministerial decision temporarily halting all medical mask exports.

No fee hike without review

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah issued a ministerial decision halting any increase in the charges of medical services provided by private medical facilities unless reviewed and authorized by the ministry's concerned committee. In another medical issue, MoH assistant undersecretary for private medical services affairs Dr Fatima Al-Najjar stressed the presence of coordination between the ministry and various private

medical facilities concerning the protocol to be followed with the new coronavirus.

Shaheed Park concert legal

The information ministry stressed that a local art production company had applied to it to get a license to hold a concert at Shaheed Park, and that the application was fully legal. The license was given after the applicants signed affidavits not to violate laws regulating concerts and parties. The ministry added that its inspectors will be present at the concert to ensure that the laws and regulations are fully adhered to. The ministry's statement came in response to reports about allowing a foreign band into Kuwait to hold a concert at the park. This particular band is known to always break censorship regulations.

MoD final budget statement

Chairman of the parliamentary budgets committee Adnan Abdulsamad said that the committee met in the presence of Deputy PM and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah to discuss the ministry's final statement for the fiscal year 2018-2019. Abdulsamad said the final statement had been properly prepared in four years since a law was passed setting an exceptional budget for the defense ministry's armaments for 10 years, with a total value of KD 3 billion.

Abdulsamad added that the committee is still awaiting the finance ministry's approval to add the balance of the exceptional budget to the state budget. The committee finally decided forming a special team from the ministry's technical office to reach the right solution after coordination with the Audit Bureau and finance ministry auditors. Notably, the defense ministry also briefed the committee on the procedures it had followed on referring the memo of the Eurofighter jet contract to the public prosecution.

Child killed in tent blaze

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A four-year-old child was killed in a tent fire in a camp on Salmi road. Tahreer fire center responded, led by Maj Hadi Nusair. A woman suffered injuries and was taken to hospital.

Fire at North Zour station

Zour hazardous materials and Nuwaiseeb fire centers responded to a report about a limited fire at North Zour power station. Firemen controlled the fire, which was in the turbine unit. No injuries were reported. Director of Ahmadi governorate fire department Col Ahmad Al-Bairami, head of Zour center Col Meshal Al-Qattan and

head of Mubarak Al-Kabeer hazardous materials center Lt Col Ali Al-Marzouqi were present at the site.

No permit for Irada Sq gathering

The interior ministry confirms that the right to organize parades and gatherings is guaranteed by the Kuwaiti constitution and regulated by laws, adding that laws issued by the National Assembly stipulate that parades and gatherings must have permissions. About calls to gather in Irada Square, the interior ministry said it did not license the gathering there today. The ministry appealed to all citizens to comply with the law, whether to submit a request or join gatherings.

Man dies during flight

The Civil Aviation Directorate said a passenger on Kuwait Airways flight KU 618 from Doha on Friday died after the flight left Hamad International Airport. Concerned authorities conducted the usual procedures upon the flight's arrival to Kuwait.



Firemen respond to a blaze at North Zour power station.

local spotlight

Dirty money



By Muna Al-Fuzal

Muna@kuwaittimes.net

Money laundering and human trafficking are crimes that no honorable person or transparent system can accept or tolerate for any reason. Suspicions have risen about it in recent years, leading people to express their concerns and fears about the spread of this ugly and negative phenomenon of making rapid wealth without an evident source of income.

Naturally, security authorities investigate the issue when they have conclusive evidence, but the emergence of such crimes or suspicions in Kuwait are dangerous and disturbing for Kuwaitis and expats, with implications of such cases on the economic and social situation, especially the youth.

Socially, the spread of dirty money crimes in any society will lead to the creation of class differences due to the emergence of a new and alien social class that is extremely wealthy without a clear source of income. Such a matter has serious repercussions on young people, as it sends a wrong message that has no value for education, science or work - that you can get a lot of money that reaches in the millions by doing activities that do not require a degree, a certificate of study or experience. So it is expected that the community could be subjected to tremors.

Since I believe that a citizen is a role model for the expatriate in the importance of adhering to laws and fighting corruption, unfortunately, sometimes we find ourselves facing crimes committed by expatriates working for companies that are owned by citizens.

One of the most prominent crimes was published in dailies during the past week that is still under investigation. The interior ministry said that it arrested a "Bangladeshi" involved in money laundering and human trafficking in the country, while two of his partners managed to escape from the country. The case was exposed after some workers complained that their salaries had been stopped for more than five months, and others found their salaries were less than what they had agreed upon.

A report published in Kuwait indicated that these people brought more than 20,000 Bangladeshi workers on government cleaning contracts in exchange for large sums of money, exceeding KD 50 million. They have Bangladeshi representatives who work for them to bring in Bangladeshi workers for large sums of money, with a single residency ranging from KD 1,800 to 2,200 for a worker, and for a driver from KD 2,500 to 3,000. Surprisingly, one of the suspects holds a major position in his country, while he is also a director of a local company. The file of the company has been suspended.

In 2019, 12 companies were shut down by the Kuwaiti government due to suspicions of money laundering and illegal financing activities. Kuwait has law no. 106 of 2013 on combating money laundering and terrorist financing, which was published in the official gazette on May 26, 2013. These laws and decisions came after the authorities discovered hugely inflated bank accounts of social media celebrities, with transfers of large amounts of money from their accounts.

Nevertheless, there is a lot of talk about suspicions of money laundering and human trafficking operations, but the security authorities cannot arrest or investigate with anyone without clear evidence. The importance of fighting dirty money crimes is important to prevent members of society from benefiting from corruption, especially as these suspicious and illegal funds are transferred from one country to another, crossing borders. Therefore, no country or institution should encourage the process of money laundering or turn a blind eye to the huge money that enters it, especially developing countries.



Chinese tourist becomes Europe's first virus death

Where's the love? Indonesia says no to Valentine's Day

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BEIJING: A nearly empty street is seen in Beijing yesterday. The death toll from the new coronavirus outbreak jumped past 1,500 in China as France reported the first fatality outside Asia, fuelling global concerns about the epidemic. —AFP

Love in the time of coronavirus

A quiet Valentine's Day in China

BEIJING: It was supposed to be a whirlwind tour of China for Jiang Lanyi's boyfriend: classical gardens in Suzhou, modern art in Shanghai, ice-skating in central Beijing. Instead, the 24-year-old and her Ukrainian partner have spent more than two weeks holed up in her parents' house in northeast Liaoning province to avoid the new coronavirus.

Couples around China settled for a quiet Valentine's Day this year, with COVID-19 intruding as an unwelcome third-wheel in romantic celebrations. The new disease has infected nearly 64,000 people and killed more than 1,350 in China, triggering transport restrictions, restaurant shut-downs, and the closure of major tourist sites. Businesses around the country from florists to concert halls closed shop and axed events, leaving couples with no choice but to spend the night in.

For Jiang and her boyfriend, that meant a lot of mahjong. "We play two to three hours every day," said Jiang, who met her

partner, a tech entrepreneur, while studying in London. "Having started learning from zero, he's now very skilled," she added. In Beijing, Valentine's Day specials aimed at couples - from a "My Heart Will Go On" concert to a 1,688 yuan (\$240) lobster dinner for two - were cancelled.

Valentine's Day this year "won't be that different from daily life under quarantine," said Tyra Li, who lives in Beijing with her boyfriend of nearly three years. Since Lunar New Year, aside from a trip to see family, the couple has only left the house to buy groceries - they don't even order food delivery for fear of infection, she said. "There definitely won't be any flowers," the 33-year-old said. "I don't dare to receive them and he doesn't dare to buy them."

Business of love

The risk of infection, which has left most lovers house-bound, has battered Valentine's Day sales for businesses hoping to cash in on love. Flower shop Xian

Hua Ge in Beijing told AFP that sales plunged by up to 70 percent from last year - partly because many have not returned to the city to work. Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said in a Tuesday report that the "return rate" of workers for China's four Tier-1 cities was only 19.4 percent as of February 9, far below 66.7 percent a year ago.

A worker at Romanti Fresh Flowers said sales had dropped up to 50 percent in part because customers were fearful of virus transmission via delivery staff, while another shop told AFP they had "no stock". China's wedding industry has also taken a hit, with the Chinese government urging couples to delay their nuptials earlier this month.

Zhu He, 25, who downsized her wedding due to virus fears last month, said she and her fiancé had originally planned to pick up their marriage license on Valentine's Day. That's been delayed due to the epidemic, said Zhu, who lives in southern Guangzhou

city. "We had planned to go together (with my parents)," she told AFP. "Now, they won't come even though we all live in Guangzhou." "They both can't drive and I don't really trust public transport," said Zhu, worried about the risk of infection.

Together in spirit

The new coronavirus has also complicated romantic trysts, with many cities across China closing off neighborhoods to outside visitors in a bid to contain the outbreak. Miao Jing, a university student in northern Tianjin city, said her girlfriend had to sneak into her hotel through the car park for a three-hour rendezvous earlier this month.

The trip was supposed to last three days, explained the 23-year-old, who took a five-hour train to northern Zhangjiakou city to see her partner. But on the second day, the district where Miao was staying reported a confirmed case of the virus. "She was really worried," Miao told AFP.

"In the end, I only saw her on the first day."

For Shaw Wan, 28, who works on short documentaries in Beijing, the epidemic has separated her and her boyfriend - who is in Taiwan - indefinitely. "I don't really want him to return either - what if he gets infected on the way back?" she told AFP. But there is some silver lining to the COVID-19 outbreak. Li in Beijing said staying cooped up at home had meant more time with her boyfriend - in the past, their busy schedules meant they only saw each other after 10pm on weekdays.

And for Miao and her girlfriend, who are in a long-distance relationship, volunteering in epidemic relief work has brought them closer together. The two students help residents and communities in Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak, with remote tasks like calling to arrange car transport. "There is a feeling of working together," she said. "Even if we cannot be together physically, in some sense we are." —AFP

Love boat: Valentine on quarantine cruise

TOKYO: "Cupid's avocado" for dinner, heart-shaped messages for the crew, but also painful separation: for those trapped on board the quarantined Diamond Princess cruise ship, Friday is no ordinary Valentine's Day. Wearing a red dress and a red hair tie, the ship's entertainment manager Natalie posted a Valentine's Day video on Twitter to try to keep spirits up.

"I just wanted to check in with everybody and say that we are all hanging in there, doing fine and keeping together as a big family," she said, admitting with a smile: "This hasn't been my regular attire for the last week or so." Passenger Matt Smith, 57, was marking Valentine's Day on board with his wife of 21 years, Katherine Codekas, also 57 - and admitted this was not their first-choice location for the special day.

"After 21 years of marriage, we don't make a big deal of it, but I usually get Katherine a card at least," he said from the ship. "I think she was a little disappointed with our setting," he added. "Facebook reminded me this morning that three years ago we were in Las Vegas. Way to rub it in!" Passengers on board were being offered a "Valentine's Day" breakfast, Smith said. "We were reminded what day it was by the delivery of what the crew member said was a 'special' breakfast," he said.

"Not sure why hard-boiled eggs, sausage, and sauteed mushrooms are special." The dinner menu, on the other hand, promises several special treats in honor of the day, "Cupid's Avocado and Shrimp salad" to start, followed by "Shrimp Valentine Japanese style with rice and vegetables." The main course is the French classic Coq au Vin with mashed potato and vegetables, and a "Valentine's Day surprise dessert of the day" is promised.

"Coq au Vin, yes please," tweeted Yardley Wong, who has been posting her efforts to keep her young son entertained on the quarantined vessel. "A special meal for Valentine's Day, a reserved bottle of red," she added, with her usual hashtag #hanginthereDiamondPrincess and a



YOKOHAMA: A bus with a driver wearing protective gear departs from the dockside next to the Diamond Princess cruise ship, which has around 3,600 people quarantined onboard due to fears of the new COVID-19 coronavirus. —AFP

picture of a bottle of wine. She also posted a drawing by her six-year-old son for Valentine's Day, with the caption "Stay strong, we are with you Diamond Princess."

'Love never fades'

American passenger Jackie joked that she had big plans for Valentine's Day on the cruise, which has proved far from the gala holiday everyone planned. "We're going to have a formal night on Valentine's Day in our cabin. Take some pics, have some laughs," she tweeted. Another passenger cut out paper hearts and left them on her door for the crew to read, with messages including: "Thank you for all your hard work" and "Thank you for taking care of us."

More than 200 people on board the ship have been diagnosed with the newly named COVID-19 and taken to local hospitals. Those remaining on board will be in quarantine until at least February 19. While passengers are battling isolation, fear and boredom, some members of the crew have voiced concerns about their conditions, includ-

ing eating together and sleeping two to a cabin.

But the coronavirus has also ripped some couples apart for Valentine's Day, including at least one on their honeymoon. Kent Frasure was forced to say goodbye to his partner Rebecca, who has contracted the virus and is now in isolation in hospital. "We said 'goodbye, see each other later' and gave each other a hug. We didn't have a goodbye kiss because we didn't really know what was going on," Kent told CNBC. "Then I watched her walk down the hallway, turn the corner and then she was gone."

On Friday evening, passengers tweeted photos of additional Valentine's Day treats: chocolates, face masks, even single red roses. "This Valentine's Day, we have many well wishes, messages of love and support coming to all of us on board from around the world," the captain said in a public broadcast. "It's a heartwarming show of support." "Now, I'd like to share this short poem with you: love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fades. I wish you all a happy Valentine's Day." —AFP

Google mulls licensing deals with news media

SAN FRANCISCO: Google is in discussions on deals to pay media organizations for content, a move aimed at blunting criticism that it unfairly profits from copyrighted news, according to people familiar with the talks. Negotiations between the internet giant and news outlets were said to be in the early stages, with most of the publishers located in France and other parts of Europe.

Paying for news would diverge from the Alphabet-owned internet titan's practice of freely mining the internet for material it displays in search results. A licensing deal would likely be welcomed by news organizations that contend Google derives profits from ads alongside their news articles, including "snippets" in search results.

Contacted by AFP Friday, Google indicated it is seeking new ways to help publishers. "We want to help people find quality journalism - it's important to informed democracy and helps support a sustainable news industry," Google vice president of news Richard Gingras said in a statement. "We care deeply about this and are talking with partners and looking at more ways to expand our ongoing work with publishers, building on programs like our Google News Initiative." The Wall Street Journal reported earlier Friday Google was considering deals for a "premium" news product. The California tech giant has remained steadfast about not paying for news article links displayed in search results and is not changing that position, people familiar with the matter said. It has argued that it drives traffic to news websites and thereby helps those publishers get ad revenues. Google's News Initiative works with publishers to encourage readership and paid subscriptions to their offerings. —AFP

International

Kazakh violence makes Chinese Muslim minority ponder future

Assailants descend on village, setting fire to homes, shops, livestock

MASANCHI: As Khusei Daurov lay dazed after being caught up in inter-ethnic clashes near his home in southern Kazakhstan, he felt the cold steel of a pistol against his forehead. Violence had broken out among local Kazakhs and a group of ethnic Chinese Muslims called Dungans, who number more than 150,000 across Central Asia.

Daurov, a Dungan community leader, was trying to calm tensions when a Kazakh man put the gun to his head. Another Kazakh intervened, convincing the man to let Daurov go. His eyes glazed with tears as he recalled the incident a few days later, a sling supporting an arm that was broken in the assault. But Daurov was still reluctant to condemn his Muslim Kazakh "brothers" for the violence. "It wasn't Kazakhs who did this to our people," he said. "These people were bandits and extremists."

The February 7 rampage, which resulted in 11 deaths, saw hundreds of ethnic Kazakh assailants descend on the Dungan village of Masanchi, setting fire to homes, shops and livestock. In the worst such violence in nearly three decades of independence, at least nine of the dead were Dungans, while one was a Kazakh, officials said. One body has not yet been identified. The bloody clashes have highlighted underlying tensions in a region where many ethnic groups live side by side, and have left many in the Dungan community wondering what their future holds.

From China in fear

Life in Central Asia for the Dungans has proven quiet compared to the brutal repressions they fled in imperial China in the 19th century. Straddling the border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the people who claim Chinese and Arab heritage mostly work in agriculture or run small businesses. The Mandarin dialect

that Dungans speak, which is infused with Farsi and Arabic loanwords, sets them apart in a region where Turkic tongues dominate. Yet this has not prevented Dungans forming close bonds with other groups in ex-Soviet Central Asia, even if intermarriage is the exception rather than the rule.

For Batyrbek Toreyev, a civil servant who lives in the majority-Kazakh village of Karakemer, the sudden raid of nearby Masanchi was "unthinkable". "Our families are friends with their families. We stop by each others' houses. What happened has happened now. We need to get on with our lives," he said, carrying a shopping bag with two bricks of white bread. Many Dungans of Central Asia have family ties to China, especially western China, where they are known as Hui.

Beijing has targeted the group of some 10 million as part of a crackdown on Muslims that has also swept up Turkic groups like Uighurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in the western Xinjiang region. Some Kyrgyz and Kazakhs argue that Dungans have leveraged their linguistic and cultural heritage to benefit unfairly from trade with China, which floods the region with imports. In 2013, dozens of ethnic Dungan truckers were reportedly beaten by Kyrgyz drivers at a border crossing with China where truckers compete for cargo bound for the country's bazaars.

Earlier, Kyrgyz and Dungans were involved in a village conflict that saw Dungan homes burned and some families flee to Kazakhstan to join relatives there. But after the most recent clashes, it was Kyrgyzstan that became a safety net for thousands of mainly women and children seeking refuge from the fighting. Daurov said that all ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan were due "enormous thanks" for providing food, aid and shelter to his fleeing compatriots, many of whom have since returned home.



MASANCHI: Ethnic Dungan men pray at a mosque in the majority-Dungan village of Masanchi - in southern Kazakhstan's Jambyl region close to the border with Kyrgyzstan. — AFP

Charred buildings

In Masanchi, where charred buildings have marred a once-tidy central strip, Kazakh state officials have set about restoring a sense of normality. Oil-rich Kazakhstan's authoritarian leadership prides itself on guaranteeing inter-ethnic harmony in a country where the foreign ministry says "over 100 ethnic groups are living in peace." At one of several mosques, Dungan elders sat down for steaming bowls of rice and mutton pilau with Kazakh police, whose heavy presence in the village was a welcome reassurance, residents said.

Elsewhere, a team employed by the regional administration was removing burned debris from the shell of what used to be Masanchi's largest supermarket. But even among these workers, there were signs of resentment towards the minority. "The Dungans beat up one of our old men," said one man, Ernek Saparov, who called the conflict a "misunderstanding". Saparov said that the altercation two days before the February 7 clashes had prompted calls across online messengers for attacks against Dungan communities. — AFP

Irked US squeezes Iraq with cash delays and short waivers

BAGHDAD: Irked by Iraq's close ties to neighboring Iran, Washington has begun following through on threats to squeeze Baghdad's fragile economy with delays to crucial cash deliveries and shortened sanctions waivers. This week, the US granted Iraq last-minute leave to import Iranian gas for its crippled power grids, despite American sanctions on Tehran. But Washington's patience seems to be running out - the latest waiver was reduced from the usual 90 or 120 days to just 45.

"This is the beginning of death by a thousand cuts," warned financial analyst Ahmed Tabaqchali, of the Iraq-based Institute of Regional and International Studies. "The shorter the waiver, the more we can't afford for things to go wrong in that time." Iraq is at a crucial crossroads. Its new premier is struggling to form a cabinet, anti-government protests are filling the streets and skyrocketing tensions between its two main allies, Tehran and Washington, have already spilled blood on its territory.

While Iran enjoys tremendous political and military sway in Iraq, the US still holds a major trump card — the economy. Every month or so, Iraq's Central Bank flies in \$1 billion to \$2 billion in cash from the Federal Reserve in New York, where all its oil revenues are kept, to pay for official and commercial transactions. But the mid-January shipment was more than a week late, a top Iraqi official and an oil industry source said, citing "political reasons" for the White House decision. "We are on a knife's edge," the Iraqi official said.

South Sudan cuts number of states from 32 to 10

JUBA: South Sudan's President Salva Kiir said yesterday he was cutting the number of states from 32 to 10, unlocking a stalled peace deal and paving the way for the formation of a long-awaited unity government. "The compromise we have made today is a painful decision but a necessary one if that is what brings peace", Kiir said in a statement. "I expect the opposition to be prepared to do the same."

The regional group IGAD had given the government until Saturday to find a solution over the number of states the country should have. Disagreement between Kiir and former rebel leader Riek Machar over the number of states as well as a failure to integrate different fighting forces have been major obstacles to completing the peace process.

"In general we welcome the decision taken by the president to take the country to 10 states," said Manawa Peter, deputy spokesman of Riek Machar, adding, "this is a win win decision for the people and we commend the president for his wise choice." Alan Boswell, a senior analyst with the Brussels-



BAGHDAD: Iraqi protesters clash with riot police following an anti-government demonstration in the capital Baghdad's Al-Khilani Square, on February 14, 2020. — AFP

Pompeo 'yelled' at Iraq PM

It was the first sign Washington may implement a January threat to block Iraq access to its money were Baghdad to oust the roughly 5,200 US troops stationed in Iraq. That was the Iraqi parliament's response to a US strike on its soil that killed a top Iranian commander and an Iraqi paramilitary chief.

Washington has considered blocking the funds to pressure Iraq for months, a senior US diplomat in Baghdad said, describing it last year as "the nuclear option". While February's dollars arrived on time, Iraqi officials said they expect Washington to start restricting how much cash Baghdad can bring in. Losing access to its funds would have devastating ramifications for Iraq, whose economy relies almost entirely on oil exports paid with the greenback.

And if the sanctions waiver expires, Iraq would have to either stop buying Iranian gas and face sweeping power cuts, or keep importing and risk US sanctions itself. Iraq's power cuts can last up to 20 hours a day. Washington has tied sanctions to other issues,

including the nearly 20 rocket attacks since October on the US embassy in Baghdad and Iraqi bases hosting US troops. An Iraqi official said US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had "yelled" at outgoing Iraqi premier Adel Abdel Mahdi in a phone call last month.

"He told him to forget talks over a waiver renewal if the attacks continue," the official told AFP. In a sign of worsening ties between Washington and Baghdad, Pompeo did not meet with Iraq's federal foreign minister Mohammad al-Hakim at the Munich Security Conference. Pompeo, as well as the US secretaries of defense and energy, met with the prime minister of the autonomous Kurdish region, Masrour Barzani instead.

The US is also irritated by Iraq's slow progress in signing deals with major US energy firms and weaning itself off Iran. "(Iraqis) have continuously rejected the deals with GE and Exxon," a senior administration official told AFP, weeks before the recent waiver expired. "They are choosing to be dependent on the Iranians, giving (Tehran) a chokehold on their economy and infrastructure." — AFP

40 killed in attacks in restive central Mali

BAMAKO: Forty people, including nine soldiers, have been killed in a spate of attacks in central Mali, authorities said Friday, with most of the deaths caused by inter-ethnic violence in the deeply troubled region. Thirty-one people were killed in an attack overnight in Ogossagou, a village mainly inhabited by Fulani people where 160 died last March in a massacre blamed on Dogon militiamen, the government said, raising the death toll. About 30 gunmen carried out the new attack, village chief Aly Ousmane Barry said.

"Huts and crops were set alight, livestock was burned or taken away," he added, vowing that the government would find the perpetrators. A local government official, who requested anonymity, had earlier said that 28 people were missing. He blamed the attack on a Dogon hunters' group - an assertion that could not be verified independently. The official and village chief Aly Ousmane Barry both said the attackers moved in several hours after government troops had pulled out of the area.

8 soldiers killed in ambush

Later Friday eight Mali soldiers were

US Senate votes to rein in Trump from attacking Iran

WASHINGTON: The US Senate has voted to rein in President Donald Trump from attacking Iran, sharply rebuking his foreign policy despite a week earlier acquitting him in his impeachment trial. Eight senators of Trump's Republican Party, which enjoys a majority, bucked their leadership to join Democrats in a resolution that bars any military action against Iran without an explicit vote from Congress.

"The Senate just sent a clear shot across the bow - a bipartisan majority of senators don't want the president waging war without congressional approval," Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer said after the vote. The resolution will head to the Democratic-led House of Representatives, which passed a similar text last month. But much like an earlier attempt by Congress to end US support for Saudi Arabia's devastating offensive in Yemen, Trump is nearly certain to issue a veto, with lawmakers lacking the two-thirds majority to overturn it.

Moments before the vote, a rocket slammed into an Iraqi base housing US troops in the first attack on the site since a December 27 barrage killed a US contractor, according to Iraqi and US secu-

rity sources. There were no immediate reports of casualties. The contractor's death set off an escalating crisis in which Trump ordered a drone strike at the Baghdad airport that killed Qassem Soleimani, Iran's most powerful general.

Democrat Senator Tim Kaine introduced the resolution after Soleimani's death, concerned that the United States was rushing into another Middle East war without debate. While warning of dire consequences of an escalating conflict with Iran, Kaine said his main point was to restore the authority of Congress to declare war, as spelled out in the US Constitution.

"An offensive war requires a congressional debate and vote. This should not be a controversial proposition," Kaine said in a speech on the Senate floor. The resolution makes an exception if the United States is "defending itself from an imminent act." Democratic Senator Tammy Duckworth put concerns about Trump more bluntly. "My 21-month-old toddler has better self-control than this president does," she told reporters.

Tensions have soared between the United States and Iran since 2018 when Trump withdrew from a denuclearization accord negotiated by his predecessor Barack Obama and imposed sweeping sanctions aimed at reducing Tehran's regional clout. Soleimani, the head of the elite Revolutionary Guards' overseas Qods force, enjoyed vast influence within the clerical regime and was seen by the United States as orchestrating rocket attacks in Iraq. — AFP



MAPEL: Trainee soldiers for a new unified army carry their wooden rifles while attending a reconciliation program run by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) at a makeshift barracks in Mapel. — AFP

based think-tank International Crisis Group, said: "This paves a path forward. The peace deal was stuck. Now the parties will need to complete the negotiations to form the long-awaited unity government."

South Sudan's five-year civil war erupted soon after the country's formation in 2011 and created the worst refugee crisis in Africa since the Rwandan genocide. Kiir and Riek

Machar agreed a peace deal in 2018, pressured by the United Nations, the United States and countries in the region. Under the deal, the two agreed to form a unity government by November 2019. They then pushed then the deadline back by 100 days, prompting Washington to recall its ambassador and impose sanctions on senior officials for their role in perpetuating the conflict. — Reuters

International

Chinese tourist becomes first coronavirus fatality in Europe

Death toll in China reaches 1,523

SHANGHAI: An elderly Chinese tourist infected with the coronavirus has died in France, Paris said yesterday, becoming the first fatality in Europe and the fourth outside mainland China from an epidemic that has rattled the world. Thought to have originated from a wildlife market in the Chinese city of Wuhan, the outbreak has dented the world's second largest economy and presented a huge challenge to the ruling Communist Party.

Beijing's latest figures yesterday showed 66,492 cases and 1,523 deaths, mostly in central Hubei province. Outside mainland China there have been about 500 cases in some two dozen countries and territories, with four deaths in Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines and France. In the French case, the 80-year-old Chinese man died at the Bichat hospital in Paris of a lung infection due to the flu-like virus, Health Minister Agnes Buzyn said.

After an extended Lunar New Year holiday, China urgently needs to get back to work. But some cities remain in lockdown, streets are deserted, employees are nervous, and travel bans and quarantine orders are in place around the country. Those returning to Beijing from the holiday have been ordered to undergo a 14-day self-quarantine to prevent the virus' spread. Many factories are yet to re-open.

While there has been some hope expressed this week that the flu-like disease may be peaking in China, numbers keep rising and a trend has been hard to discern, especially after a reclassification that widened the definition of cases. The biggest cluster of cases outside China has been on a cruise ship, the Diamond Princess, quarantined off Japan's Yokohama port. Out of about 3,700 passengers and crew on board, 285 people have tested positive and been taken to hospitals.

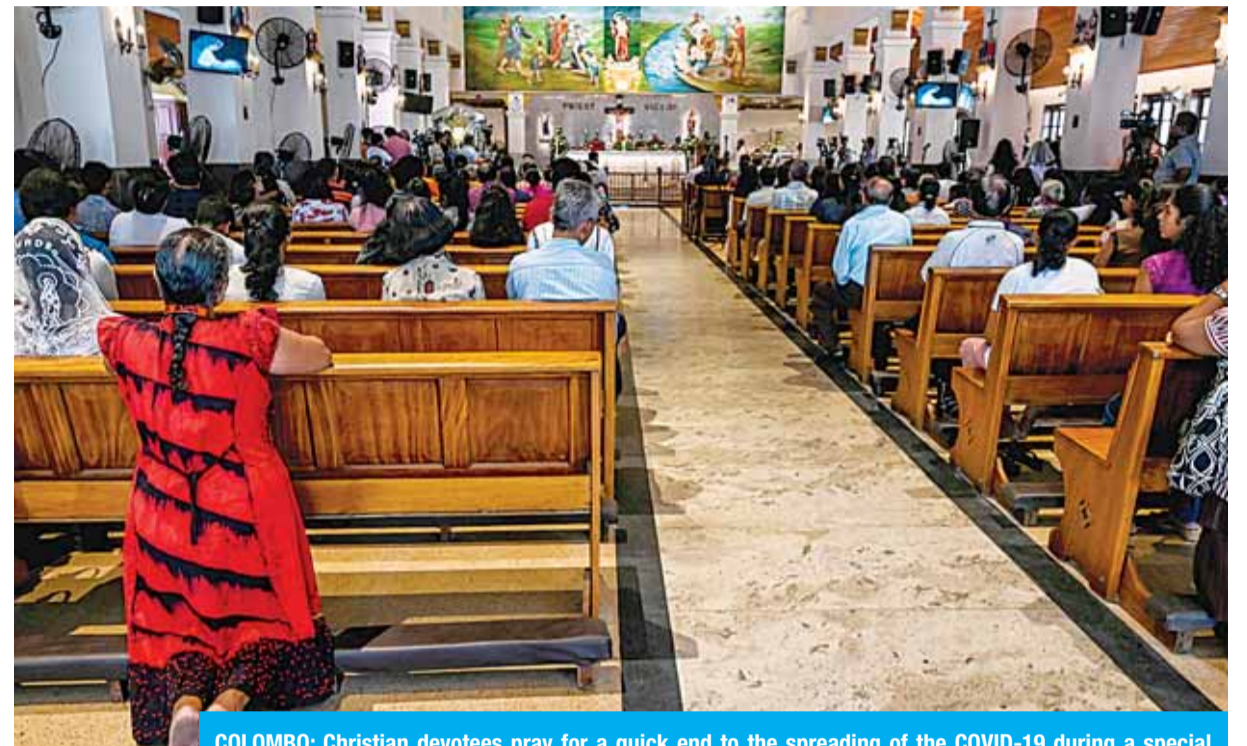
The United States said yesterday it plans to send an aircraft to pick up American passengers and take them back home where they face another two weeks of isolation "out of an abundance of caution". "They are very concerned about spreading the virus, and there's no good way to transport people from Japan without possible transfer of virus, so it is the logical thing to do," passenger Sawyer Smith, 25, told Reuters.

Beijing upbeat

The United States has imposed some of toughest curbs on travelers from China, going beyond World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations and offending Beijing. China has called for science-based responses and not panic. In Chinese-ruled Hong Kong, which has seen months of anti-Beijing protests, hundreds of demonstrators marched yesterday to demand full closure of the border with mainland China and to oppose plans to turn some buildings into quarantine hubs.

"Doing that (opening such centers) is like creating more wounds rather than trying to stop the bleeding," said Chan Mei-lin among the protesters. TV images showed police making some arrests and using pepper spray. The sickness, now officially labeled COVID-19, has killed around 2% of those infected. Cases have spread faster than other respiratory viruses this century.

A senior Chinese official sought to project optimism yesterday. "The impact of the epidemic on the Chinese economy will be short term and temporary," foreign affairs vice minister Qin Gang said at the Munich Security Conference. "When the epidemic is over, the subdued consumer demand will be released rapidly and the economy will rebound strongly."



COLOMBO: Christian devotees pray for a quick end to the spreading of the COVID-19 during a special mass at the St Anthony's Church in Colombo yesterday. —AFP

The Chinese central bank said yesterday the country's lenders will tolerate higher levels of bad loans as part of efforts to support firms hit by the epidemic. "We will support qualified firms so that they can resume

work and production as soon as possible, helping maintain stable operations of the economy and minimizing the epidemic's impact," said Fan Yifei, a vice governor at the People's Bank of China. —Reuters

Germans hit the streets against deals with far right

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Ten thousand people are expected to join a demonstration Saturday in Erfurt, capital of Thuringia state in Germany's former communist east, where far-right lawmakers last week helped install a new state premier. "Not with us! No pacts with fascists any time or anywhere!" is the motto for the protest, organized by the DGB trade union federation, NGOs, artists and politicians belonging to the "Unteilbar" (indivisible) movement. Thuringia rocked national politics on February 5, when state lawmakers from Chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right CDU party voted with far-right, anti-immigrant AfD representatives to elect liberal politician Thomas Kemmerich state premier.

Spontaneous demonstrations quickly broke out across Germany in response, targeted especially at the CDU and Kemmerich's Free Democrats (FDP). Barely 24 hours after accepting the vote, Kemmerich agreed to step down. But outrage at the centrist parties accepting help from the far right, a first since the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949, remains deep-seated among the protest organizers.

'End of a taboo'

"This election was the end of a taboo" against cooperation with the far-right, Unteilbar spokesman Maximilian Becker told Berlin's Tageszeitung newspaper. "We want to show that what's going on in Thuringia will not go unanswered." While Saturday's demonstration is supposed to be peaceful, some have taken out their rage in attacks on FDP offices around Germany. Der Spiegel reported, a sign of festering political tensions nationwide. Mainstream politicians charge that one of AfD's aims is to paralyze or render ridiculous the normal functioning of the country's institutions.

Merkel accused the party of wanting to "cripple democracy", and in Thuringia, Kemmerich's election and subsequent standing down have left the region hobbled for more than a week. Now the far right says it could lend its votes to popular former Left party premier Bodo Ramelow in case of a new vote in Erfurt, potentially forcing him to turn down a new term. Representatives from all parties apart from AfD plan to meet Monday to work through their options.

From a minority government to going back to the people in fresh elections, there are possibilities that could shut out AfD. But the crisis has already claimed one vital scalp, after Merkel's chosen successor and CDU leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK) resigned on Monday when it became clear her grip on the party was too weak. Some CDU members, especially in the former communist east, see no harm in working with the far right, which in recent state elections has booked scores above 20 percent across the region.

'Funeral march'

AFD's rhetoric of a remote Berlin elite more interested in coddling immigrants than supporting hard-working Germans resonates in the former East. In Thuringia, average incomes reached 35,700 euros (\$38,692) in 2018, compared with almost 43,000 euros nationwide, according to statistics authority Destatis. The state's unemployment rate is little higher than the national level of 5.0 percent, but large numbers of young people are leaving and the birth rate is on the slide. More than one in four residents in Thuringia is older than 65, against just over one in five across Germany. February's coup for the far right came days before 75th anniversary commemorations in Dresden, capital of neighboring Saxony state, for the baroque old city's destruction in one night and day by Allied bombers in 1945. —AFP

Trump's ally draws fire for homophobic jab at Buttigieg

WASHINGTON: Mockery of Democratic candidate Pete Buttigieg's homosexuality by a close ally of President Donald Trump drew fire Friday, pushing the politically sensitive issue higher into the headlines than ever before. Buttigieg is the first openly gay man with a realistic chance of getting a major party nomination to run for the White House. So far, the former Indiana small city mayor has rarely had to confront homophobia on the campaign trail, where his husband has often joined him.

But controversy erupted on Wednesday when Rush Limbaugh, a radio host who acts as a kind of spiritual leader of right-wing Republicans, said Democrats would never choose a gay man over Trump. "They're saying, 'OK, how's this going to look?'" Limbaugh asked. "Thirty-seven-year-old gay guy kissing his husband on stage, next to Mr Man, Donald Trump." Buttigieg is 38. Bernie Sanders, who is furthest

to the left of the Democratic candidates, tweeted Friday that "personal attacks like this are unacceptable. The homophobic comments from Rush Limbaugh about @PeteButtigieg are outrageous and offensive."

"Together, we will end the division and hate led by Donald Trump," Sanders tweeted. On Thursday, former vice president Joe Biden, who is battling with Buttigieg for the support of more centrist Democrats, also defended his rival. "You saw, you just had on Rush Limbaugh, I mean, my God, it's part of the depravity of this administration," he said on ABC television. "Pete and I are competitors, but this guy has honor, he has courage, he's smart as hell," Biden said.

As for Trump, he has carefully staked out a middle ground - avoiding anything controversial on Buttigieg, while not denouncing apparent homophobia against him. Asked on the Geraldo Rivera radio show Thursday whether Americans could vote for a gay president, Trump said "I think so." Then he added, "I think there would be some that wouldn't. I wouldn't be among that group, to be honest with you." "It doesn't seem to be hurting Pete Buttigieg," Trump said.

Trump is so close to Limbaugh that he chose to dramatically award him the Presidential Medal of



SACRAMENTO: Attendees look on as Democratic presidential candidate former South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg speaks during a campaign event in Sacramento, California. —AFP

Freedom - the highest civilian honor in the country - during the State of the Union speech earlier this month. In doing so, Trump declared that Limbaugh was "beloved by millions of Americans." Although hugely popular in right-wing circles, Limbaugh has been criticized for years over remarks seen as racist, misogynist and homophobic. —Reuters

Pope Francis sides with traditionalists on priest celibacy

VATICAN CITY: In quashing the idea of married priests in the Amazon, Pope Francis has appeased traditionalists while disappointing progressives who had hoped for a historic turning point in the Catholic Church. In his "apostolic exhortation" on the Amazon basin published Wednesday, Francis slammed the door on a progressive proposal offered by the region's bishops during a synod on the region in October.

The synod had suggested that the way to solve a shortage of priests in the remote and inaccessible area was to allow married indigenous men to become priests. Without even mentioning that proposal, Francis instead argued for more missionary priests in the Amazon and for women and lay people to take on larger roles, falling short of another synod idea to ordain women as deacons in the region.

The Argentine pontiff's thoughts, coming after

months of speculation and hand-wringing within the Vatican, were welcomed by some, including a vocal opponent of Francis, German Cardinal Gerhard Mueller. For five years Mueller was in charge of church dogma, holding the key Vatican post of Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith until 2017 - when he was not reappointed by Francis.

Mueller saluted the document's potential for "reducing internal Church factions." Conservatives within the Church were outraged by the regional synod's proposal, even were it to be an exception limited to the Amazon, seeing it as potentially paving the way to the abolition of priest celibacy globally. US Cardinal Raymond Burke, a staunch traditionalist, suggested last year that Francis would be heading into a "schism" were he to give his stamp of approval to the synod's proposals.

Failing to reform?

But to others, the text lacked the audacity that has marked the papacy of the first Jesuit pope. Francis' document marked a "failure in the reforming impulse of the pontificate," according to longtime Vatican analyst Marco Politi. The pope, "abruptly slowed down" by a strong and multifaceted opposition, also disappointed those local Amazon bishops

whom he had called on to offer up new ideas to help guide the Church, Politi said. "Francis finds himself more alone today, having caused disillusionment among a notable mass of his supporters," Politi said. Key among them are Catholic feminist organizations, some of whom have been fighting for women's access to the priesthood.

In his text, Francis cited the contributions of women and argued that their roles be increased, but dismissed the idea of their ordination. Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) said Francis had "dropped the ball" for women within the Church. "Francis has opted to perpetuate the shameful elitist men's club that, as he so brazenly points out in the document, is held up by the second class status of women who do most of the work with none of the recognition," the group said in a statement.

Still, the issues of women's ordination, and married priests, are not dead, some say. The German Church, which contains a strong progressive branch, has just launched a two-year debate on top controversial issues, including the end of priestly celibacy and a greater place for women. Meanwhile, Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes, a proponent of priestly marriage, sees the question as still open, telling the publication Estadão: "It will be taken up again." —AFP

Macron opens door to North Macedonia, Albania EU accession

MUNICH: French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday he would allow North Macedonia and Albania to begin talks on joining the European Union if the bloc's executive gave them a positive review next month. Macron's comments at the Munich Security Conference look set to end his freeze on the two Balkan countries' progress towards EU membership and reassure other European leaders that France still backs expanding the bloc to new members.

"We are waiting for the (European Commission) report in March ... depending on that, if the results are positive and confidence is established, then we should be in a position to open the negotiations," Macron told the conference. Macron had refused to approve the start of so-called accession negotiations at a summit in October, saying the process of admitting new members needed to change. One French minister called the accession process an

"endless soap opera".

Worried by Chinese and Russian influence in the six states that aspire to join the bloc - Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and North Macedonia - Germany and the European Commission said Macron was wrong to block them. This month, the Commission suggested reforms to the accession process along the lines of a French proposal made in November, giving EU governments more say and making it easier to stop or reset negotiations and freeze funds.

Macron's shift sets the stage for the 27 EU governments' assent before an EU-Balkan summit in Zagreb in May. Denmark and the Netherlands, who supported Macron's position last year, are expected to drop their resistance, EU diplomats said. France and its allies are concerned about the EU's ability to bring in a region scarred by ethnic wars in the 1990s and struggling with crime and corruption, anxious not to repeat what they believe was the rushed accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. Membership talks, once underway, will take years.

Macron also cautioned that so-called EU enlargement was not a panacea for the bloc's difficulties in speaking with one voice and that more members also meant the need for a bigger EU com-



SKOPJE: Members of the guard of honor raise the NATO flag during a flag ceremony in front of the parliament building in Skopje, after the lawmakers ratified the NATO accession agreement. —AFP

mon budget, something northern EU members reject. "It doesn't work at 27 (EU members) so do you think it will work if we're 32 or 33? We are not coherent," Macron said. "The implicit strategy is that we think of Europe as a big market ... but not a political power with collective preferences and a minimum of convergence." —Reuters

International

Where's the love? Indonesia says no to Valentine's Day

Authorities arrest couples, scold stores over condom displays

MAKASSAR: Indonesia wasn't feeling the love for Valentine's Day on Friday as authorities arrested couples in one city, scolded stores over condom displays and warned students they would be reprimanded for amorous activities. Makassar on Sulawesi island doled out some tough love with raids at hotels and guest houses Thursday evening which netted about two dozen unmarried offenders, including a German national.

"We caught the German with his Indonesian partner in a motel and they weren't husband and wife so that's why we arrested them," Iman Hud, head of the local public order office said. The unlucky lovers were quickly released after a lecture about the evils of pre-marital sex, but five sex workers caught in the dragnet would be sent to a rehabilitation centre, he added.

"These social illnesses must be prevented. We need to remind the public to uphold our culture and ethics," Hud said. Valentine's Day is controversial in parts of the majority Muslim nation, with many Islamic clerics and conservative Indonesians criticizing its Western roots and what they say is its promotion of pre-marital sex.

Still, many others practice a moderate form of Islam and celebrate the day with chocolates and flowers for their loved ones, and displays were set up at malls and cafés in the capital Jakarta. Back in Makassar, however, authorities were checking to see if shops had complied

with an earlier warning not to sell condoms openly and check identification cards to make sure buyers weren't underage. "Condoms are for married adults," public order chief Hud said. "They're not supposed to be displayed and sold openly, particularly near snacks for kids like chocolate." Makassar's acting mayor Muhammad Iqbal Samad Suhae insisted the measures were necessary to prevent his city from being paralyzed by rampant sex and drug use. "Festivities like Valentine's Day usually attract youth," he added.

"That's when they are out of control and doing things which violate our norms and traditions, like consuming drugs and engaging in free sex. 'We want to prevent that here.'" In Depok city near Jakarta, administrators warned students against any Valentine's romance under threat of unspecified sanctions for violators.

Across the archipelago in conservative Aceh, the only region in Indonesia that imposes Islamic law, a government circular called for residents not to celebrate the romantic day and to report any violations. The document also told restaurants, cafés and hotels not to provide space for celebrations and asked clerics to deliver speeches on the danger of Valentine's Day. The latest crackdown comes after the national government last year backed off a bill that would have made pre-marital sex illegal. —FP



MAKASSAR: Photo shows a group of people detained during a raid at a hotel in Makassar, where they were caught in the rooms with partners that are not their spouse. —AFP

Australian bushfires extinguished, but the climate row rages on

SYDNEY: Australia's "black summer" of devastating bushfires is finally coming to a close, but bitter arguments over how to tackle climate-fuelled disasters are raging on. When firefighters announced this week that all blazes in the hard-hit state of New South Wales were under control for the first time since September, the relief was palpable.

In other regions, a few fires are still being contained, but most Australians can finally abandon the grim rituals of the last half-year — morning checks of smog monitors and "Fires Near Me" apps, deciding whether the kids can play outside, whether to flee or defend their homes. But the after-effects will endure, and national soul searching has already begun. "We know events like these can challenge the way we think about the world, undermine our perceptions of safety, and rupture social bonds," said disaster response expert Erin Smith.

Dozens of families have lost loved ones, thousands of homes and farms have been gutted, swathes of the east coast are scarred charcoal-black and millions have had their sense of security shaken. "It will likely take years and a great deal of imagination for us to figure out where we go from here," said Smith. The question of what is next for Australia is already being asked, most

of all of political leaders, and it is being met mostly with finger-pointing and recrimination.

'Heads above the parapet'

While scientists agree climate change created favorable conditions for the blazes, politicians of all stripes are acutely aware how sensitive the issue is in Australian politics. In an arid nation whose economic strength is intimately tied to the mining and export of fossil fuels, at least four prime ministers have been ousted in part over their climate policies. In recent weeks, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has seen his ruling conservative coalition threatened by members in rural constituencies demanding funding for more coal-fired power plants. At the same time, the centrist wing of his party has criticized his climate targets as inadequate. Meanwhile rebel members of opposition Labor met secretly to steer the centre-left party's leadership toward a more overtly pro-coal stance.

The party's deputy leader awkwardly refused to rule out more coal subsidies, months after vowing they should end. "They don't want to stick their heads above the parapet, at least when it comes to suggesting substantive policy," said Matt McDonald, an expert in climate politics from the University of Queensland. One reason, he explained, is that while the hot and dry Australian continent is uniquely susceptible to the impact of climate change, it is also a world-beating source of coal.

Coal accounts for around 75 percent of Australia's electricity generation and exports of the fossil fuel are worth Aus\$60 billion a year, the country's largest export after iron ore. People in affluent suburbs may



SYDNEY: A light rail tram makes its way towards the Circular Quay along George Street in Sydney. Last week Australia's central bank kept interest rates on hold at a record low, despite expected economic pain from the country's devastating bushfire crisis and the deadly outbreak of COVID-19 coronavirus in China. —AFP

call for emissions cuts and green energy, but coal accounts for thousands of jobs in election-deciding districts of Queensland and New South Wales, and many more in the related aluminum smelting business.

Independent MP Zali Steggall - a former barrister and Olympic medal-winning skier - who ousted climate-sceptic former Prime Minister Tony Abbott from his Sydney seat at the last election, wants to take some heat out of the debate. She has introduced a bill that would reduce Australia's carbon emissions to zero by 2050 and divert some contentious issues to an independent expert body. —AFP

Scientists map coronavirus path with computer models

PARIS: As the novel coronavirus spreads around the world, scientists are using the latest computer modeling techniques to predict its fallout: from the eventual number of cases and deaths to the peak of the outbreak. Recent decades have seen the power of new computer processors combine with ever-more sophisticated mathematical models to give health authorities a far better idea of how far and fast diseases are likely to spread. Despite an inevitable margin of error, scientists are now able to predict the path the novel

coronavirus, which has already killed nearly 1,500 people, will take. France's health minister Agnes Buzyn said Friday that she had held telephone talks with her G7 counterparts to expedite modeling of the diseases' eventual spread and severity.

Models are built in a compound manner, taking into account data of the virus's known history — transmission, mortality and recovery rates — as well as human behaviour trends, such as air traffic patterns. But it's not enough to be sophisticated: the best models are also adaptable. "It's a trade off: the more you refine the model the harder it is to manipulate it and it opens the door to a wide margin of error," said Arnaud Banos, from France's National Centre for Scientific Research.

In order to adapt in real time to outbreak developments, researchers carry out simulations by inserting new data as it emerges. "This might be the appearance

for themselves in Pakistan's cities, paying rent and contributing to the economy.

"Mini Kabul", the bustling Refugee Market in the northwestern city of Peshawar is home to some 5,000 shops - all run by Afghan refugees. But their status has always been temporary, with deadlines set for them to leave Pakistan repeatedly pushed back as the conflict in Afghanistan worsens. Many Pakistanis view them with suspicion, accusing them of spurring militancy and criminality, and calling for them to be sent home.

Even those who have spent decades in the country cannot own property or obtain identity cards, and were only recently allowed to open bank accounts. Shortly after he came to power, Prime Minister Imran Khan vowed to grant them citizenship - but the controversial promise sparked outrage, and has not been spoken of since.

'I prefer to stay'

Nevertheless, many of the refugees who spoke to AFP in Peshawar recently said they love their adopted home. Javed Khan, 28, was born in Pakistan, has married a Pakistani woman and has three sons of his own. "I will leave only if Pakistan forces me," he said. The situation could yet change: Afghanistan may be about to take the first step on the long road to peace. Late Thursday the US said it has secured a seven-day reduction in violence in the country that it hopes will allow it to strike a deal with the Taliban, as President Donald Trump said a peace accord was "very close".

Such a deal would allow Washington to begin withdrawing troops, in return for security guarantees from the Taliban and a promise to begin peace talks with the Afghan government.

However refugees were sceptical about what it would mean for them. Mohammed Feroz, who came to Pakistan just over 40 years ago from Kabul, now runs a cloth shop in "mini Kabul". Sitting in a chair at the front of his shop, he said he supported the withdrawal of US

troops - but was leery of US and Taliban motivations. "They are after their interest. No one cares about us, God is the only hope for us," he said. Even if peace comes, most refugees said that they would prefer to stay in Pakistan, where they can support their families. In the Khurasan refugee camp outside Peshawar an estimated 5,000 refugees live in poverty. Yaseen Ullah, 26, collects scrap and sells it to junkyards. His family - his mother, four brothers, and four sisters - share a two-room mud house with no plumbing.

They also came from Nangarhar province across the border - and, despite the harshness of life in the camp, are not eager to go back. "I have no job, no work in Afghanistan. So what will I do there?" Ullah asked. Mohammad, the laborer from Nangarhar, agreed. "I have to feed my family, my kids," the father of seven, all born in the camp, told AFP, speaking Pashto with a Pakistani accent. "I am saying it from my heart and I am very clear on it, that I will prefer to stay here. I do not want to return." —AFP



PESHAWAR: Afghan refugee women walk in a refugee camp in Peshawar. —AFP

Afghan violence reduction a fragile step toward peace

KABUL: Now that the Taliban and the United States have agreed to a "reduction in violence" across Afghanistan, hopes are high a comprehensive peace deal will eventually follow. Though the move marks a historic step, analysts warn the attempt to stem Afghanistan's bloodshed is fraught with complications and could fail at any time. Or, worse still, they say warring parties could exploit a lull to reconfigure their forces and secure a battlefield advantage.

"This is a really precarious situation and spoilers on all sides are already maneuvering to upset the balance," Ashley Jackson, a researcher at the Overseas Development Institute said. Pentagon chief Mark Esper said Thursday an agreement was in place for a "conditions-based", seven-day reduction in violence. It was not clear when it may start - a Taliban official said it was imminent, President Donald Trump said Thursday a full peace accord was "very close" and a US official said Friday it would begin "really soon."

'Everyone is hungry for peace'

The United States has for more than a year been in talks with the Taliban for a deal to end a war that started after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Though the Afghan government was largely sidelined from negotiations, acting interior minister Massoud Andarabi said the partial truce would also include national security forces, who are doing almost all the fighting on the ground. Highlighting the fragility of the situation, he warned that if the "Taliban continue attacking, we will respond and the US will also assist us in responding to Taliban attacks."

A reduction in violence would show the Taliban can control their forces and demonstrate good faith ahead of an agreement that would see the Pentagon withdraw many of the 12,000-13,000 troops currently in Afghanistan. The Taliban did not respond to requests for comment, but Mohammad Qasim, a deputy police chief in the southern province of Kandahar, which is largely under Taliban control, said the insurgents are ready for peace. He said he had spoken to Taliban commanders via radio, and the interactions had been "positive".

"We did not have any attacks, blasts or clashes between the Afghan security forces and the Taliban in our entire district," Qasim said Friday, following news of the partial truce. "Taliban fighters are also tired from the ongoing war. There is no benefit for them continuing the war - everyone is hungry for peace to come," he added. But Jackson warned a truce could leave government forces, already in a weak position in many provinces, even more vulnerable to insurgents. "What I do worry about is that (the Taliban) see this as an opportunity to claim control," she said.

'Long talks and continual fighting'

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday said talks between the US and the Taliban had "made real progress" in recent days. "We hope we can get to a place where we can get a significant reduction in violence not only on a piece of paper but demonstrated, the capability to actually deliver a serious reduction in violence in Afghanistan," he told reporters. Despite the talks, Afghanistan's war has raged on, with the number of clashes jumping to record levels in the last quarter of 2019, according to a recent US government watchdog report.

The only other time there has been a Taliban ceasefire since 2001 was in 2018, during the first three days of Eid at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. It invoked moving scenes such as Afghans sharing ice cream with Taliban fighters and snapping selfies with locals. But afterwards, the violence resumed. Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said many players in Afghanistan's war would be happy to see the reduction in violence fail. —AFP

Temporary status

Pakistan is one of the largest refugee-hosting nations in the world, home to an estimated 2.4 million registered and undocumented people who have fled Afghanistan, some as far back as the Soviet invasion of 1979. Many live in camps, while others have built lives

Analysis

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Climate change opens up 'frontier' farmland at what cost to planet?

Kenya's livestock herders planting chilli peppers, Pakistan's mountain farmers rearing fish and tropical fruits in Sicily - farmers around the world are already shifting what they grow and breed to cope with rising temperatures and erratic weather. In a few more decades, potatoes from the Russian tundra and corn from once-frigid areas of Canada could be added to the list as vast swathes of land previously unsuited to agriculture open up to farmers on a hotter planet.

Climate change could expand farmland globally by almost a third, a study by international researchers found this week. They examined which new areas may become suitable for growing 12 key crops including rice, sugar, wheat, oil palm, cassava and soy. "In a warming world, Canada's North may become our breadbasket of the future," the scientists wrote.

But, they warned, opening up new "agricultural frontiers" would also bring significant environmental threats, including a risk of increased planet-warming emissions from soils. In Canada, there is potential to at least double the country's farmland to 2 million sq km, thus doubling food production, said study co-author Krishna Bahadur KC, an adjunct professor at Canada's University of Guelph. "This is the positive aspect," he said.

Farming on the land identified in the study - more than half of which lies in Canada and Russia, with the rest including the mountains of Central Asia and North America's Rocky Mountains - could help feed the planet's growing population. Today, one in nine people go to bed hungry, and the United Nations has said food production needs to increase by about 50 percent by 2050, when the global population is expected to reach nearly 10 billion.

Mars next?

Despite growing demand for food, environmental experts who were not involved in the study told the Thomson Reuters Foundation enlarging farmland could further accelerate climate change. Some of these frontier areas have the most carbon-rich soils, said Ronald Vargas, secretary of the Global Soils Partnership and a land management officer at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. "As soon as you start (farming) you will see emissions. So global warming will shoot up," he said, pointing to a map showing that Russia and Canada hold about a third of the world's organic carbon stock found in the top layer of fertile soil.

Within a decade, half of that carbon could be released into the atmosphere if the land is cultivated, he warned. The study, published in the science journal PLOS One, echoed that concern. If agriculture were allowed to extend into all areas identified, "there would be little chance" of meeting the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, it said. That, in turn, would generate "even more climate change for poor people in the developing world" who have done little to cause global warming, said Margarita Astralaga, head of the environment and climate division at the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Instead the answer lies with better management of existing arable land, including raising productivity in Africa, she said. About four-fifths of African agriculture relies on rainfall, so extended droughts cripple food production, she noted, calling for solutions such as irrigation, soil conservation and reduction of food waste and spoilage. "We have millions of hectares that already are arable that we have destroyed... Do we go to Mars next?" she asked.

Caution urged

Agnes Kalibata, president of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa and former Rwandan agricultural minister, also saw downsides to opening up more farmland. She pointed to the devastating locust invasion in East Africa and a surge in malaria in parts of Africa as the climate gets hotter. "We can't... forget that in those areas where it's warming up, it's also warming up to be comfortable for insects that were not there before," she said. Biodiversity loss could be "huge" too, added Kalibata, who was recently appointed special envoy for a UN summit on improving food systems slated for next year.

As well as threatening global biodiversity hotspots, the study warned that extending farming to frontier areas could bring risks for indigenous people who often inhabit such land. It called for government policies to "optimize food production, biodiversity and ecosystem services under climate change" rather than simply favoring agricultural expansion, as in the past. An environmentally aware approach could include protecting areas with carbon-rich soils or levying high carbon taxes on conversion of such land for farming, said co-author KC. "We should proceed but we should move very, very cautiously and (be) mindful of the potential environmental impacts," he added. — Reuters

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Syrian boys take a picture with a Turkish soldier in the town of Turmanin in Syria's Idlib province yesterday. — AFP

Washington Watch

Significant changes in Arab public opinion

By Dr James J Zogby

Across the Middle East and North Africa, 2019 provided an eventful end to a tumultuous decade. There were unsettling developments on multiple fronts, to name just a few, there were: Popular uprisings in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq; international intervention in civil conflicts raging in Libya, Yemen, and Syria; dangerously accelerated tensions with Iran; and fading hopes for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite the US promises about a great "deal".

In late 2019, Zogby Research Services (ZRS) once again had the opportunity to poll public opinion across the Middle East and North Africa about many of these issues that are of such critical concern to the region and its peoples. Among the topics covered in our 2019 survey were: the unsettled situation in Iraq; the status of the "Arab Spring" countries - focusing on Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Arab attitudes toward Iran; and how Arabs view the role played by the US and other global powers in their region.

Since we've been surveying attitudes on these issues every year since 2011 for the annual Sir Bani Yas Forum held in the UAE, this year's results enabled us to identify both areas where the public's views were similar to those of earlier years and areas where there were dramatic changes in opinion. What follows were dramatic changes in opinion.

The most notable development in Iraqi attitudes is the high percentage of Iraqis (almost six in ten) - including a majority of respondents in all sub-groups, Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, and Kurds - who want their country to be united under a central government and not divided into separate regions. As further evidence of this unity, there is a marked increase in the number of Iraqis from all sub-groups, who are now wary of Iran. In fact, when we asked Iraqis to identify their main concern with Iran, they said it

was Iran's involvement in their country. Iraqis, however, also told us of their deep dissatisfaction with the direction of the country and their lack of confidence that their lives will improve in the near future. Given these dangerously low levels of satisfaction and confidence, it was not surprising that mass protests erupted in the fall. After the eruption of demonstrations, we surveyed the public's attitudes toward the protests. Iraqis told us that they supported the demonstrators and that their confidence in their government had been shaken by the violent response to the protests.

The reactions in the so-called "Arab Spring" countries were mixed. During 2019, attitudes in Egypt continued to sour, with Egyptians reporting very low levels of satisfaction with their current situation and little confidence that it will improve in the next five years. When asked to evaluate the role played by various institutions in their country, Egyptians gave low scores across the board. Tunisians, on the other hand, are more positive both with their present situation and are more optimistic in their future, despite recent electoral tumult.

With regard to Syria, there is a growing acceptance in Arab public opinion that the Assad government has survived the civil war. But attitudes are divided as to whether Syria will have peace in the next decade, with respondents in most Arab countries pointing to the prospect of future clashes between the Assad government and the opposition and the potential for conflict between Russia and Iran for influence in Syria.

One of the more intriguing results in our 2019 survey were the changes in Arab views toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Most Arabs still blame the US and Israel for the absence of peace and have little confidence that the conflict can be resolved in the near future. Maybe as a result of this despair, this issue now ranks low as an Arab priority. Also noteworthy is the fact that majorities in

most Arab countries now say that normalization with Israel, which they acknowledge is already happening, may be a good thing. This development shouldn't be overstated, however, since there is still no love for Israel. It appears, from our survey, to be born of frustration, weariness with Palestinians being victims of war, and the possibility that normalization might bring some economic benefits and could give Arabs leverage to press Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians.

We learn from our 2019 ZRS poll that the greatest concern with Iran across the region is with its nuclear program, followed by Iran's role in the Arab Gulf. Most intriguing, though, is the growing wariness of Lebanese and Iraqis with Iran's involvement in their countries. It is the top concern of respondents in both Lebanon and Iraq. This is significant since past polling has shown Lebanese and Iraqis viewing Iran more favorably than did Arabs in other countries.

In our 2019 survey we find a continued slide United States' favorability in the Arab World. With only a few exceptions, in almost every country there is a sharp decline in respondents' views of US policies toward Syrian, Iraq, Iran, and Muslims. And only Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan now see the US as a being a dependable ally in the next decade. Instead of the US, respondents in a number of Arab countries now look elsewhere, to China, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, or Russia.

As a result of this unsettling world order, we also find that Arabs are turning inward. When we asked Arabs what their foreign policy priorities were for the region, far and away their top choices are investing more of the region's wealth and expertise in creating a more prosperous and stable Arab World and promoting greater political unity among the Arab states.

Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute

Beijing crafts its narrative on virus outbreak

China's government is purging unpopular local officials and commandeering heroic stories of doctors on the frontline as it tries to shield itself from public rage over the handling of the deadly coronavirus epidemic. Facing the biggest challenge of his presidency, Communist Party leader Xi Jinping has cast the crisis as a "people's war" and state media have gone into overdrive to regain control of public opinion. Images of doctors and nurses in masks and full protective suits, leaving their families behind to care for patients, have dominated the airwaves.

Government censors, meanwhile, have made rare exceptions to allow for criticism online - but mostly when directed at local officials accused of negligence in central Hubei province and its capital Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak. One comment that was allowed to circulate on the Twitter-like Weibo platform declared that "scores

should be settled against all the officials in Wuhan after the crisis", which has claimed more than 1,500 lives and infected some 66,000 people.

An investigation into health inspectors in neighboring Hunan province who had leaked residents' personal information also became a trending search on the platform. On Thursday, the political chiefs of Hubei and Wuhan were sacked and replaced with Xi loyalists with security backgrounds. The province's top two health officials were also fired. Senior Beijing law enforcement official Chen Yixin was also appointed to manage local efforts against the epidemic.

Every part of Beijing's messaging is designed to "deflect from the centre: Failings at the local level, the heroism of medical staff, the resilience and unity of the Chinese people in the face of great difficulties," Jonathan Sullivan, a China expert from the University of Nottingham, said. In Hubei, local Red Cross leaders had also come under fire on Weibo for allegedly mismanaging donations of masks and other medical supplies. Authorities reacted quickly, sacking the local Red Cross vice president Zhang Qin for dereliction of duty.

China must "dare to criticize" those who fail to carry out official orders, and dereliction of duty "shall be pun-

ished according to discipline and law," Xi said in a February 3 speech published by state media yesterday. "Vividly describe touching deeds on the epidemic control and prevention frontline," Xi also urged. "Let positive energy fill the cyberspace from start to end."

Heroes

The death of Li Wenliang, a whistleblowing doctor punished in January by Wuhan police for sending text messages about the illness, prompted a national outpouring of grief and anger that Beijing was quick to redirect towards local officials. The 34-year-old, who died after contracting the virus from a patient, was mourned on Weibo but his death also triggered calls for freedom of speech and the downfall of the Communist Party. Within hours, however, hashtags and posts related to free speech disappeared from the platform. Two open letters, including one signed by 10 professors in Wuhan, were circulated on social media days later but were quickly removed by censors. At the same time, the central government announced that it would send a team to Wuhan to investigate how Li's case had been handled. State media and officials sought to paint Li as a hero who was part of a "joint" battle against the epidemic. — AFP

Man runs marathon in flat as China fights virus with exercise

Afanatical runner jogged the equivalent of an ultra-marathon inside his small apartment as people in virus-hit China desperately try to keep fit while cooped up indoors. The country is at the centre of an outbreak of a new coronavirus, leaving more than 1,500 dead and sparking global alarm, but it is also in the grip of a health drive because the government is aggressively encouraging people to exercise to fight the disease.

With much of the 1.4 billion population ordered indoors and gyms closed, people are competing to outdo each other in how many bottles of water they can lift, how many push-ups they can do with their children on their backs or how many flights of stairs they can scale in their tower blocks. But Pan Shancu has easily won the unofficial gold medal, saying he jogged 66 kilometres (41 miles) in a loop at home in six hours, 41 minutes. He has the data tracker that he says proves it, and the 44-year-old's feat and a video of

him repeatedly circling furniture in his apartment went viral in China. "I felt a little dizzy at first, but you get used to it after you circle many times," Pan told AFP by telephone from Hangzhou, near Shanghai. "Running is like an addiction. If you don't run for a long time, you get itchy feet."

On another occasion Pan ran 30 km on the spot in his bathroom and live-streamed it to inspire others who have similarly been confined at home for the last two weeks. "I am in an online chat group in which people are asking what we want to do most after the epidemic," said Pan, a massage therapist and dedicated long-distance runner. "Some people said they want to have a feast. I said that I want to run 100 kilometres outside." China's ruling Communist Party has launched a campaign featuring Olympic athletes to demonstrate how people can stay fit while spending endless days stuck inside. Tables, chairs and even door frames can all be used in one form or another to help exercise, according to one online pamphlet. Schools are shut and children are not exempt. They have been ordered by education authorities not to simply lounge about playing computer games and fiddling with their phones. "In addition to letting children help parents do some chores within their ability, they must get creative at home," government expert Zhao Wenhua told a press conference. "For example, walking and running on the spot, skipping, push-ups, sit-ups and so on." Some



Pan Shancu runs in his bedroom in Hangzhou on Friday. — AFP

people have turned to technology, using apps on their smartphones that show how to work out without equipment and sharing the results with their friends.

Bilibili, a popular video-sharing platform, says views of fitness-related content jumped nearly 50 percent in the period January 23 to February 5 compared to the two weeks before. — AFP

Business

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SINGAPORE: In this file photo taken on February 12, 2020 visitors look at an Airbus model display at the Singapore Airshow in Singapore. Airbus said yesterday, it "deeply regrets" Washington's move to increase tariffs on its planes imported into the United States from Europe. — AFP

Airbus 'deeply regrets' US tariff hike

Trade tension escalates as Washington increases tariffs from 10% to 15%

WASHINGTON: The United States is increasing tariffs on Airbus planes imported from Europe to 15 percent, authorities announced, in a move the aerospace giant said yesterday was "deeply" regrettable. Friday's decision to hike tariffs from March 18 "further escalates trade tensions between the US and the EU", the European aerospace giant said in a statement, adding it creates "more instability for US airlines that are already suffering from a shortage of aircraft."

The announcement from the office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) came just days after President Donald Trump said it was time to talk "very seriously" about a trade deal with the European Union. Duties have been at 10 percent since October, when Washington hit European products worth \$7.5 billion with tariffs. "Airbus deeply regrets USTR's decision to increase tariffs on aircraft

imported from the EU as well as the decision to maintain tariffs on goods from other sectors," the company said, referring to products including wine, cheese, coffee and olives — which have been taxed at 25 percent since October.

The latest decision also "ignores the many submissions made by US airlines, highlighting the fact that they—and the US flying public—will ultimately have to pay these tariffs," it added.

'Ultimately harmful'

The German finance ministry said it had taken note of the move by the United States, and reiterated its stance on tariffs. "Our basic position is clear: we reject any unilateral increase in customs taxes," it said in a statement. "Customs taxes are ultimately harmful to everyone, including the USA." Washington imposed

punitive taxes on the \$7.5 billion in European products after the World Trade Organization (WTO) gave the United States a green light to take retaliatory trade measures against the EU over its subsidies to European aerospace giant Airbus.

Industry executives in Europe and the United States are on tenterhooks awaiting each new announcement from trade authorities. "It has become abundantly clear that tariffs on distilled spirits products are causing rough seas on both sides of the Atlantic," the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States said in a statement Friday.

The council called on authorities to withdraw 25 percent taxes on American whiskeys in the EU, and 25 percent taxes on liquors imported from five European countries, pointing to fears of a negative impact on the US economy and jobs. But Trump, a

real estate developer turned politician, sees tariffs as a negotiating tool.

After a trade war with China that lasted nearly two years and featured punishing reciprocal tariffs, Trump declared at the signing of a "phase one" trade deal with Beijing in January that it was a "momentous step ... righting the wrongs of the past." He has now turned his sights to Europe as Washington brandishes the threat of taxing European auto imports, a move targeting Germany, Europe's biggest auto exporter.

Trump wants EU member states to further open their markets to American products, particularly agricultural goods. He has also threatened to hike tariffs on French wine—currently taxed at 25 percent—even further unless there is a deal on a digital tax which European nations want to impose on American giants such as Amazon and Facebook. —AFP

stc-Kuwait first to launch 5G E2E SA network in MENA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc-Kuwait, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced yesterday the deployment of an E2E 5G SA solution from devices to network and billing with the ability to simultaneously support both 5G Non-Stand Alone (NSA) and 5G Stand Alone (SA).

This initiative builds on stc's partnership and vision to collaborate with Huawei to deliver an agile, cloud native, next generation 5G network that gives stc the ability to introduce new 5G services and experiences with the shortest time to market. With the best 5G wireless coverage by end of 2019, stc-Kuwait updated its wireless network seamlessly to support the SA & NSA terminals.

stc-Kuwait's 5G core network platform is fully designed with containerized & micro service architecture making it truly Cloud Native. The hardware of platform is MENA first running on the innovative & disruptive next generation ARM V8 architecture powered by Huawei servers which have been specifically designed to meet

the needs of the ICT industry specifically as we enter the 5G era.

These ARM based servers are able to leverage their abilities in providing a highly scalable, massively dense, power efficient 5G Core to stc-Kuwait based on the industry standard 5G reference architecture ensuring an open and rich ecosystem. stc-Kuwait also upgraded its billing system to further support multi-dimensional, multi-scenario charging for consumer, home and corporates. Collaborating with 5G SA technology, stc currently has an end to end network ready with an initial focus on eMBB and is looking forward to the industry to standardize mMTC & uRLLC.



Maziad Alharbi

stc-Kuwait CEO, engineer Maziad Alharbi said: "5G is where the aspiration of the enterprising business and the magical consumer use cases will for the first time become reality. We are able to provide guaranteed SLAs through SA, especially the enhancement in uplink to support our "Dedicated Access" offering to enterprises. It is now possible with 5G to see stc pave the way for users to experience low latency and massive connections to become a reality in Kuwait."

He added, "This is why stc has partnered with Huawei to design and deliver a network that considers the latest trends and utilizes evolutionary learning systems to provide an unmatched user experience. A safe and secure digital ecosystem where industries and consumers can benefit from with services tailored to their needs. We hope to welcome everyone to experience this end to end 5G SA with us."

Burgan Bank EGM approves BoD recommendations

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced during the 35th Extraordinary General Meeting the approval of the recommendation of the Board of Directors to increase the number of members to eleven members, and amend articles (16) and (17) and (18) of the Bank's articles of association.

Majed Essa Al-Ajeel, Chairman of Burgan Bank, said: "This amendment comes as part of Burgan Bank's commitment to maintain and implement best governance practices and to ensure the implementation of the Central Bank of Kuwait's guidelines issued on

10/9/2019 regarding the rules and regulations of governance in Kuwaiti banks. This falls within the framework of the ongoing efforts and commitment by the Board of Directors of Burgan Bank Group to achieve the regulatory requirements."

Al-Ajeel further added: "In order to fulfil the requirements, the Board of Directors has approved its work plan and schedule for the implementation stages, including the increase in the number of members of the board to 11 members, with the addition of two independent members before the date of 30/6/2020 to raise it to four independent members before 6/30/2022."

Burgan Bank encompasses operations in Kuwait and its regional subsidiaries, namely Burgan Bank Turkey, Gulf Bank Algeria, Tunis International Bank. It has one of the largest regional branch networks across Kuwait, Turkey, Algeria, and Tunisia as well as a representative office in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



KUWAIT: Chairman Majed Essa Al-Ajeel (right) and Vice Chairman and Group CEO Masoud Hayat during the meeting.

Gulf Bank announces Malak Al-Enezi as winner of 2019 salary package

Winner takes home a grand cash prize worth up to 100 times her monthly salary



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank wrapped up its annual Salary Package draw event at The Avenues, after announcing Malak Ghanim Al-Enezi as the lucky winner who will be taking home a grand cash prize worth up to 100 times her monthly salary. To kick off this year's Salary Package draws, Gulf Bank also held another raffle to reveal the name of the Salary Package winner for January 2020. The winner, Majedah Mohammad Rashed, received a cash prize equivalent to 12 times her monthly salary.

The draw event, which took place Thursday evening at The Avenues near the Cheesecake Factory, was held in the presence of a representative each from the Ministry of Commerce and Ernst & Young. Throughout the day, and in the hours leading up to the draw, attendees and mall visitors also took part in a variety of activities that Gulf Bank had organized.

Throughout the day, visitors at The Avenues had an opportunity to take part in a variety of entertaining activities and games for the chance to win cash prizes. Everyone was invited to join in the fun from 10 AM to 6 PM, and choose from a variety of competitive games, a photowall, and an interactive mupi/advertising banner. After the announcement of the winners and to wrap up the day's celebrations, attendees were also treated to a live musical performance from the popular musical artist Daffy, who recorded the Bank's annual song celebrating the upcoming national holidays.

Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, noted: "Congratulations to both our winners, Malak

Ghanim Al-Enezi and Majedah Mohammad Rashed, on being awarded their cash prizes as part of Gulf Bank's Salary Package draws. Gulf Bank's Salary Package is one of the most exceptional salary accounts in Kuwait and offers its clients multiple valuable features. Not only are customers automatically enrolled into the monthly and annual Salary Package draws, but they can also avail interest-free loans, cash gifts, fee waivers, and many more rewards throughout the year. We encourage everyone to transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank for the chance to avail these features and more throughout the year."

The 2020 Kuwaiti Salary Package automatically enrolls new Kuwaiti customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank in the monthly and annual Salary Account draws. The monthly draws allow customers the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary, while the yearly draw gives them the opportunity to win Kuwait's largest salary prize of up to 100 times their salary.

The Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD 100 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank or an interest-free loan of up to KD 15,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and will be eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a Visa or MasterCard credit card free of charge for a year, as well as a chance to apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000 or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.



EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.785
Indian Rupees	4.287
Pakistani Rupees	1.977
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.680
Nepali Rupees	2.675
Singapore Dollar	221.650
Hongkong Dollar	39.347
Bangladesh Taka	3.559
Philippine Peso	6.058
Thai Bhat	9.839
Malaysian Ringgit	78.171

GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.561
Qatari Riyal	84.004
UAE Dirham	794.412
Bahraini Dinar	812.140
UAE Dirham	83.272

ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	22.000
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.514
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.228
Tunisian Dinar	114.050
Jordanian Dinar	431.500
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.204
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.447

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	305.250
Euro	334.690
Sterling Pound	401.930
Canadian dollar	232.610
Turkish lira	51.540
Swiss Franc	314.450
US Dollar Buying	298.200

US Dollar Transfer	305.250
Euro	334.690
Sterling Pound	401.930
Canadian dollar	232.610
Turkish lira	51.540
Swiss Franc	314.450
US Dollar Buying	298.200

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	305.300
Canadian Dollar	231.100
Sterling Pound	396.880
Euro	333.360
Swiss Frank	301.185
Bahrain Dinar	811.905
UAE Dirhams	83.525
Qatari Riyals	84.765
Saudi Riyals	82.310
Jordanian Dinar	431.895
Egyptian Pound	19.465
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.680
Indian Rupees	4.270
Pakistani Rupees	1.975
Bangladesh Taka	3.562
Philippines Peso	6.056
Cyprus pound	18.160
Japanese Yen	3.775
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.680
Malaysian Ringgit	74.650
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.185

Thai Bhat	10.780
Turkish Lira	50.900
Singapore dollars	220.942

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.388349	0.402249
Czech Korune	0.005336	0.014636
Danish Krone	0.040359	0.045359
Euro	0.324481	0.338181
Georgian Lari	0.105537	0.105537
Hungarian	0.000885	0.001075
Norwegian Krone	0.028942	0.034142
Romanian Leu	0.052689	0.069539
Russian Ruble	0.004812	0.004812
Slovakia	0.009157	0.019157
Slovenia	0.027588	0.032588
Swedish Krona	0.305874	0.316874
Swiss Franc	0.305874	0.316874
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.196835	0.208835
New Zealand Dollar	0.190571	0.200071
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.225073	0.234073
US Dollars	0.301550	0.306100
US Dollars Mint	0.302050	0.306100
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002885	0.003686

Chinese Yuan	0.042378	0.045878
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037250	0.040000
Indian Rupee	0.003631	0.004403
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002696	0.002876
Korean Won	0.000248	0.000263
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069972	0.075972
Nepalese Rupee	0.002906	0.002946
Pakistan Rupee	0.001333	0.002103
Philippine Peso	0.005861	0.006161
Singapore Dollar	0.214594	0.224594
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001321	0.001901
Taiwan	0.010055	0.010235
Thai Bhat	0.009465	0.010015
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013

Arab	
Bahraini Dinar	0.804580
Egyptian Pound	0.019329
Iranian Riyal	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000200
Jordanian Dinar	0.426199
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000102
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021147
Omani Riyal	0.788758
Qatar Riyal	0.083297
Saudi Riyal	0.083367
Syrian Pound	0.001296
Tunisian Dinar	0.103427
Turkish Lira	0.044166
UAE Dirhams	0.082583
Yemeni Riyal	0.000994

Business

Vestel Electronics unveils new era of technological innovations in Kuwait

Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Company to distribute latest Vestel products in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Renowned European Consumer Electronics & Home Appliances brand Vestel has launched their latest technological products in Kuwait through their distributor Easa Husain Al-Yousifi company in a glittering ceremony conducted here in Kuwait's Radisson Blu Hotel in the presence of key top management officials from the companies, other Kuwait government officials and senior diplomats from the Turkish Embassy. Vestel has ensured their commitment to Kuwait market through this event wherein series of ground-breaking products were also demonstrated to the entire business community.

Re-defining the scope of home appliances

The Kuwait launch, the very first launch Event for Vestel brand in the GCC region, showcases a lineup of consistent innovations that perfectly fits in the era of intuitive and intelligent living. These developments offer a richer, more refined user experience that rapidly transforms homes & enables users to enjoy seam-less living with the feeling of an affordable luxury.

Vestel's multi-door refrigerator with vacuum bag and fermentation module won the best innovation award also in the last CES exhibition in Las Vegas, USA. "We plan to bring all the innovative technologies to Kuwait, as Kuwait market is always passionate for the new technologies and quality brands. Thanks to Vestel's mighty R&D capabilities, we are happy to be associated with such as world class brand in Kuwait market", added Wael Deeb, General Manager of the Electronics department at Easa Husain Al-Yousifi company.

"Technology and innovation are in our DNA at Vestel Group. We listen carefully feedbacks from consumers who want something beyond a conventional product. Vacuum bag and fermentore are the answers of this approach of Vestel for instance" said Volkan Karacali, Deputy General Manager of Vestel, Turkey. "As we designed these new products, we considered all aspects, from look and feel to user delight in order to ensure we're offering families top innovations that make their daily lives more convenient," he added.

Vacuum bag technology provides eight times longer food freshness. Shelf life is essential for consumers. Besides that millions of foods are wasted because of oxidation. Generally foods like sausage, cheese and steak are not fully consumed in a single use and their life begin to go down once their package is opened. Bacteria and harmful microorganisms grow fast in the aerobic environment. However, vacuum method could prevent oxygen to touch the food. So the food can be fresh for longer. Vacuum bag feature provides us to vacuum our residue foods, so they can be kept fresh and healthy. This feature is easy to use and also easily accessible.

Vestel Ferment Store technology is the solution for anyone who's ever wanted to produce fermented food but can't have the ideal conditions and space. Technology offers users ideal conditions for fermentation and storage. Refrigerators turn into a food factory for a new level of home-made foods. Like (yogurt, kefir, bread dough, vinegar, pickle) foods fermentation functions are possible with Ferment Store technology. All in

one technology; after the fermentation, foods will be chilled and stored at just right conditions. Multi-functional: Ferment Store zone also has cooling and freezing functions. Healthy-eaters' best friend fermented food is rich in probiotics which helps restore balance in the gut and aid digestion and immune health.

"We strongly believe that there is clear need in the Markets to consume quality, affordable Products which are truly futuristic too. Vestel commits to provide leading technologies & building on its existing strengths to shape a new era where innovation & smarter integration across its device ecosystem will deliver Consumers personalized experiences to transform their everyday living," added Abhineet Tiwari, Managing Director of Vestel Electronics Gulf, sales subsidiary of Vestel Group in the region.

The world class unique experience of cooking appliances

Vestel also showcased truly innovative world class products in the cooking arena in the same Event both built in and free standing type. Vestel's proprietary unique cooking technology of HeatWrap drew much attention in the event. Patented Heat Wrap technology provides a unique cooking experience by evenly cooking at 5 different trays simultaneously which is ideal for large families. Besides, the Heat Wrap technology prevents odor mixture for up to 4 different kinds of dishes while cooking at the same time. It is possible to cook fish; cake and pizza at the same time, and still enjoy a perfect cake. For single tray dishes the versatile Heat

Wrap feature allows the same cooking results at any tray level.

Also Vestel's unique technology in cooking is patented Hot Air Shield: to solve a common problem for the built-in ovens, Hot Air Shield technology creates an air curtain between the control panel and bottom of the oven door and protects the user from being exposed to hot air when the oven door is opened.

Vestel also having their pioneering technology in the washing machine and dish washer product segments with their Twin Jet, Pyrojet and EcoWash technologies where it make Vestel products world class energy efficient keeping the low carbon emissions. Vestel also show cased latest Condenser and Heat pump based dryer technology in the function which is preferred in the European market today for their best energy efficiency and eco-friendly stance. In Kuwait, consumers are now changing to Condenser dryer technology from outdated vented dryer technology. Vestel also announced that soon they would be launching in the Kuwait market, the detergent less washing machine and dish washers through their proprietary technology invented through their unique water electrolysis system as Hydro Charge (r) technology which drew much appreciation in the whole industry during all recent exhibitions.

"Suitable Lineup has already been introduced in the Kuwait Market and we will continue to add value to People lives here. We follow a motto Every Home Deserves Vestel and we will continue to push the limits in Kuwait too," added Sonny Peter, Regional Sales Head at Vestel Electronics Gulf.

Asian plane makers struggle to take off in crowded market

SINGAPORE: Asian plane makers have thrown huge sums at building jets but flagship projects have suffered repeated setbacks, and they face a tough time breaking into a market dominated by established players. The Asia-Pacific region is the world's biggest aviation market for commercial aircraft and Japanese and Chinese firms have embarked on programs to build their own planes.

Asia's two biggest economies are home to myriad companies making hi-tech goods, from cars to smartphones, which in many cases have succeeded in rivaling Western firms. But when it comes to building planes—which requires mammoth investment, years of painstaking development, and rigorous safety standards—progress has been slow.

The companies at the forefront of the Asian drive, Japan's Mitsubishi and Chinese state-owned manufacturer COMAC, have both seen their flagship projects delayed for years. China "could be successful in 10-15 years but at this time, the odds are not really in their favor", Shukor Yusof, founder of Malaysia-based aviation consultancy Endau Analytics, told AFP.

"The international market is just too saturated with aircraft from the established manufacturers so there's very little space for new players." Asia's biggest air show in Singapore this week was—as ever—dominated by European plane maker Airbus, US manufacturer Boeing and a handful of smaller, mostly Western manufacturers.

Chinese manufacturers had a good reason for not making much of an impression—they were forced to pull out because of a ban on

travellers from China due to the coronavirus outbreak, which has killed around 1,400 people and infected tens of thousands.

'Very long race'

Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation was showing off a mock-up of the interior of its SpaceJet, the first version of which was originally due for commercial rollout in 2013. After repeated delays, Japanese carrier All Nippon Airways had finally been due to receive the first of the SpaceJet M90 aircraft in the middle of this year.

But the model suffered its sixth delay this month, with the first delivery now expected next year at the earliest. The setbacks, due mainly to technical glitches, have raised the development cost for the plane to an estimated 800 billion yen (\$7.3 billion). Steve Haro, vice president and head of global marketing and strategy at Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation, said that more than 900 changes had made to the aircraft's original design.

But he added that a milestone had been reached as the latest version was ready to be certified by regulators. "We're really at the place where we're crossing the finish line of a very long race," he told AFP.

The plane is for short, regional flights—such as between a major hub and smaller airports inside the same country—and its main rival are aircraft made by Brazil's Embraer, he said.

"We're not interested in competing with Boeing on the large airplanes, or Airbus. We see ourselves meeting a vital market segment that has really been ignored too long," added Haro. Over 400 orders had already been received for the M90 from around the world, he said.

Missing the boom

Meanwhile state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC)'s flagship jet has been delayed at least five years and analysts believe it is likely to miss its 2021 schedule for the plane's first delivery



SINGAPORE: Exhibitors standing next to the SpaceJet model display at the Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation booth during the Singapore Airshow in Singapore. Asian plane makers have thrown huge sums at building jets but flagship projects have suffered repeated setbacks, and they face a tough time breaking into a market dominated by established players. —AFP photo

to a customer. The single-aisle C919 is designed to compete with the Boeing 737 and Airbus A320, the favored workhorse of budget carriers. The manufacturer says there are 815 of the planes on order, largely from domestic carriers. But it will face particular challenges in winning approval from US and European regulators to operate internationally, and gaining public acceptance outside its home market, said Shukor of Endau Analytics.

The manufacturers are missing out on a boom in air travel in the Asia-Pacific, where increasing affluence combined with cheaper flights mean the numbers of people flying regularly is soaring.

Demand for new aircraft is expected to exceed 39,000 over the next 20 years, with 42 percent of the deliveries to carriers in Asia, according to Airbus projections.

Still, delays are to be expected in the industry, said Janesh Janardhanan, aviation specialist with consultancy Frost & Sullivan. "Aircraft are complex systems and some level of teething issues are common with new programs," he said.

He said there is still room for new players, as passenger numbers are forecast to grow strongly, but cautioned: "Barriers to entry are high." —AFP

Airbus defense division to start talks on job cuts

MUNICH: The head of the defense business of Airbus said he would start talks with labor representatives next week on job cuts, as the German-based group retrenches following setbacks with its A400M military transporter. "We will enter the first talks soon with the European works council," Airbus Defence and Space chief Dirk Hoke told Reuters in an interview cleared for publication on Saturday, adding that negotiations would then take place at national level.

Recurring technical problems with the A400M led the German air force to refuse

Britain in talks with CRCC on high-speed line

LONDON: The British government is in "preliminary discussions" with the part state-owned China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC) to help build the controversial HS2 high-speed link, according to the Department of Transport. "The DfT is always keen to learn from the experience of others and to consider approaches that offer value for money to the taxpayer," said a ministry official, confirming reports in Saturday's Financial Times. The department added that no "concrete commitments" had been made. London finally approved the new high-speed railway line on Tuesday, with full construction work to begin in April following years of delays, after Prime Minister Boris Johnson backed the project.

delivery of two of the aircraft last autumn. The group has also taken a 1.2 billion euro (\$1.3 billion) charge on the worsening sales outlook, with a German ban on defense exports to Saudi Arabia causing Airbus Defense and Space to lose a promising potential customer, said Hoke.

German-headquartered Airbus Defence and Space, formed in 2014 as part of a broader restructuring, employs 34,000 staff - 13,000 of them in Germany - and contributes around a fifth of revenues to parent group Airbus. "The works councils know that I will fight to keep every job I can. We won't come with disproportionate numbers," Hoke said. Job cuts would depend on capacity utilization and project pipeline at different facilities: "Here I have to tell local politicians that the guarantees to keep plants open that many of them demand depend on projects." —Reuters

He said the entire HS2 line linking London to central and northern England would go ahead, rejecting criticism of a ballooning price tag and impact on the environment. "If we start now, services could be running by the end of the decade. So today... the cabinet has given high-speed rail the green signal," he told the House of Commons.

The CRCC wrote to rail chiefs last month in a letter seen by Building Magazine saying it could construct the line five years earlier than scheduled for a much reduced price. "We are certain that we can offer a cost that is significantly lower than the projections we have seen," the magazine quoted the letter as saying. "The advantages are too great, in our opinion, too great to dismiss on the basis that there are obstacles to overcome. You will find that the Chinese way is to seek solutions, not linger on obstacles and difficulties," it added. An independent review into the scheme, currently the largest infrastructure project in Europe, estimated it could cost more than £100 billion (\$129 billion, 118 billion euros). —AFP

Business

Boubyan Bank sukuk oversubscribed by more than 6-fold amounting to \$4.6bn

Issued with lowest profit rate for a global sukuk issuance from Kuwait

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced its regional and international success in covering the subscription in its first initial unsecured sukuk under the umbrella of a sukuk program with bids amounting to \$4.6 billion approximately, i.e., the issuance was oversubscribed by more than 6-fold the targeted amount, which reflects the solid position of the bank.

The bank made a roadshow to meet several investors in Dubai and London, then proceeded with the issuance of the USD-denominated 5-year sukuk amounting to \$750 million, which will be listed on the Irish Stock Exchange at a 2.593 percent annual profit rate; this rate is the lowest global Sukuk Issuance from Kuwait at all, reflecting the solid creditworthiness of the bank and the strong confidence in the bank by investors.

The issuance was subscribed in by 190 local, regional and international investors, including banks, and global and sovereign investment institutions, confirming investors'

high confidence in Boubyan Bank. GCC & ME investors accounted for 51 percent of the issuance subscription, with 23 percent going to European investors, 23 percent to Asian investors, and the remaining 3 percent going to other investors. Abdul-Salam Al-Saleh, the bank's Deputy CEO stated: "Thanks to Allah, the Almighty, and then to the confidence of the investors, we managed to issue a major sukuk issuance that confirmed Boubyan Bank's international and regional status and reputation, gained owing to its achievements over the past years across many levels."

"This reflects investors' confidence in the continuity of Boubyan Bank's success and improvements. The issuance will have a positive effect on the bank's liquidity position, and the diversification of its funding sources, while enhancing our CBK-related regulatory ratios," he added.

Al-Saleh further referred to the fact that the issuance was rated A+ by Fitch Ratings, the global rating agency, coupled



Abdul-Salam Al-Saleh

with Boubyan Bank's solid ratings from Fitch, Standard & Poor's & Moody's.

Islamic investment instruments

Al-Saleh went on to add: "We are proud of our achievements since this does not represent a success for Boubyan Bank alone, rather, this is a success for the Islamic finance industry in general. It further confirms the sound investment climate in Kuwait overall, as it enjoys various factors that appeal to global investors in light of the available good opportunities such as Boubyan Bank's sukuk."

He added: "Subscription in Boubyan Bank's sukuk is a good investment opportunity, considering the bank's achievements over the past years, and its good growth rates in terms of assets or deposits' growth in addition to the increase in operating profit and the bank's market shares," Al-Saleh remarked: "All indicators show that there is an increasing demand for Islamic financial and investment instruments, considering the growth rates over the past two decades, and the expectations to follow the same positive pace."

Last November, Boubyan Bank obtained the final approvals for a sukuk issuance programs, where HSBC and Standard Chartered acted as global arrangers and dealers in the widely successful issuance while the Arab Banking Corporation, Boubyan Capital, the National Bank of Abu Dhabi, HSBC, the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector, Baitak Capital, Kuwait International Bank, Standard Chartered Bank, and Warba Bank acted as managers.

NBK mobile banking app: Your everyday partner

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait is always committed to offering customers the most advanced technology in line with the top-notch digital solutions that respond to their need and enable them to have fast and easy banking experience. That is why the bank constantly adds new services and features to the NBK Mobile Banking App.

With the new NBK Mobile Banking services, customers can today apply for different products including loans, credit cards or request an increase in their credit card limit, all in a few clicks that make banking with NBK much easier and more convenient. Customers can also open NBK Term Deposit in different currencies with ease and flexibility.

NBK also released the NBK Geo Alerts the first of its kind in Kuwait, through which customers can receive location based notifications while shopping about offers and discounts via the NBK Mobile Banking App. Other advanced features available on NBK Mobile Banking include establishing standing orders, displaying investment funds and money market details, transferring to Watan Brokerage accounts to provide seamless experience during their investments, as well as automatically filling the OTP codes received by SMS when making transactions.

In addition to these services, NBK Mobile Banking App has enabled the Dark Mode feature for a better customer experience, and allowed customers to send payment links created through NBK Quick Pay directly to WhatsApp



Cigdem Iltemir Carino

numbers to receive money immediately at any time and from any local banks even during the weekends and official holidays. Moreover, the NBK Mobile Banking App has enhanced the Smartwatch features where customers can check the balance of their credit cards and display their latest transactions.

Commenting on the new enhancements, Cigdem Iltemir Carino, Assistant General Manager, Consumer

Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We had an outstanding year in 2019 with the introduction of frequent updates and features to NBK Mobile Banking App. These new features were designed to meet the changing needs of our customers and are in line with our digital transformation strategy as we seek to provide our customers with the most advanced digital solutions."

"The services and enhancements made on the application reached 95 percent on the customer satisfaction level. Our active customer-base increased in 2019 over 55 percent on yearly basis. As a result, NBK was awarded Best Consumer Digital Bank and the Best in Mobile Banking in Kuwait for 2019 by Global Finance magazine," Carino noted.

Carino added: "We are proud of these enhancements; they represent a major breakthrough and reflect our commitment to fulfill our customers' various needs. We are bracing to introduce more services and enhancements over the coming period so that our customers can enjoy faster and convenient solutions while making their banking transactions."

"We are committed to serving our customers as an

"everyday partner" with innovative solutions to meet their everyday needs in banking services. This year, our ambitions exceed what we have already achieved in 2019 and revolutionize the way customers experience banking services," Carino concluded.

In addition to these features, NBK Mobile Banking allows customers to manage their cards while travelling, increase their monthly transfer limit and contact the bank through the NBK toll-free numbers.

Additionally, customers can open a new account, view transactions, check their NBK Miles and NBK Rewards Points, settle outstanding credit cards payments, use bill payment, advanced payment features like e-Payments to enable online payment for purchases and NBK Quick Pay for fast and easy transfers, finding the nearest NBK Branch, ATM or CDM in Kuwait, as well as submit an account statement request, checkbook and other requests.

The NBK Mobile Banking App is available in Arabic and English on iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, Android, as well as on Apple Watch and Android Wear. In addition, the App can be used on more than one device and customers can access the account in one touch using the advanced "fingerprint" or "Face ID" technologies. NBK is always committed to providing customers the most advanced paying solutions, with two new services being launched recently: Fitbit Pay and Garmin Pay. Both services provide customers with an easy and secure one-touch payment. The new services enable customers to make contactless payments via select Fitbit and Garmin devices, thus becoming the first bank locally to offer this service.

Application downloading using QR code

The application is available on iOS and Android operating systems. To download the app, simply open the camera in your device, point it at the code and you're done. The app will automatically recognize the QR Code your camera is pointing at and the app will be downloaded.

Huawei media statement regarding WSJ 'Backdoor' story

As evidenced by the Snowden leaks, the United States has been covertly accessing telecom networks worldwide, spying on other countries for quite some time. The report by the Washington Post this week about how the CIA used an encryption company to spy on other countries for decades is yet additional proof.

US allegations of Huawei using lawful interception are nothing but a smokescreen - they don't adhere to any form of accepted logic in the cyber security domain. Huawei has never and will never covertly access telecom networks, nor do we have the capability to do so. The Wall Street Journal is clearly aware that the US government can't provide any evidence to support their allegations, and yet it still chose to repeat the lies being spread by these US officials. This reflects The Wall Street Journal's bias against Huawei and undermines its credibility.

Huawei's role as a telecoms vendor is to provide equipment that follows 3GPP/ETSI standards, just like every other vendor. We are obligated to follow industry-wide lawful interception standards like 3GPP's TS 33.107 standard for 3G networks, and TS 33.128 for 5G. This is where Huawei's obligations with regards to lawful interception end.

The actual administration and use of lawful interception interfaces is conducted solely by carriers and regulators. Interception interfaces are always located in protected premises on the operator's side, and they are operated by employees who are vetted by the government in the countries where they operate. Operators have very strict rules to operate and maintain these interfaces. Huawei doesn't develop or produce any interception equipment beyond this.

Huawei is only an equipment supplier. In this role, accessing customer networks without their authorization and visibility would be impossible. We do not have the ability to bypass carriers, access control, and take data from their networks without being detected by all normal firewalls or security systems. In fact, even The Wall Street Journal admits that US officials are unable to provide any concrete details concerning these so-called "backdoors."

Cyber security and user privacy protection are Huawei's top priorities. The remarks made by US officials completely ignore the huge investment and best practices of Huawei and carriers in cyber security risk management. We are very indignant that the US government has spared no efforts to stigmatize Huawei by using cyber security issues. If the US does discover Huawei's violations, we again solemnly request the US to disclose specific evidence instead of using the media to spread rumors.

US officials declined to say whether the US has observed Huawei using this access. US officials also haven't provided details about the alleged backdoor access, except to say they have been aware of it since observing it in 2009 in early 4G, or fourth-generation, cellular equipment.

A spokesman for London-based Vodafone Group PLC, one of the world's largest telecom providers by subscribers, said there was no indication that any of its equipment vendors had unauthorized access to its global networks. Only company employees with security clearance could link into the lawful interception system, he said. Deutsche Telekom AG, Germany's largest carrier, said it wasn't worried about its own network in Germany. The company said its legal-intercept management system was built by a German company. That would prevent Huawei from being able to get access, it said.

Last month, the UK, despite heavy lobbying from the Trump administration, agreed to continue to allow Huawei gear in its latest 5G network build-out. The European Union also issued a set of guidelines, referred to as the "5G toolbox", and allowed Huawei to continue participating in Europe's 5G roll. Huawei has repeatedly said that it "has never and will never do anything that would compromise or endanger the security of networks and data of its clients," the company said. "We emphatically reject these latest allegations. Again, groundless accusations are being repeated without providing any kind of concrete evidence."

Global stocks rise with positive chipmaker forecast, oil up

NEW YORK: Global stock markets rose slightly on Friday as investors bet on a lull in proliferation of the coronavirus, while oil prices registered their first weekly gain since early January.

Wall Street climbed late in the session following a CNBC report, citing sources, that the White House was considering a tax incentive for Americans to buy stocks. Investors were still trying to gauge the economic fallout of China's coronavirus outbreak, with Chinese health authorities reporting more than 5,000 new cases on Friday.

"You saw some late program trading," said Rick Meckler, partner at Cherry Lane Investments in New Vernon, New Jersey. The stock market "has met every attempt to sell it off with more (buying), and the hope of some of the people buying late is that the news on the virus would be muted for the three days, and that with three days' time, there will be just a little less anxiousness about it."

The US market will be closed on Monday for Presidents Day. A recent Reuters poll showed the world's second-biggest economy will grow at its slowest pace in the current quarter since the financial crisis, but the downturn will be short-lived if the outbreak is contained. Some investors said they thought the economic impact of the outbreak would not be as deep as feared, with some also noting the spread beyond China has not been as rapid as feared.

"Investors are definitely keeping an eye on how much the coronavirus is spreading and where it spreads to. It still remains the biggest risk going forward," said Robert Pavlik, chief investment strategist and senior portfolio manager at SlateStone Wealth LLC in New York.

MSCI's gauge of stocks across the globe gained 0.06 percent. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 25.23 points, or 0.09 percent, to 29,398.08, the S&P 500 gained 6.22 points, or 0.18 percent, to 3,380.16 and the Nasdaq Composite added 19.21 points, or 0.2 percent, to 9,731.18.

Chipmaker Nvidia late Thursday forecast first-quarter revenue that topped Wall Street expectations. The pan-European STOXX 600 index lost 0.13 percent. Oil prices rose more than 100 percent on the day and posted their first weekly gain since early January amid hopes demand will rebound.

Brent crude rose 98 cents, or 1.74 percent, to settle at \$57.32 a barrel. It rose 5.23 percent since last Friday, its first weekly increase in six weeks. US crude futures gained 63 cents, or 1.23 percent, to settle at \$52.05. The weekly rise was 3.44 percent. In currency markets, the dollar index rose 0.09 percent, with the euro down 0.09 percent to 1.083. But concerns about growth in the eurozone are expected to keep weighing on the single currency. — Reuters



Burgan Bank participates in 'KFAS Innovation Challenge 2020'

KUWAIT: To further solidify its position as a dynamic financial powerhouse, Burgan Bank selected five talented employees to undertake the responsibility of acquiring the skills to integrate an innovative culture within the bank. The Bank partnered with Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) in line with its steadfast strategy to foster transformative growth, and implement modern practices.

The Learning and Development department at Burgan Bank under the Human Resources Group leadership handpicked the members namely, Omar A-Halabi, Ahmed Al-Rbean, Shurrooq Al-Houty, Salem Al-Qenaei, and Mohammed Bualiyun from various divisions, to ensure each bring value from a diversified banking perspective.

The 'KFAS Innovation Challenge 2020' which commenced in January 2020, brings the combined resources of the Wharton School's Mack Institute of Innovation Management and the Penn Center for Innovation to the program. Leveraging outside resources, the participants gain industry insights and explore the themes of innovation. Participants work in teams on selected projects and at the end of the program, each of the teams will be requested to present to their companies.

The topics and activities include 'Business Model Innovation', 'Innovative Delivery Models', an 'Innovation Tournament Workshop' followed by visits to the Silicon Valley



companies in the United States in April, where they meet successful innovators operating in business today, from start-ups to multinational firms. Senior Manager, Learning and Development at Burgan Bank Ghada El-Kadi said, "Synergy remains the key to ensuring success and the chosen representatives have reflected the spirit of team work and perseverance to absorb and achieve new learnings. As a participating Bank in this dynamic program, we will benefit immensely from the rich content that will add immediate value to our ongoing projects. Groomed in Burgan Bank's col-

laborative and knowledge sharing culture, the team of five leaders will integrate their findings and best practices to accelerate organizational performance and develop a sustainable competitive advantage. We wish all of the participant's every success."

Through its continued commitment to progression and excellence, Burgan Bank has partnered with local and international knowledge facilitators to ensure employees undergo enriching levels of engagement to positively impact the bank's performance as well as the communities in which it thrives.

What's On

Kuwaiti graduates honoured in Australia



Under the auspices of Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and in collaboration with the Australian Embassy in Kuwait, Kuwait Students Union in Australia recently held a special ceremony to honor Kuwaiti graduates and Master and Ph.D students in Australia. The ceremony was also attended by the Australian Ambassador to Kuwait, Jonathan Gilbert.

Speaking on the occasion, Sheikh Mubarak expressed his pride to honor the graduates who had achieved remarkable success during their studies in Australia.

"They are the ambassadors of science and messengers of progress who travel far and wide to assimilate various cultures and return to Kuwait as competent highly intellectual citizens", he underlined.



Burgan Bank distributes gifts to children at APK

As one of the lead contributors to child welfare, Burgan Bank participated in a celebration that was organized by the Autism Partnership Kuwait (APK) for the rehabilitation and treatment of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Bringing joy to the children this season, the bank's Public Relations representatives distributed special gifts and toys to ensure a memorable day.

Burgan Bank's continued support through increased activities and interactions to APK reflects its keenness to elevate the lives of children with autism and facilitate their integration into society. Through its cooperation with Autism Partnership Kuwait, the bank also aims to raise awareness about autism and highlight the importance of early diagnosis and its treatment methods.

The children and their families expressed their happiness during the celebratory event that included a range of exciting activities



Hessa Al-Najadah - Manager External Affairs at Burgan Bank during the kids celebration at Autism Partnership - Kuwait.

and competitions. Burgan Bank's commitment to different humanitarian initiatives reinforces its role as a positive catalyst for dynamic change in society.

Burgan Bank will maintain its journey of driving meaningful outcomes in the coming year through its involvement in their many activities and educational workshops.

Burgan Bank's support to this initiative falls under its full-fledged community pro-

gram entitled 'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural, social and health initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the Kuwaiti society.

LuLu Hypermarket launches slew of Hala February promotions

LuLu Hypermarket, the largest retailer in the region, is holding a range of promotions and exciting interactions with customers, as part of the shopping extravaganza of Hala February, and the National and Liberation Days in Kuwait.

Some of the fantastic promotions during the month-long celebrations include the Trolley Promotion, where lucky winners get everything in their trolley for free, and Digital Fest, which showcases the best electronic products at competitive prices. There is also a 'Brand of the week' and a 'Product of the Day' promotion that highlight the best products and brands. Also, to lend support to local farmers as part of the celebrations, grocery sections at LuLu outlets will be stocked with farm fresh fruits and vegetables sourced locally.

As part of its initiative to make shopping an enjoyable and memorable event for customers, LuLu branches will feature a 'Selfie Corner' during the promotion period, which will enable shoppers to take photos of themselves or their loved ones against interesting background cutouts. A number of traditional cultural events are also being organized as



part of the celebratory promotions to entertain shoppers and highlight the patriotic fervor and love for the country.

Aside from the regular promotions, there is the ongoing amazing 'Dream Drive' promotion being held from 29 January to 14 March at all LuLu outlets in Kuwait. During the promotional period, shoppers will receive one e-affle coupon for every KD 5 worth of purchases at any LuLu branch, which will entitle them to enter a raffle draw to win one of four Nissan X-Trail 2020 SUVs. In addition to the

bumper prize of four Nissan SUVs, 100 lucky winners will also receive KD100 worth of gift vouchers each, for a grand total of KD10,000 in gift vouchers.

LuLu Hypermarket remains committed to offering customers the widest range and variety of quality products from around the world at highly competitive prices. The 'Hala February' promotions is part of the Hypermarket's customer-oriented approach of constantly interacting with customers and adding value to their shopping experience.

CBK takes part in 'Because You Deserve 3'

The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) took part in the job fair recently organized by the manpower authority under the title of 'Because You Deserve 3', held with the presence of Minister of State for Economic Affairs, Mariam Al-Aqeel and the Deputy Director for National Labor Affairs, Sultan Al-Sha'arani.

CBK participation came out of its constant contributions in vocational expos and activities as part of its social responsibility activities. In this regard, CBK's Human Resources

Manager, Sadeq Abdullah said that the bank's participation in the expo was meant to manifest CBK's leaders' keenness on contributing in providing varied proper job opportunities for young citizens, namely in the private sector. "CBK depends on such expos to attract competent skilled youth to work in the private sector where they can get ample good chances to get promoted to higher positions through motivating them", said Al-Abdullah stressing that CBK had been always keen on providing constant support to competent young citizens seeking job opportunities in the private and banking sectors.

CBK's human resources team received the youth during the exhibition and briefed them on the work environment at CBK and the incentives it offers to new graduates.



Health & Science

Virtual reality surgery start-up Digital Surgery snapped up by US firm

One of Britain's most hotly-tipped medical technology start-ups

LONDON: A British start-up developing virtual reality and artificial intelligence technology for doctors has been snapped up by a US medical devices giant. Digital Surgery, which was known for its surgical training apps and kitting out doctors with VR headsets, has been acquired by New York-listed Medtronic in a deal that represents a substantial exit for Britain's burgeoning medical technology start-up scene.

Medtronic and Digital Surgery declined to comment on the value of the deal, but sources said it was in excess of \$300 million (£229 million). Founded in 2013 by former surgeons Dr Jean Nehme and Dr Andre Chow, Digital Surgery first made waves developing an app for helping train surgeons with a database of common procedures. It has also developed virtual reality software to train doctors as well as artificial intelligence tools for surgeons in the operating theatre.

As well as attracting interest from the US medical giant, The Telegraph understands that SoftBank, the Japanese investing giant that has backed dozens of tech start-ups through its Vision Fund, came close to an investment in Digital

Surgery. No deal was agreed. SoftBank, which has become notorious for its quick-fire investing in start-ups across the world, has recently pulled back from several deals after submitting term sheets. It came close to investing \$150 million in US healthcare start-up Honor, and also pulled out of a deal with software company Seismic.

SoftBank has reined in its investing style after several big bets from its first Vision Fund, including WeWork, turned sour. Medtronic, a US-listed medical technology giant that employs over 86,000 people, is set to fold Digital Surgery into its existing portfolio of robotic surgery technologies.

Dr Nehme said: "We have always believed in computational power and data as two central drivers of consistency and quality in surgery. Computational power has impacted our lives in so many ways, and within surgery it is almost absent. By joining forces with Medtronic, we will finally apply computing and AI to surgery on a meaningful scale with a goal of helping more patients in more places benefit from consistently high-quality surgical care."

In 2017, The Telegraph revealed it had



secured £15m from 8VC, a West Coast fund whose partners had previously been an early backer of Oculus Rift. Other investors included London's Balderton Capital. The start-up was previously recognized in the Telegraph's Tech4Good

awards. According to the start-up's last Companies House statement, between them Dr Nehme and Dr Chow owned around 20pc of shares in Digital Surgery, with those shares now worth millions of pounds. SoftBank declined to comment.

Betelgeuse's dimming light puzzles astronomers

PARIS: Astronomers have managed to take pictures of Betelgeuse showing that the star, one of the brightest in the Milky Way, has been losing luminosity over recent months, the European Southern Observatory (ESO) said on Friday.

The mysterious dimming of one of the most visible stars in the Orion constellation has astronomers scratching their heads, with some saying Betelgeuse could be about to explode while others point to passing conditions. "The stunning new images of the star's surface show not only the fading red supergiant but also how its apparent shape is changing," the ESO said after astronomers used the observatory's very large telescope (VLT) to find out more.

A team led by Miguel Montargès, astronomer at KU Leuven university in Belgium, has been observing the star with ESO's VLT since December, aiming to understand why it's becoming fainter. — AFP

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Kuwait Times

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◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

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- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo – Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

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

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DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368
Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

- ◆ Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- ◆ (IFSO) member .
- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
- ◆ Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

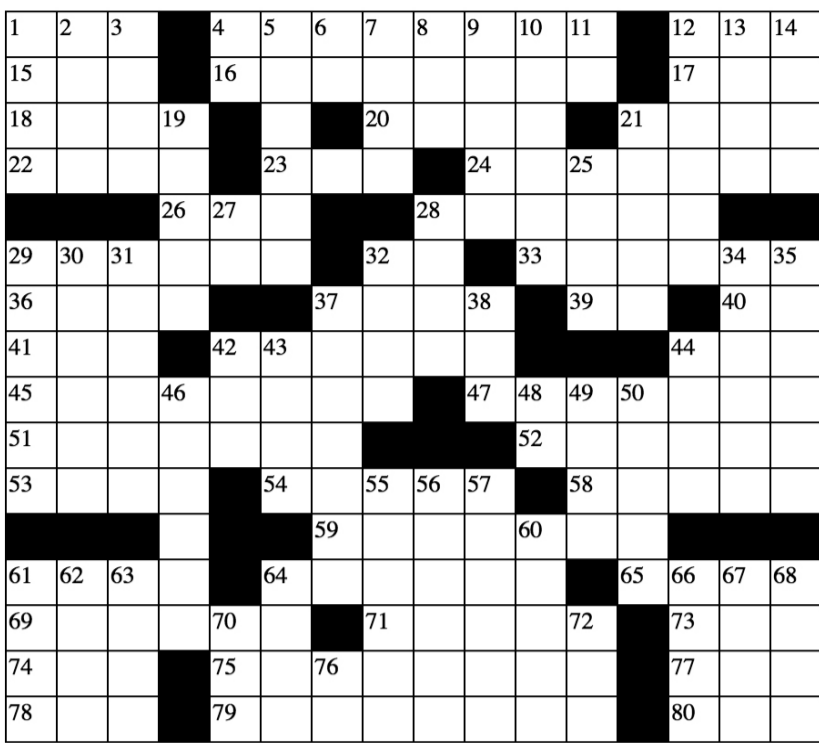
Scope of clinical Practice.

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

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Stars

CROSSWORD 2437



ACROSS

1. An accountant certified by the state.
4. The absolute unit of pressure equal to one dyne per square centimeter.
12. Standard time in the 6th time zone west of Greenwich, reckoned at the 90th meridian.
15. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
16. A drug (trade name Tolinase) used in treating stable adult-onset diabetes mellitus.
17. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
18. A fraudulent business scheme.
20. A large number or amount.
22. God of love and erotic desire.
23. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
24. A member of the Muskogean people formerly living in northern Alabama.
26. A broad flat muscle on either side of the back.
29. To or from every one of two or more (considered individually).
33. Flightless New Zealand birds similar to gallinules.
36. A visual presentation showing how something works.
39. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
40. An edge tool with a heavy bladed head mounted across a handle.
41. A white linen liturgical vestment with sleeves.
45. A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
47. A portable rocket launcher used by infantrymen as an anti-tank weapon.
51. A large waterfall on the border between Argentina and Brazil.
52. Cause to go crazy.
53. Keep in mind or convey as a conviction or view.
54. A member of a North American Indian people of southeastern California and northwestern Mexico.
58. Having help.
59. (Sumerian and Akkadian) A demon personifying death.
61. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
65. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
69. Type genus of the Tetraonidae.
71. Type genus of the Triglidae.
73. (British) Your grandmother.
74. Bulky grayish-brown eagle with a short wedge-shaped white tail.
75. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
77. A branch of the Tai languages.
78. Type genus of the family Myacidae.
79. Widespread genus of herbs or soft-wooded arborescent shrubs cultivated for their showy flowers.
80. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.

DOWN

1. The quantity a cask will hold.
2. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
3. The biblical name for ancient Syria.
4. A unit of weight equivalent to 1000 kilograms.
5. Add ions to.
6. Being ten more than one hundred forty.

7. Port city that is the capital and largest city of Latvia.
8. United States musician (born in Japan) who married John Lennon and collaborated with him on recordings (born in 1933).
9. A coffee cake flavored with orange rind and raisins and almonds.
10. Keep company with.
11. A rare heavy polyvalent metallic element that resembles manganese chemically and is used in some alloys.
12. A small tent used as a dressing room beside the sea or a swimming pool.
13. Having a long narrow cut.
14. French filmmaker (1908-1982).
19. Celebes megapode that lays eggs in holes in sandy beaches.
21. Port city on southern Honshu on Osaka Bay.
25. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
27. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
28. United States labor organizer who ran for President as a socialist (1855-1926).
30. Growth of hair or wool or fur covering the body of an animal.
31. Permeate or impregnate.
32. An independent group of closely related Chadic languages spoken in the area between the Biu-Mandara and East Chadic languages.
34. Small striped semiterrestrial eastern American squirrel with cheek pouches.
35. Extend in one or more directions.
37. Language of the people of Cebu in the Philippines.
38. Light informal conversation for social occasions.
42. An association of countries in the western hemisphere.
43. Something with a round shape like a flat circular plate.
44. Scottish chemist noted for his research into the structure of nucleic acids (born in 1907).
46. (Sumerian and Akkadian) A demon personifying death.
48. Before noon.
49. A Chadic language spoken in northern Nigeria.
50. State of disgrace resulting from detestable behavior.
55. (Hinduism or Buddhism) A sacred word or syllable repeated in prayer or meditation.
56. A hostel for pilgrims in Turkey.
57. Clothing of a distinctive style or for a particular occasion.
60. A high wave (often dangerous) caused by tidal flow (as by colliding tidal currents or in a narrow estuary).
62. Characterized by lightness and insubstantiality.
63. An inactive volcano in Sicily.
64. Amino acid that is formed in the liver and converted into dopamine in the brain.
66. (prefix) Opposite or opposing or neutralizing.
67. King of Saudi Arabia since 1982 (born in 1922).
68. Small buffalo of the Celebes having small straight horns.
70. The sign language used in the United States.
72. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
76. The eleventh month of the civil year.

Friday's Solution

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

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Expect a lot of letters and phone calls from lovers, close friends, or children today, Aries. You might also want to make a few yourself. Some positive and interesting information may have come your way that you'll want to share with those close to you. You could also want to try your hand at writing. You'll want to make sure that you remember whatever it is you learn today, Aries, as it could prove valuable in the future.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Studying some paperwork involving your finances could bring a pleasant surprise. You're better off than you thought, Taurus! Dividends or benefits of some kind might be forthcoming. You could decide to treat yourself, buy some gifts for your family, or perhaps do some work on your home. Do take care to avoid impulse buying, and don't go crazy spending. You don't want your funds to disappear as quickly as they came!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Today some information might come your way that inspires you to come up with some valuable new ideas, Gemini. Your own intuitive faculties are operating at a very high level, and therefore your insights could prove valuable. Make sure you cover every possible contingency. This knowledge could be used to advance your own career and financial interests, so you may want to spend an hour or two writing down your thoughts.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Your intuition, physical and intellectual energy, and insight are at an all-time high today, Cancer. You'll probably want to spend much of the day alone, reflecting on your ideas and deciding how you want to put them to work for you. At some point, you may want to put your thoughts in writing. You could also tune in more strongly than usual to the thoughts and feelings of others.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You could well be bubbling over with physical energy today, Leo. You might want to spend your day visiting with friends. You could pick up some interesting information from them, which you might be able to put to work for you. You could lay plans for finally attaining a long-term goal; perhaps a lucky break made this possible. Expect to spend most of your day talking and planning!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Visitors in your home, perhaps invited by others in your household, could put a crimp in your desire to be alone and hash out your thoughts today, Virgo. Your mind is sharp and ideas should come thick and fast. Don't get so irritated with the situation at home that you sabotage your plans. You might want to go off somewhere by yourself, possibly to simply sequester yourself in your own room.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You're very intuitive by nature, Libra, and today you should be feeling especially so. Don't be surprised if you spontaneously tune in to the ideas and emotions of those around you, or even if you and someone else come up with the same words at the same time. Use your insights to increase your understanding of others. You might also find that they bring artistic inspiration and even advance your worldly ambitions.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This should be one of those days when you feel as if you could conquer the world. You feel strong and determined, Scorpio, and willing to do whatever it takes to get wherever you want to be. A goal could be attained at this time, ambitions realized, or perhaps a lucky break could come your way. This is an excellent day to seek a new job, ask for a raise, or make a favorite project a success.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A business or love partner could bring opportunities for advancement your way today, Sagittarius. You may decide to draft or execute legal papers that could be very important to your future. Travel might somehow be involved. Romance looks promising today. Your confidence and enthusiasm are showing in your face and could make you seem more attractive than usual, both to your partner and strangers. In the evening, plan an intimate celebration!



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

The hard work and good business sense that you've put into your job may finally be paying off, Capricorn. Expect some positive changes to take place at the workplace this week. Today you're likely to be feeling especially energetic and decide to give your house a thorough cleaning. Don't try to do this on your own, however. You need to conserve your energy. Get other members of your household to help!



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Insights that may come welling up from the past could be put to work for you in a positive way, Aquarius. You could use them as inspiration for a creative project of some kind, or you could just make them work for you in your day-to-day dealings with others. You should be feeling especially romantic and sexy today, and you might want to go shopping for clothes made of soft, touchable fabrics. Relations with lovers should be close and passionate.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Your home might need some work today, Pisces. You and other members of your household could decide to join forces and get everything done. This might simply involve a thorough cleaning, or it could mean major repairs of some sort, perhaps plumbing or electrical. If the latter, it isn't a good idea to try to do this yourself. There could be factors involved that are more complicated than they seem. Don't be afraid to call in a professional.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Movies: Musicals

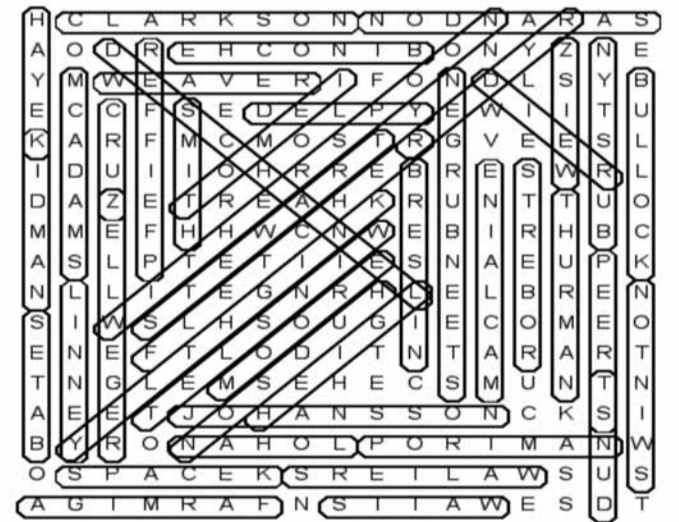
Find and circle all of the Movie Musicals that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the title of an additional Movie Musical.



- | | | | |
|---------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|
| A CHORUS LINE | CHICAGO | HELLO, DOLLY! | PAL JOEY |
| ALL THAT JAZZ | EVITA | HIGH SOCIETY | SHOW BOAT |
| ANNIE | FAME | HOLIDAY INN | SILK STOCKINGS |
| BLUE HAWAII | FANTASIA | JAILHOUSE ROCK | SOUTH PACIFIC |
| BRIGADOON | FUNNY FACE | LA TRAVIATA | STATE FAIR |
| BUGSY MALONE | FUNNY GIRL | MARY POPPINS | SWEET CHARITY |
| CABARET | GIGI | MOULIN ROUGE | SWING TIME |
| CALAMITY JANE | GODSPELL | MY FAIR LADY | THE MUSIC MAN |
| CAMELOT | GREASE | NEWSIES | TOMMY |
| CARMEN | GYPSY | OKLAHOMA! | TOP HAT |
| CAROUSEL | HAIR | OLIVER! | WEST SIDE STORY |

Friday's Solution

Movie Actresses 2



- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| BATES, Kathy | JOHANSSON, Scarlett | SPACEK, Sissy |
| BINOCHÉ, Juliette | KIDMAN, Nicole | STENBURGEN, Mary |
| BRESLIN, Abigail | KNIGHTLEY, Keira | STEWART, Kristen |
| BULLOCK, Sandra | LINNEY, Laura | STREEP, Meryl |
| BURSTYN, Ellen | LOHAN, Lindsay | SWINTON, Tilda |
| CLARKSON, Patricia | MACLAINE, Shirley | THURMAN, Uma |
| CRUZ, Penelope | MCADAMS, Rachel | TOMEI, Marisa |
| DELPY, Julie | MOORE, Julianne | WALTERS, Julie |
| DESCHANEL, Zooey | PFEIFFER, Michelle | WATTS, Naomi |
| DUNST, Kirsten | PORTMAN, Natalie | WEAVER, Sigourney |
| FARMIGA, Vera | REID, Tara | WEISZ, Rachel |
| FLETCHER, Louise | ROBERTS, Julia | WINSLET, Kate |
| HAYEK, Salma | RYDER, Winona | WITHERSPOON, Reese |
| HEIGL, Katherine | SARANDON, Susan | ZELLWEGER, Renee |
| HUDSON, Kate | SMITH, Maggie | |

The hidden movie title is: ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

Daily SuDoku

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

hard

Friday's Solution

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

very hard

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2020



A Kuwaiti man holds a heart-shaped balloon outside a shop in Kuwait City on February 13, 2020 ahead of Valentine's day. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Women look at art on display at the Frieze Los Angeles 2020 art fair in Los Angeles, California. — AFP photos



A piece by US artist Will Boone titled "the Three Fates" is displayed.



Iranian visual artist Shirin Neshat stands next to an untitled work from her "Women of Allah" series.

Anti-white supremacist silent disco hits Hollywood art fair

An anti-white supremacist silent disco broke out on Hollywood's oldest major studio lot Friday as Frieze Los Angeles, a major art fair, opened its doors to A-listers and collectors. Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, created the dance work "F**k White Supremacy, Let's Get Free" in response to the politics of US President Donald Trump. "So much of the last four years under this administration there has been a lot of anger, fear, helplessness," she told AFP. "And whenever I feel that way in my personal life, I usually go and dance."

The piece sees visitors don headphones and join a choreographed line dance. Her project is part of Frieze's second show in Los Angeles—a city which has historically struggled to maintain an international art fair, but is increasingly drawing wealthy collectors including local A-listers. Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lopez and Natalie Portman were among visitors to a Thursday preview, where Kendall Jenner purchased an abstract light installation by California artist James Turrell. "Obviously being in LA means there is a wealth of celebrities and people in the movie industry, who are based here in the city, and many of them do actually collect art," said Victoria Siddall, Frieze's global director. New York remains the art market's global capital but Los Angeles represents

a significant niche, she added. "The West Coast is a very long way from the East Coast and they are very different places with different cultures, different artistic communities," said Siddall.

Outside the physical confines of Frieze's tent, where paintings have traded hands for millions of dollars, artists like Cullors have been invited to showcase projects on Paramount Studios' famous backlot replica of New York streets. Several pieces draw on the movies for inspiration. One replica Manhattan brownstone houses an exhibition dedicated to the representation—or lack-of—Latino filmmakers in the movies.

Another invites visitors to play a bizarre game of chess inside an isometric grid made of wool from endangered sheep—all apparently inspired by an episode of "Star Trek" that was filmed close by. One week after the Oscars drew fire for its lack of diversity, Cullors says her message is as appropriate for the movie industry as the art world. Hollywood "has been white for far too long," she told AFP. "Los Angeles is one of the places that's doing the best work at having a more multi-racial, more connected art world," Cullors added. "But it's still very white, it's still very secluded, it's still very elitist." — AFP



US artist Channing Hansen (left) sits with his Star Trek-inspired work on display.

Couple find Banksy Valentine's love bomb on side of family home



A piece of street art showing the stenciled image of a young girl firing a slingshot of flowers and leaves. — AFP

The elusive street artist Banksy has confirmed that he is behind a piece of street art showing a young girl firing a slingshot of flowers at a building in Bristol. A local couple walking in the Barton Hill area of the city were stunned to find the striking piece - since dubbed 'the Valentine's Banksy' - on the side of a building. James Bullock said he saw scaffolding on the wall at about 6.20am on Thursday and was amazed when he returned later with his girlfriend and noticed the artwork had appeared. The piece, in Marsh Lane, features a stenciled image of a girl firing a slingshot of red flowers and leaves.

Banksy confirmed the piece was his by posting two images of it on his official Instagram account and website in the early hours of Valentine's Day. The artwork appeared on a rented home owned by Edwin Simons, who celebrated his 67th birthday on Thursday. His daughter, Kelly Woodruff, 37, found out about it after being tagged in a Facebook post. She told the PA news agency: 'We've been down here all day and it's just been a complete buzz of excitement. There's so many people coming and enjoying it, taking pictures, it's fantastic.'

'There's been a lot of debate if it is a Banksy or not. Most people I've spoken to think it 100% is, and they're naming it the Valentine's Banksy. It's incredible and beautiful. The family are looking to cover up the artwork with glass to preserve it. We hope it's Banksy's work. Come and have a look yourself. Whoever painted, it's worth admiring their creativity. Thank you.' — www.metro.co.uk



Vendors selling heart-shaped balloons wait for customers on Valentine's day at a flower market in Manila on February 14, 2020. —AFP

Love story: Video of US astronaut reuniting with her dog goes viral

Abseence makes the canine tail wag harder. American astronaut Christina Koch received numerous accolades from her record-breaking, 328-day space-flight and then a healthy dose of doggy love upon her return home, according to a video she posted on social media on Thursday.

"Not sure who was more excited. Glad she remembers me after a year," Koch tweeted. The video shows her dog wagging up a storm, peering out the front door with her front paws on the window sill as Koch nears. The dog flips out even more when Koch enters the home, greeting her with some serious face-licking.

The astronaut's capsule landed in Kazakhstan on February 6 after her historic trip to the International Space Station, ending a 328-day mission that set the record for the longest stay in space by a woman. Koch, 41, a North Carolina-born engineer who joined NASA's astronaut corps in 2013, also who led the first all-female space-walk in 2019. — Reuters



Weddings, proposals bloom in Times Square on Valentine's Day



Rosa Torres and Randell Alston were one of two couples selected by the Times Square Alliance to have their wedding ceremony in the center of Times Square on Valentine's Day. — Reuters

The Crossroads of the World became a bit more romantic on Friday as "Love is in the Air in Times Square" was held for a twelfth year on Valentine's Day. At least two weddings were due to be held on the red steps and later, hundreds of married couples would gather to renew their vows. Surprise proposals were expected to be aired on the famed electronic billboards.

A sculpture of mirrors beaming the image of a heart was entitled, "Heart Squared." Wedding planning website The Knot hosted a pop-up floral stand where pedestrians can make their own bouquets. Myisha Rich and Erin Nelson's nuptials kicked off the event. "We met playing Call

of Duty online on PlayStation Network," Rich told reporters. "And he saw me online on Facebook after that, it was like, 'I'm gonna marry you.' And nine years later, here we are."

A very public ceremony is right for some, according to Tim Tompkins, the president of the Times Square Alliance and event organizer. "Ultimately love is about what's going on between two people. For some people, that's a very private thing. And other people want to celebrate and share the love with the world," Tompkins said. — Reuters

'Mr and Ms Valentine': Afghanistan celebrates with roses and fashion

After a busy afternoon walking the catwalk in a luxury hotel in Kabul on Friday, Salma Hussaini was named Afghanistan's first "Ms Valentine". The 20-year-old from Bamiyan province took a final walk down the runway clad in a pink and yellow top and white jeans with silver cuffs, before receiving her sash. "Valentine's Day is known all over the world, but now it finds its place in Afghanistan too. We have celebrated Valentine's Day with today's fashion show, but we are going to have many more fashion shows in the future," she told Reuters.

The competition, organized by a local modeling agency, also named a 23-year-old male model from Helmand province as "Mr Valentine". The show was a sign of how Valentine's Day is now being celebrated by young people in a conservative society where it

serves as a distraction from years of war. In larger cities, displays of red and pink balloons and posters with Valentine's Day wishes spring up in February. Restaurants in Kabul advertise packages with menus and entertainment such as music and comedy shows for couples wanting to celebrate Valentine's Day together.

Murtaza Haidari, manager of online store Kaaj, said he had received dozens of orders for roses and teddy bears this week and was expecting that to rise into the hundreds by the end of Friday. Mainly young people took part, he said, and his online shop served those who did not feel comfortable shopping publicly for Valentine's Day gifts. "It is good to see our people are talking about love, affections and emotions, at least it is better than everyday fighting and war. Most of our customers are youngsters," he told Reuters. "Here there is famous

saying among everyday people: 'the Taliban would not have gone to the frontline if he had a lover at home'."

In the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, 23-year-old Hamidullah said he would celebrate Valentine's Day with Nazanin, his fiancée, though he did not want to ruin the surprise by revealing the details publicly. "I can't say what I will gift to my life partner but there will be a bouquet of red roses, as a sign of my love," he said. Nazanin, 22, was looking forward to the celebration. "Life is already full of tension and fear in Afghanistan. This is at least a small opportunity for lovers to express their inner feelings, to enjoy those feelings and emotions," she said. —AFP



Afghan models parade on the catwalk during the fashion show, as they celebrate Valentine's Day in Kabul. — Reuters photos



Russian soldier rolls out tanks for romantic manoeuvre

ARussian soldier has pulled out all the stops to propose to his girlfriend, with his fellow officers manoeuvring 16 tanks to surround the couple in a heart shape. The high-octane romantic stunt was filmed in a video published by the defense ministry on Friday, Valentine's Day. As snow fell, the T-72B3 tanks rolled into position on the Alabino training ground outside Moscow.

Lieutenant Denis Kazantsev led his long-term partner Alexandra Kopytova into the center as she held her hands over her eyes, the defense ministry's TV channel Zvezda reported. Kazantsev, a platoon commander, went down on

bended knee, holding a bunch of red roses. "We've been together a very long time. We've stood the test of time and distance. Marry me!" he said as his girlfriend nodded silently. He then put a ring on her finger. "I still don't understand what's going on," Kopytova told a television reporter at the scene. "It's very unexpected." The tanks used for the romantic manoeuvre also take part in the annual Victory Parade on Red Square, Zvezda reported. "No one has ever seen such a large-scale proposal," its reporter said. — AFP



Models of the Eiffel tower are displayed in front of the Eiffel Tower illuminated with pink hearts and love messages to mark the Valentine's day in Paris, on February 14, 2020. — AFP



Lena Dunham on the runway for 16Arlington's London Fashion Week show. — Getty Images



British designer Vivienne Westwood at the end of her autumn/winter 2020/21 collection at London Fashion Week. — www.vogue.com photos

US star Lena Dunham's catwalk debut kickstarts London Fashion Week

British style icon Vivienne Westwood unveiled her latest offerings and American actress Lena Dunham made a catwalk debut as London Fashion Week got underway Friday under the shadow of the novel coronavirus epidemic. The five-day showcase in the British capital will feature more than 60 shows, including Burberry and Tommy Hilfiger, but with participation dented by the deadly outbreak spreading around the world. The COVID-19 epidemic-as the World Health Organization has formally named it-has so far claimed around 1,400 lives and infected nearly 64,000 people.

The vast majority have been in China, the source of the outbreak, but as it has spread there have also been nine cases identified in Britain. The British Fashion Council (BFC), which organizes the event, said it expected attendance from Chinese media and buyers "to be significantly reduced" due to the travel restrictions imposed as a result of the outbreak.

Chief Executive Caroline Rush announced a partnership with the Business of Fashion China media platform "to ensure that our two audiences remain incredibly connected". But BFC chairwoman Stephanie Phair tried to downplay the obvious concerns encroaching on one of the global fashion industry's key gatherings. "It is absolutely a topic but the fashion industry has always faced challenges and is a resilient industry," she told AFP.

Sustainability focus

US acting star and "Girls" creator Dunham made her surprise runway debut for London-based brand 16Arlington, sporting wet hair, a gold leaf dress and a leather jacket. "Lena is amazing," Marco Capaldo, its co-founder along with Kikka Cavenati, told AFP. "Apart from being a dear friend, she stands for such positivity and she is a real force for change and we love that." Meanwhile Westwood present-

ed her autumn/winter 2020/21 collection, inspired by British and Italian traditions, at the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park with an overtly political message of support for jailed Wikileaks founder Julian Assange.

"I'm taking the opportunity of London Fashion Week to defend human rights and free speech," she said in a statement calling for protests when the whistleblower's trial over extradition to the United States begins later this month in Britain. Some of the models at her show wore black and white masks to represent a decapitated man's face while a pillory was on display. London's turn in the fashion spotlight opened Friday with the debut show by Yuhan Wang, a London-based designer originally from Weihai in northeast China. She showed long and light floral dresses, dominated by lace with a bohemian, melancholic feel.

Also showing in London this week are queen of punk rock culture Pam Hogg, along with big British names such as Chalayan, JW Anderson and Victoria Beckham. Meanwhile Vienna-based designer Petar Petrov will be among the newcomers showcasing at Fashion East, London's pioneering non-profit initiative championing emerging talent. After largely deserting New York Fashion Week in recent years, Tommy Hilfiger returns to London to unveil his fourth "TommyxLewis" collection, which has a strong focus on sustainability.

'Creative disruptions'

With climate change concerns paramount, an increasing number of designers are choosing to use renewable materials and support local crafts. That trend is set to feature in the collections of Mulberry, Phoebe English, and Johnstons of Elgin-all with a strong production presence in England. Under pressure from environmental activists, London organizers are trying to improve the image of the event and promote good practices. They include a "switch to blue" campaign to bring the industry together "to lead in ambitious environmental action", as well as a collaboration with designer Richard Malone for a reusable canvas bag.

On Tuesday, young designer Rosh Mahtani, founder of the jewelry brand Alighieri, will receive the Queen Elizabeth II Award for British Design, for her "ethical approach and commitment to local manufacturing". However, activist group Extinction Rebellion has called for next season's event in September to be scrapped, denouncing the fashion indus-



Models present creation for British designer Vivienne Westwood at London Fashion Week.

Lifestyle | Fashion

Billie Eilish drops James Bond track

Teenage pop iconoclast Billie Eilish dropped her James Bond theme tune on Friday, racking up 2.2 million views in just six hours as the teenage prodigy continues her stunning rise. Sharing the same name as the upcoming movie "No Time To Die", the ballad features the grungy melancholic feel that has propelled Eilish to star status and caps a remarkable few weeks for the teenager. Last month Eilish was the breakout star at the Grammys, sweeping five awards including the "big four" prizes: Album of the Year, Song of the Year, Record of the Year and Best New Artist.

The Los Angeles-born singer, who only turned 18 in December, is the youngest artist to record a Bond track.

The song was written with her primary creative collaborator-and brother-Finneas O'Connell. Her Facebook page said Eilish would perform the world premiere of the new track at next Tuesday's Brit Awards in London alongside O'Connell, movie score maestro Hans Zimmer and former Smiths legend Johnny Marr. The 25th installment of the British spy saga, due out in April, sees Bond drawn out of retirement in Jamaica by his old friend and CIA agent Felix Leiter.

Rami Malek, who won a best actor Oscar for his depiction of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury in "Bohemian Rhapsody", plays the villain. Craig, 51, who had to undergo minor ankle surgery after an injury on set, is expected bow out after

eight years as agent 007. Trailers feature the Bond staples that have made the franchise so successful over the decades: car chases, gun fire, gadgets and femmes fatales. But Eilish's track will guarantee interest from a younger demographic.

The biggest globally renowned musician to emerge from Generation Z, the candid Eilish draws young fans with a personal social media presence and internet-speak fluency. Her signature style features oversized sweatshirts and baggy pants, often paired with sunglasses and the garish extra-long nail extensions more often associated with rapper Cardi B. At just 13, she unveiled her debut bedroom-produced single "Ocean Eyes" on SoundCloud, the do-it-yourself streaming platform that has

also brought a generation of young rappers to fame. Interscope signed her at age 14 — making the Californian a rare internet-age pop star to win big online and then see a label invest time and money in cultivating her talent over the long term. Last year she dropped a number one album entitled "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?", led the hot songs chart with her single "Bad Guy" and played a set on a prime stage at the Coachella music festival. — AFP

US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish attends the 2020 Vanity Fair Oscar Party following the 92nd Oscars at The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills. — AFP



Justin Bieber tiptoes out of love cocoon with new album 'Changes'

Reclusive pop phenom Justin Bieber took baby steps back into public life Friday with the release of "Changes," a mellow, lovelorn album that is his first since 2015. The R&B-tinged offering is less a defiant comeback than a tentative toe-dip back into the public life the 25-year-old has largely shunned since cutting short his last tour in 2017, weighed down by the pressures of fame.



Bieber-whose run-ins with the law, drug abuse and other celeb antics have sent his reputation into free-fall-returns in introspective mood, opening up about his depression, newfound joy in marriage and battle with Lyme disease. Over 17 bite-size, eminently streamable tracks, "Changes" announces itself as an auditory comfort blanket that offers love as a refuge in the all-consuming crucible of superstardom. Stuffed with schmoozy valentines to his wife Hailey Baldwin Bieber, the album's

through-line is tenderly-articulated treatise on the Canadian singer's desire to evolve.

"Sometimes I'll go to sleep early / Sometimes I can't close my eyes / Sometimes I smile like it's all good / Even though there's pain underneath it," he breathes softly on the title track. The vocals, at times overwhelmed by heavy deployment of auto-tune, mark a departure from the bubblegum, EDM-laced pop that fans will remember from Bieber's teenage years.

He enlisted a cohort of of-the-moment stars to collaborate on "Changes," which features cameos from rappers Post Malone, Quavo and Travis Scott, and singer Kehlani. Discovered by talent scouts as a young teenager after posting videos on YouTube, Bieber became an overnight sensation who would eventually wobble-and then collapse-under the weight of his colossal celebrity.

In tandem with his work on "Changes," Bieber has been releasing his 10-episode "Seasons" YouTube docuseries that offers a glimpse into his musical process, his desire to shun tabloid scrutiny, and reflections on bad boy shenanigans that have included accidentally striking a photographer with his car and throwing eggs at a neighbor's house. Recounting stories of substance abuse, the singer reveals how close he came to gravely endangering his health. "Bro, I was like dying. My security and stuff were coming into the room at night to check my pulse," he says. "Like, people don't know how serious it got. Like it was legit crazy scary." — AFP

Music nerds' High Fidelity gets series makeover

"High Fidelity," the series, is out-a quarter of a century after the book and 20 years after the film, transporting author Nick Hornby's vinyl enthusiasts into the modern realm of Spotify. Between the book and the series-released Friday in the US on the online platform Hulu-the music world central to "High Fidelity" has undergone a revolution. Still, the London record shop at the heart of Hornby's book seems to fit comfortably in 2020 Brooklyn, even if the CDs so popular at the time have gone the way of the dodo.

Screenwriters Sarah Kucserka and Veronica West, and Hornby himself dragged the story of a white man in his 30s into contemporary society, replacing him with a bisexual woman. Zoe Kravitz takes on the role of record shop owner Rob, a gender-swapped version of the character who first appeared in Hornby's novel and was later played by John Cusack in the 2000 movie. While in 1995 the phenomenon of the culture "nerd" was emerging, but remained at the margins, in 2020, it is a dominant force and present from "Star Wars" to "Game of Thrones." — AFP



In this file photo Zoe Kravitz attends Hulu's 'High Fidelity' New York premiere at Metrograph in New York City. — AFP

UK rapper Stormzy to reschedule Asia tour over virus

British grime star Stormzy said on Thursday he will reschedule the Asia leg of his current world tour due to the deadly new coronavirus epidemic. The rapper, real name Michael Omari, told his social media followers he had "regrettably" decided to postpone his shows on the continent starting next month due to the outbreak. The 26-year-old had been set to perform in Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, China, South Korea and Indonesia in March and April, as part of his "Heavy is the Head" tour.

"I was seriously looking forward to bringing the #HITH world tour to Asia and playing some epic sold out shows," Stormzy wrote on Instagram. "But due to the ongoing health and travel concerns surrounding the Coronavirus, I'm regrettably having to reschedule this leg. Information regarding the rescheduled dates will follow in due course... I promise I'll be back," he added. Concern is growing that the COVID-19 epidemic, as the World Health Organization has formally named it, is worsening. China, the source of the outbreak, said Thursday the official death toll had spiked dramatically. The virus has so far claimed 1,367 lives and infected nearly 60,000 people, the vast majority in China, as it has spread around the globe. — AFP

Weinstein prosecutors urge jurors to convict 'predator'

Harvey Weinstein was a "predator" who used his status as a powerful Hollywood producer to take advantage of the women he attacked, prosecutors said Friday as his sex crimes trial drew to a close. The disgraced movie mogul, 67, faces life in prison if convicted of predatory sexual assault charges in the high-profile trial that marks a watershed moment in the #MeToo global reckoning against men abusing positions of power.

Weinstein believed he was "the master of his universe, and the witnesses here were really ants who he could step on without consequences," said assistant district attorney Joan Illuzzi-Orbon in the final day of closing arguments. "He had a surefire insurance policy: the witnesses were standing in line to get into his universe," she added. Weinstein, the first man accused of abuse in the #MeToo movement to face a criminal trial, has been accused of sexual misconduct by more

than 80 women. He denies the allegations against him.

Six women took the stand to say the ex-Miramax Films boss had sexually assaulted them, but the jury is considering charges related to just two: 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 July 2006. Illuzzi-Orbon argued that the six women who testified had "no motive to lie." "They sacrificed their dignity and privacy and peace for the prospect of having that voice" heard, she said.

On Thursday, defense attorney Donna Rotunno argued the women had used sex with Weinstein to advance their careers, saying they only decided they had been assaulted after Weinstein became a global pariah when allegations against him ignited #MeToo in October 2017.

Viewed 'differently'

The trial has raised complicated issues surrounding consent and abuse of power for the jury of seven men and five women. Under cross-examination, both Mann and Haley acknowledged at least one consensual sexual encounter with Weinstein after the alleged assaults. "By going to Harvey Weinstein's home, did she deserve what she got? Was it her decision?" asked Illuzzi-Orbon, referring to Haley's accusation that Weinstein assaulted her in his house.

"If you go on a plane, should you expect to be hijacked?" she said in comparison. "But we view the victims of sex crimes so differently than the crimes that are committed against people on a regular basis." Testimony during the trial from Mann, a former aspiring actress, was often-confused and she recalled having a relationship with Weinstein for several years after he allegedly raped her in 2013. The defense has presented emails that

appear to show Mann on friendly terms with Weinstein. "The truth leaves a paper trail," said Rotunno in her closing arguments on Thursday.

But Illuzzi-Orbon argued that Mann has shown her moral character, even if she made a "bad decision" in the past. Weinstein faces five counts, including predatory sexual assault, rape and engaging in a criminal sexual act. Jurors will begin deliberating Weinstein's fate on Tuesday and must reach unanimous verdicts on each count. If they are unable, the judge may be forced to declare a mistrial. A split verdict is possible, where Weinstein is convicted of some charges and cleared of others. Weinstein faces a separate sex crimes investigation in Los Angeles and is the subject of several civil complaints. — AFP

French Oscars academy promises reforms after Polanski row

France's Cesar Academy, which awards its version of the Oscars, was in crisis Friday after its entire board resigned, overwhelmed by a series of rows that have infuriated both women's activists and industry insiders. The mass resignation came two weeks ahead of the their gala awards ceremony and just days after more than 200 leading film actors, producers and directors demanded "profound reform" of the industry. "To honor those men and women who made cinema happen in 2019, to find calm and ensure that the festival of film remains just that, a festival, the board... has unanimously decided to resign," the academy said in a statement.

"This collective decision will allow complete renewal of the board," it added. The move, which has been welcomed by feminist groups, follows weeks of controversy over the academy's attitude to women and its lack of transparency. In mid-January there was anger after the academy refused to let two young actresses invite their mentors, film-makers Virginie Despentes and Claire Denis, to a dinner organized to honor the up-and-coming actors. Despentes and Denis are outspoken feminists.

The academy came under fire again at the end of January after Roman Polanski's film "An Officer and a Spy" topped the list of nominations for this year's Cesar awards, due to be handed out on February 28. Polanski is already persona non grata in Hollywood over the 1978 statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl. More recently he has denied new rape allegations from photographer Valentine Monnier, who says he raped her at his Swiss chalet in 1975.

Growing pressure

France's equality minister, women's groups and some film critics condemned the inclusion of Polanski's film on the Cesars' shortlist. But president of the academy Alain Terzian said it could not be expected to take "moral positions" when evaluating films. The open letter from leading film industry figures, published late Monday in the French daily Le Monde, called for reform of the academy's statutes, "which have not changed for a very long time".

It protested that its 4,700 members had no say on how the academy, or even its awards ceremony, was run. It attacked its lack of transparency and the under-representation of women. Signatories included many of French cinema's brightest and best: actors Mathieu Almaric and Elodie Bouchez; directors Bertrand Tavernier and Jacques Audiard; and producer Michel Hazanavicius, who picked up the 2011 Best Picture Oscar for "The Artist".

In response, Terzian announced reforms were on the way, including moves to remedy the under-representation of women. In the end however, the growing pressure proved too much. Thursday night's statement announcing the unanimous decision of the board to resign said this would allow for a complete overhaul of the academy at a general assembly to be held after the February 28 awards ceremony.

"When we mobilize, things happen!" French feminist groups had already demonstrated outside cinemas showing Polanski's film. When it topped the list of nominations, they called for those with votes at the academy to snub the film. And in an open letter to the press on Tuesday, they called for protests outside the award ceremony itself, in Paris's Salle Pleyel auditorium. On Thursday night, they were celebrating news of the board's resignation. "When we mobilize, things happen!", feminist collective Nous Toutes (All Of Us) wrote on Twitter.

Another group, Osez Le Feminisme (Dare Feminism), said: "Imagine what's next. A new voting panel without male self-confidence, opacity and sexism. Will we finally stop applauding rapists and paedophiles on the run?" But feminist groups are still calling for the protests outside the Cesars ceremony to be maintained. — AFP



Roman Polanski

The Cesar awards: Key facts about the 'French Oscars'

The Cesar film awards, France's version of the Oscars, have been thrown into turmoil after the entire academy board resigned amid calls for reform and a row over the long-running Roman Polanski scandal. Here are some key facts about the annual highlight of the French movie industry and one of the most high-profile national film awards around the world.

Inspired by the Oscars

The US Oscars were the inspiration behind the creation of the Cesar awards in 1975, the idea of French producer Georges Cravenne to acknowledge those working in France's film industry. It takes its name from the French sculptor Cesar Baldaccini, a friend of Cravenne and the designer of the Cesar trophy. The first award ceremony took place at the now-shuttered Theatre de l'Empire in Paris on April 3, 1976, with some 1,700 people attending the three-hour event broadcast live on French television.

More recently the glitzy ceremony has been held at the central Paris Chatelet theatre, attracting the most glamorous figures from French cinema. Winners receive a hefty bronze statue weighing 3.7 kilograms (8.1 pounds) of compressed, layered shapes-quite a contrast to the sleek human figure of its American inspiration.

'Opaqueness', 'dysfunction'

Over the years the Cesar awards have been dogged by criticism of elitism, often snubbing films that have been popular among French audiences in favor of more supposedly high-brow offerings. In 2009 director and comedian Dany Boon threatened to boycott the ceremony after his film "Welcome to the Sticks"-the most successful French film of all time-received just one nomination. Responding to the pressure nearly a decade later, the Cesar academy created a separate category for the highest grossing film of the year.

But the Cesar has been further weakened by its embroilment with the affair involving filmmaker Polanski, a fugitive from the US since he was convicted for the statutory rape of a 13-year-old in 1978. In 2017 Polanski was forced to decline the academy's offer to lead the jury, following outrage from women's groups and government officials.

Two years later, with the release of his latest film "An Officer and a Spy", feminist groups protested when it topped with 12 picks the list of nominations for the 2020 Cesar ceremony to be held on February 28. The shortlisting of Polanski's film was condemned by France's equality minister, women's groups and film critics, but the academy said it could not be expected to take "moral positions" when awarding films.

And in a broader swipe in open letter published on February 11, more than 200 actors, producers, directors and movie personalities denounced the "dysfunction" at the academy, the "opaqueness" in its accounts and the lack of change to its founding statutes. Three days later the entire board of the Cesar academy resigned.

Honoring foreign stars

In 2015 US actress and "Twilight" star Kristen Stewart became the first American actress ever to win a Cesar, for her supporting role opposite Juliette Binoche in "Clouds of Sils Maria". This was the same year US film star Sean Penn received an honorary Cesar, the only category along with Best Foreign Film that awards international talent. George Clooney, Michael Douglas, Kevin Costner and Scarlett Johansson have all been previous recipients of the honorary Cesar. — AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, February 16, 2020

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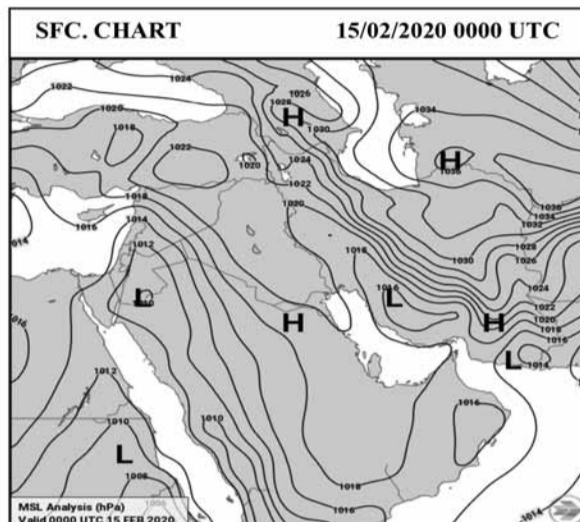
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 06 - 28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Cold and Partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings
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STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	22 °C	12 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	25 °C	07 °C
ABDALY	25 °C	06 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	26 °C	10 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	20 °C	09 °C
SALMIYAH	20 °C	14 °C
AHMADI	20 °C	08 °C
NUWAISIB	24 °C	09 °C
WAFRA	26 °C	06 °C
SALMY	27 °C	06 °C



4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	02/16	Warm and Partly cloudy	27 °C	08 °C	SE	12 - 40 km/h
Monday	02/17	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	27 °C	12 °C	SE	20 - 45 km/h
Tuesday	02/18	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	25 °C	15 °C	SE	20 - 45 km/h
Wednesday	02/19	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	29 °C	15 °C	VRB-SE	10 - 45 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:07
Sunrise	06:27
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:13
Sunset	17:37
Isha	18:55

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	24 °C
MIN. Temp.	04 °C
MAX. RH	72 %
MIN. RH	14 %
MAX. Wind	S 25 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Johan Basha Siwkath Ali holder of Indian Passport No: J6454129 having permanent address Manikkam Nagar, Mangalampettai Post, Mangalampet (tp) Mangalam (sa) Cuddalore Tamil Nadu - 606104 residing in Kuwait at present and hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under John Basha and would like to delete my surname. **(C 5494) 16-2-2020**

I Nilesch Ashok Neve have changed my minor son's name from Pritesh to (as follows) Surname - Neve, Given name - Pritesh Nilesch, herein after all his documents will be known as above. His Passport No:

50930833. (C 5636) 14-2-2020

I, Mufaddal Taherbhai Kalol Aka Kalolwala holder of Indian Passport No. J-4559330 with Civil ID No: 288031905238, have change my name to Mufaddal Taherbhai Kalolwala having permanent address at Morning Star fatemi mohalla voharwad Godhra 389001 Panchmahal Gujarat India. **(C 5491)**

I Syed Reyaz S/o Syedesa holder of Indian Passport No. M8397780 issued at Kuwait on 14/10/2015 & Civil ID No. 269050504727 has changed my name from Syed Reyaz to Syed Riyaz herein after in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Syed Riyaz. **(C 5492)**

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
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Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Sunday 16/2/2020				Departure Flights on Sunday 16/2/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	JZR	215	Jeddah	00:05
FEG	241	Alexandria	00:30	QTR	1093	Doha	00:25
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
NIA	561	Asyut	00:45	BBC	044	Dhaka	00:45
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	FEG	342	Sohag	01:30
KAC	504	Beirut	00:55	NIA	364	Alexandria	01:40
KAC	102	London	00:55	JZR	119	Dubai	01:55
JZR	002	LGW	01:25	JZR	111	Doha	01:55
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
ETH	3424	Addis Ababa/Bahrain	01:30	KAC	363	Colombo	02:00
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	677	Dubai	02:10
PGT	840	Istanbul	01:50	THY	773	Istanbul	02:20
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	KAC	417	Manila	02:30
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	PGT	841	Istanbul	02:50
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	ETH	3425	Addis Ababa	02:55
RBG	551	Alexandria	02:25	IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	RBG	552	Alexandria	03:05
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	621	Doha	03:50
RJA	648	Amman	03:05	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	KAC	103	London	05:00
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	JZR	101	Bahrain	05:50
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	THY	771	Istanbul	06:25
KAC	382	Delhi	05:00	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	JZR	113	Doha	06:40
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	JZR	001D	LGW	06:45
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	RJA	649	Amman	06:55
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	UAE	874	Dubai	07:15
QTR	8511	Doha	05:45	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	QTR	8512	Doha	07:45
UAE	873	Dubai	05:50	KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:55	IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	KAC	165	Rome	08:15
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	KAC	161	Geneva	08:20
JZR	120	Dubai	06:50	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	545	Cairo	08:50
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	BAW	156	London	09:00
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
BAW	157	London	07:10	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15	KAC	163	MXP	09:00
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	KAC	691	Muscat	09:20
KAC	622	Doha	08:00	QTR	1085	Doha	09:30
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
JZR	102	Bahrain	08:55	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	KAC	101	London	09:45
KAC	334	Trivandrum	09:00	KAC	561	Amman	09:45
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	JZR	151	Mashhad	09:55
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	KAC	791	Madinah	10:00
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	117	New York	10:00
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
JZR	114	Doha	10:20	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
MSR	610	Cairo	12:00	QTR	1071	Tbilisi	10:45
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	JZR	305	Istanbul	11:10
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25

Iran to vote in general election that many see as a 'lost cause'

TEHRAN: Iranians vote this week in a crucial parliamentary election that is widely expected to herald the return of conservatives and heap pressure on beleaguered President Hassan Rouhani. Friday's vote comes after months of steeply escalating tensions between Iran and its decades-old arch enemy the United States. The Guardian Council, the body that rigorously vets candidates, disqualified more than half of the 14,444 who sought to stand - including dozens of mostly moderate and reformist incumbents.

A week of campaigning for seats in the Majles kicked off Thursday with little fanfare. Faced with the stark choice of voting for the conservatives and whether or not to vote at all, those who backed Rouhani in the past see this election as a lost cause and are expected to stay away in droves. "The majority of the current parliament is composed of reformists, and people believe that they haven't done anything serious" since being elected in 2016, said independent journalist Farshad Ghorbanpour.

"The Iranian people have come to the conclusion that their choice has no impact," he told AFP. The purge of candidates was "unprecedented", said Ghorbanpour. "Even some conservatives who were likely to speak independently and rationally in parliament have been disqualified."

Sanctions and turmoil

Iranians are feeling the strain after months of turmoil. In November, nationwide demonstrations over petrol price hikes turned violent before being crushed in a deadly crackdown. Bread and butter issues have put Rouhani's alliance at risk of losing in a landslide. A salesman in Tehran's Grand Bazaar summed up the mood, saying he would abstain as voting seemed "useless". Asked what might convince him to change his mind, Mostafa Hamidi, 37, said it would be if those in power lived up to "at least one of their promises. Just one, not 1,000."

Bolt of buffalo? Indian jockey's record wins praise

NEW DELHI: Indian sports authorities announced yesterday they will hold trials for a buffalo jockey whose record-setting performance in a traditional footrace has seen him compared to Usain Bolt.

On a track of muddy slush, Srinivas Gowda ran 142.50 metres in 13.62 seconds on January 31, setting a record in the traditional buffalo race known as Kambala held every year in southern Karnataka state.

The 28-year-old farmer has since become a sensation after people praised him on social media and compared him to retired Jamaican sprint superstar Bolt, who is the world's fastest man for his record run of 100 meters in 9.58 seconds.

Comparing Gowda's performance with the Jamaican star's record, commenters have assumed that the farmer would have run 100 metres in 9.55

seconds, which is 0.03 seconds faster than the Olympian's feat.

India's junior sports minister Kiren Rijiju said that authorities have called Gowda to the capital New Delhi for trials under the country's best coaches.

"Officials from Sports Authority of India (SAI) have contacted him. His rail ticket is done and he will reach SAI centre on Monday. I will ensure top national coaches to conduct his trials properly," Rijiju wrote on Twitter.

Many users have however cast doubts on his performance, considering the high standards of the Olympics and the help received from the buffaloes, who during the races are lashed together with ropes and outfitted with a plough while a participant matches their speed and controls them.

Gowda is a regular participant in the popular buffalo races held in the farming belts of the southern coastal state during the winter. "I did not think I would run this fast. The buffaloes were quick and I followed them," Gowda told reporters.

The sport was briefly banned following petitions by animal rights groups who decried it as cruel, but races resumed in 2017 under government orders. — AFP

Parliament 'sidelined'

At stake in the Feb 21 election are 290 seats. The disqualifications can only benefit Rouhani's conservative rivals whose solid support base always shows up at elections and has been spurred by the tense standoff with the United States. Rouhani has repeatedly railed against the disqualifications, saying they threaten Iran's democracy. "The greatest danger for democracy and national sovereignty is the day when elections become

another voter expressed despair over the country's mismanagement. "The truth is that whenever we have voted, things never improved but got worse," said Morteza Jaber, who works in a motorbike repair shop in Tehran's run-down Molavi neighborhood. "Our country is very powerful in all fields, but there are people in charge who cannot use this power properly," the 38-year-old told AFP.

Rouhani, a moderate conservative, came to power promising greater social freedoms and the benefits of engagement with the West. But his signature achievement - a 2015 nuclear deal that was meant to give Iran relief from sanctions - is now in tatters. In 2018 US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the agreement that froze Iran's nuclear program and began reimposing crippling sanctions.

Tehran and Washington have been sworn enemies since 1979. But they have never come as close to a direct confrontation as in the past seven months, when it has happened twice, most recently after the US killed prominent Iranian general Qasem Soleimani on Jan 3. The "martyrdom" of the hugely popular general provoked an outpouring of grief in Iran. Millions from all walks of life turned out to mourn his death.

But that unity suffered a blow after Iran admitted it "accidentally" shot down a Ukrainian airliner, killing all 176 people aboard. The disaster, which claimed the lives of many students studying abroad, sparked more protests that turned political.

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meant," Cavusoglu said, referring to Ankara's purchase of the Russian air defense system criticized by Washington.

The US has threatened to hit Turkey with sanctions over the S-400 deal. The Turkish presidency also said Erdogan and Trump discussed the situation in war-torn Libya and "underlined the importance of restoring peace and stability." And the leaders agreed to restart negotiations to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion per year, it added. — AFP

But key allies including Britain and France have resisted the pressure so far, agreeing to impose restrictions without going so far as to ban the company. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged Europeans to make "an independent and wise choice" while providing "a fair business environment for all companies".

In a nod to concerns about European dependence on Russian gas, Pompeo announced at the Munich forum that the US would finance energy projects in eastern EU countries. "The United States - through our International Development Finance Corporation, and with the support of the US Congress - intends to provide up to \$1 billion in financing to the Central and Eastern European countries of the Three Seas Initiative," Pompeo told the conference. "Our aim is to galvanize private sector investment in their energy sectors."

The initiative is a club of 12 eastern and central EU countries that have grown increasingly concerned about the Russian giant in their backyard since Moscow's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. At a Three Seas meeting in 2017, Trump offered to supply the grouping with US liquefied natural gas so they would never be "hostage" to a single Russian supplier. Pompeo's announcement comes amid fierce US opposition to Russia's controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline, set to double the country's gas shipments to Germany. Washington believes the pipeline will give Russia too much influence over security and economic issues in western Europe.

On Friday, Steinmeier had taken an indirect swipe at Trump in accusing Washington, China and Russia of stoking global mistrust and insecurity with a "great powers" competition that could threaten a new nuclear arms race. He deplored the three big powers' approach to global affairs and, without naming Trump, took issue with his vow to "make America great again". "Great again" - even at the expense of neighbors and partners," quipped Steinmeier, a former Social Democrat foreign minister whose comments on foreign policy carry authority.

As foreign minister in 2014, he was central to the so-called "Munich consensus" when German leaders said Berlin was ready to assume more responsibility in global affairs. Steinmeier pressed that point again on Friday, but not before bemoaning the foreign policy approaches of Russia, China and the United States. "Russia...has made military force and the violent shifting of borders on the European continent the means of politics once again," he said in the text of a speech for delivery at the opening of the conference. — Agencies



TEHRAN: A man standing outside a mosque in the Iranian capital on Friday hands out electoral leaflets showing candidates campaigning in the upcoming legislative election due to take place on Feb 21. — AFP

a formality," he said last month.

In the absence of real opponents, a grand coalition of "principalists" - or conservatives - looks set to win in a landslide. The Majles drafts legislation, ratifies international treaties and approves the budget. But while it has been "increasingly sidelined in the decision-making process", a swing to hardliners may make Rouhani's life difficult, said Ellie Geranmayeh, analyst at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

The vote is also seen as an opportunity to gauge the electorate. "The outcome should give a decent sense of popular opinion - important in a country where quality public opinion polling is rare," said Henry Rome, Iran

analyst at Eurasia Group. "The election will also provide an early indicator of the outlook for the presidential election in mid-2021."

But Rouhani's coalition was unlikely to survive, he said. "A rightwing parliament will torment Rouhani during his final year in office... complicating the government's ability to respond to sanctions pressures," said Rome. "In contrast, if a rightwing president wins in 2021, the parliament can enable that leader to move quickly on new initiatives." Polling stations are to open at 8:00 am (0430 GMT) on Friday and close 10 hours later. Results are expected in the days after the election. — AFP



AIKALA, India: In this photo taken on Jan 31, 2020, Srinivas Gowda runs alongside his buffaloes during 'Kambala', the traditional buffalo racing event, held in this village in Dakshina Kannada district. — AFP

Erdogan, Trump discuss ways to...

Continued from Page 1

"The situation in Idlib will not affect the S-400 agree-

Qatar says talks to end Gulf row were...

Continued from Page 1

The annual gathering of world leaders, generals and diplomats to discuss security challenges has been dominated by fears over the West's diminishing role in the face of a more assertive China and Russia. In his opening speech a day earlier, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier suggested that the United States rejected "even the idea of an international community" and was acting "at the expense of neighbors and partners".

"Those statements don't reflect reality," Pompeo retorted. "I'm happy to report that the death of the transatlantic alliance is grossly over-exaggerated," he added, paraphrasing a famous Mark Twain quote. He said Washington was playing a key role in keeping Europe safe by reinforcing NATO's eastern flank on the border with Russia, as well as leading a multinational effort to defeat the Islamic State group. "Is this an America that 'rejects the international community'?" he asked. Pompeo stressed the need to work together against threats ranging from Russia's territorial ambitions, China's military build-up in the South China Sea and Iran's "campaigns of terror" through proxy conflicts in the Middle East.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, who also took to the stage in Munich, joined Pompeo in voicing dismay at the gathering's pessimistic tone. "There is a competition out there in so many areas, with so many different actors, but simply lamenting that we have lost our way will not provide us with a way forward," Stoltenberg said. "Europe and North America are indispensable partners."

But France's Macron echoed the German concerns. The US was undergoing "a rethink of its relationship with Europe", Macron said, strengthening his belief that the continent had to take charge of its own destiny. "We need a European strategy that renews us and turn us into a strategic political power," he said.

The US-European divisions were on stark display in the spat over Chinese tech giant Huawei. Washington has pushed hard for countries to bar Huawei from building their next generation 5G mobile networks, claiming its equipment can be used to spy for Beijing. US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said Huawei was the "poster child" for China's "nefarious strategy" to infiltrate and dominate crucial western infrastructure.

Defiant Man City to fight 'flawed'...

Continued from Page 1

participation in UEFA club competitions in the next two seasons (ie. the 2020/21 and 2021/22 seasons)."

European football's governing body said that City "failed to cooperate in the investigation". "The adjudicatory chamber, having considered all the evidence, has found that Manchester City Football Club committed serious breaches of the UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations by overstating its sponsorship revenue in its accounts and in the break-even information submitted to UEFA between 2012 and 2016," European football's governing body said.

City lost a previous appeal to CAS over UEFA's original decision to refer them to its adjudicatory chamber over the alleged FFP violations. "An appeal would not necessarily lift the suspension but the request can be made," UEFA told AFP. The investigation into City was based on leaked emails published last year by German magazine Der Spiegel as part of "Football Leaks".

Guardiola's City outfit currently sit second in the Premier League table, meaning that the fourth Champions League slot available for English teams would

likely go to the fifth-placed club this term. Sheffield United, promoted to the top flight last year, sit in fifth. It is not the first time that Man City have fallen foul of FFP regulations, having been fined £60 million and seeing their Champions League squad reduced in May 2014.

The ban will raise questions about the future of City coach Guardiola and their key players. Guardiola said last month that he could be sacked if he failed to beat Real Madrid in the Champions League last 16. "If we don't beat them, OK, come the chairman or the sport director and say, 'It's not good enough, we want the Champions League. I'm going to sack you'," he told Sky Sports. "I don't know (if this would happen). It has happened many times and could maybe happen."

Qatari-owned Paris Saint-Germain were also fined that year. Seven-time European champions AC Milan were banned from this season's Europa League for FFP breaches. La Liga president Javier Tebas applauded UEFA for their sanctions of Man City, saying: "UEFA is finally taking decisive action. 'Enforcing the rules of financial fair play and punishing financial doping is essential for the future of football... we finally have a good example of action.'"

City face Real Madrid in their first leg at the Bernabeu on Feb 26, with the second leg at the Etihad Stadium on March 17. City are not the only English champions with financial problems - Saracens, the Premiership rugby titleholders and European champions have been relegated to the second-tier next season for salary cap breaches. — AFP

Saudi fighter crashes in Yemen, Houthis...

Continued from Page 1

could not be immediately verified by local aid workers. The escalation follows fierce fighting around the Houthi-held capital Sanaa, with the rebels seen to be advancing on several fronts towards Hazm, the regional capital of Al-Jouf. The province of Al-Jouf has been mostly controlled by the Houthis, but with its capital still in the hands of the Saudi-backed government. The coalition intervened against the Houthis in 2015, first with air and naval forces before ground forces were also brought into the fray.

The fighting has killed tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, and sparked what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. If the Houthi claim is confirmed, the rare downing of a coalition warplane signals the rebels' growing military arsenal. "At the start of the conflict the Houthis were a ragtag militia," Fatima Abo Alasrar, a scholar at the Middle East Institute, told AFP. "Today they have massively expanded their arsenal with the help of Iran and its

proxy Hezbollah," Lebanon's powerful Shiite movement.

Yemen's Houthi rebels are in possession of new weapons similar to those produced in Iran, according to a UN report obtained by AFP earlier this month, in potential violation of a UN arms embargo. Some of the new weapons, which the rebels have possessed since 2019, "have technical characteristics similar to arms manufactured in the Islamic Republic of Iran," said the report, compiled by a panel of UN experts tasked with monitoring the embargo. The panel didn't say whether the weapons were delivered to the Houthis directly by the Iranian government, which has repeatedly denied sending them arms.

The coalition, separately, has been widely criticized for the high civilian death toll from its bombing campaign, which has prompted some Western governments to cut arms deliveries to the countries taking part. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have purchased billions of dollars' worth of weapons from the United States, France and Britain. On Wednesday, the coalition said it would put on trial military personnel suspected of being behind deadly air strikes on Yemeni civilians. The cases being investigated include a 2018 air strike on a school bus in the northern region of Dahyan that killed at least 40 children, Saudi-based Arab News said. — AFP

Sports

Kuwait Sea Sports Club and UAE's Shariqa sign MoU



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Sea Sports Club signed a memo of understanding and cooperation with UAE's Shariqa Sea Sports Club on the sidelines of the World Aquabike Championship "the first round," which concluded late last night at the Marina beach, under the patronage of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who was represented by Information Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri.

Shariqa International Sea Sports Club Executive Director Ahmad Al-Housani said he was pleased to attend the competitions of the first round of the world championship, being held in Kuwait for the first time.

He said "we received an invitation from Kuwait Sea Sports Club to attend the Aquabike World

Championship being held with the participation of an elite group of world champions." He said we are proud in being in Kuwait the land of peace and friendship.

STRONG COMPETITION

Member of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Nawaf spoke about the tough competition in the preliminary stages, and Al-Nawaf congratulated all officials at the youth ministry and Public Authority for Sports as well as Kuwait Sea Sports Club for organizing the World Championship for the first time in Kuwait under the patronage of HH the Amir, which gives the championship a strong push and support.

HIGH SPIRITS

Public Relations Director at Kuwait Sea Sports Club

Salman Al-Khulaifan said competition was tough and strong between all riders who represented 35 countries in all categories and lauded the high spirits despite the fierce competition, adding that the first two days saw entertaining shows that were seen by a large crowd, which shows the popularity of this sport in Kuwait which is something promising for it in Kuwait.

PRELIMINARY ROUND

Their preliminary round to qualify for the finals were held over two days, resulting in Spanish rider Nacho Armilas taking first place in the GPI professionals category standing for men. The second place went to French rider Michael Bouret, while Norway's Stien Shiltene won third place.

In the women GPI professionals standing France's Jessica Chavan won first place followed by her compa-

triot Estel Bouret while Poland's Lisa Patalia ended in third place.

In the GPI setting professionals UAE's Rashid Al-Tayer won first place, followed by Marcos Georginesen in second, and Kuwait's Yousuf Al-Abdelrazaq in third position. In the free style category UAE's Rashid Al-Mulla took place, Maryani second and Nounis third.

In the standing Slaloms Norway's Anderson won first place, followed by his compatriot Jetlen in second and Hungary's Cizabo won third.

In the women's standing slaloms Sweden's Ortendal was first followed by France's Bouret in second while Estonia's Yebres in third.

Kuwait's Yousuf Al-Abdelrazaq won first place of the men's setting slaloms followed by UAE's Marcos Georgenstein, and UAE's Ali Al-Linqawi third.



Kuwait's Karate National team to face Spain in finals

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Karate team will face its Spanish counterpart in the team Kata in the final of the Premier League "Karate 1" Championship being currently held in Dubai.

Competition of Kata individuals and Kumite started Friday, where brothers Sayyed Mohammad Al-Mousawi, ranked 21 in the world, and Sayyed Salman Al-Musawi, ranked 56 in the world, while Mohammad Al-Mujadi is ranked 58.

Kuwait's players Abdallah Shaaban, who is ranked 14 in the world ended in seventh place of the individual Kumite in the 60kg category.

On the other hand, Al-Yarmouk team won the second Federation's Championship for the 2019-2020 season, as 185 players representing 12 teams took part. Yarmouk got 17 points, Al-Shabab ended second with 14 points while Kuwait team was third with 11 points.

Chairman of the Board of Karate Federation Mohammad Al-

Jassim handed Al-Yarmouk players the championship cup and congratulated the players, technical and administrative departments for the achievement.

Al-Jassim said the federation's board is keen on developing championships and create the largest possible competition which will be positive at the national team level.



Park In-bee zeroes in on 20th career win in Australia

ADELAIDE: Seven-time major winner Park In-bee stretched her lead at the LPGA Australian Open yesterday to three shots over exciting South Korean teenager Ayeane Cho as the veteran targets yet another victory.

Competing in Australia for the first time since 2012, the 31-year-old is gunning for a 20th career win and her first on the LPGA Tour in almost two years.

She jointly held the overnight lead with Jodi Ewart Shadoff, but the Englishwoman had a horror day at the Royal Adelaide Golf Club, slump-

ing to a four-over-par 77 to be nine off the pace.

In contrast, the stoic Park kept her momentum going with a 68, making four birdies on the front nine and three on the back to take control, including a 20-footer at the last.

It left her three clear of emerging star Cho, who is 12 years younger than her illustrious countrywoman.

American Marina Alex is a shot further back, with French pair Perrine Delacour and Celine Boutier one behind her.

"I don't think my emotions show very much but I get nervous as well. And tomorrow I will play under a lot of pressure, just like other final days in contention," said Park.

"It's going to be a fun day. I love the golf course, the way it is playing. It think it's a good competition we are going to have tomorrow."

Cho, the KLPGA Tour's Rookie of the Year in 2019, is enjoying some sparkling form on her Australia swing.

She led going into the last day of the LPGA Vic Open last weekend before the pressure told and she struggled to a final round 81.

Park said she had been impressed with the progress Cho has made.

"She's a very consistent player, she played well last week, except for the final day. I'm really looking forward to playing with her," she said.

While Park has dropped to 17th in the world, she has proved during her storied career to be incredibly consistent, having clocked exactly 100 top-10 finishes to date, earning in excess of US\$15 million.

A key motivation for returning to Australia to play early-season events is to make the South Korean Olympic team so she can defend her gold medal in Tokyo later this year.

Only the top 15 are automatically eligible for the Games, with a limit of four from each country. As of this week, she is sixth in the Korean pecking order. — AFP

Mcllroy closes in on Kuchar, Woods lags at Riviera

LOS ANGELES: Rory Mcllroy, making his first start as world number one since 2015, pulled within two strokes of 36-hole leader Matt Kuchar Friday as Tiger Woods's hopes of a landmark Genesis Invitational win dwindled.

Northern Ireland star Mcllroy fired six birdies in a four-under par 67 at Riviera Country Club, to share second place on seven-under 135 with Americans Harold Varner and Wyndham Clark, who both signed for 68s. Kuchar, who started the day with a three-shot lead, posted a two-under 69 that put him at nine-under par 133. Woods was nine shots off Kuchar's lead, tied for 45th, after a two-over 73 that included a double-bogey and three-bogeys.

"I made some bad mistakes out there," said Woods, who opened with a birdie at the 10th but soon found himself in trouble. "I had a wedge in my hand at 15 and made double there, and made bogey there."

"Three runaway shots with wedges, something I rarely ever do," added Woods, who was in the fairway with 144 yards to the hole at 15 but found a greenside bunker on the way to a double-bogey.

He clawed back two shots with birdies at the 17th and first, but was in another greenside bunker at the third and couldn't get his seven-footer to save par to drop. Two more bogeys in the next three holes further dimmed his chances of breaking Sam Snead's record of 82 PGA Tour victories this week.

Woods matched the record with a win at the Zozo Championship in Japan in October, and finished tied for ninth in his only other start since at Torrey Pines. The record would be extra sweet this week at Riviera — the course where Woods made his tour debut as a teenager, but where he has come up empty in

12 prior starts.

"I'm going to have to make some birdies this weekend," he said. Mcllroy, playing Riviera for just the fourth time, birdied all three par-fives and while he hit just four of 14 fairways he avoided major trouble.

PLAYING THE ANGLES

"Most of the day I did the things that I needed to do," he said. "I missed a few fairways coming in and it makes it very difficult to control your spin and get any spin onto the ball coming into these greens."

"But I managed it well, played the angles, got a couple of really nice up-and-downs towards the end — a nice two-putt on 18." Kuchar, however, said his lack of accuracy had him on the defensive all day.

"Wasn't driving it nearly as accurate as I did the first day," said Kuchar, who made the first of his two bogeys at the par-five first. After an 18-foot birdie putt at the third he rolled in a 20-footer from the fringe at the fifth, but a bogey at the seventh saw him make the turn even for the day. Back-to-back birdies at 10 and 11 proved enough to give him a two-shot cushion. "Two-under was an awfully good score for the way I drove it today," Kuchar said. "I better find more control."

Nineteen players were within five shots of Kuchar's lead. Australian Adam Scott fired seven birdies in his seven-under 64 to share fifth place on 136 with South Korean Kang Sung and Americans Vaughn Taylor and Russell Henley.

Sung and Taylor posted 67s while Henley carded a 69. Spain's Rafa Cabrera Bello and American Chez Reavie were tied on 137, while world number three Jon Rahm of Spain headed a group of 10 on 138 that also included defending champion JB Holmes, Justin Rose and Dustin Johnson. — AFP

Sports

Giggs, Scholes and instant noodles: Vietnam takes pot-shot at World Cup

Academy complete with manicured pitches and ultra-modern equipment

HANOI: After a career that began in instant noodles, Vietnam's richest man knows all about long shots, and now he's taking another: Trying to get the football-mad country's national team to their first World Cup.

No Southeast Asian team has played on football's biggest stage, but Pham Nhat Vuong — CEO of the Vingroup conglomerate, and Vietnam's first billionaire — has not let that deter him. Vingroup's gleaming, \$35 million academy outside Hanoi has already helped Vietnam become a growing power in Asian football, after they reached the Asian Cup quarter-finals last year.

The communist country's national team were crowned Southeast Asian champions in 2018, and their Under-22s won gold at the Southeast Asian Games last December. The Golden Star Warriors also sit top of their World Cup qualifying group, but they still have work to do if they are to grab one of Asia's four slots — or a fifth available through playoffs — for 2022.

However, they can take heart from the example of World Cup hosts Qatar who, after building a state-of-the-art academy and drafting in foreign expertise, swept to their first Asian Cup title last year.

Manchester United legends Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes have been enlisted as consultants for the Promotion Fund of Vietnamese Football Talents (PVF) academy, which opened its doors in 2017.

The academy is complete with manicured pitches and ultra-modern equipment, including the 360S simulator — a customised room where players receive balls from various angles, and have to hit moving, electronic targets. The facility is a bold venture from Vuong, who started out selling dried noodles in Ukraine before building Vietnam's biggest private conglomerate and amassing an estimated \$7.8 billion fortune.

The PVF academy's technical director, former Japan

coach Philippe Troussier — who also leads Vietnam's U19s — said the results had been positive. "We've started a strong process to develop our football, to develop our players, to educate the boys, to export the players to international level," Troussier told AFP. "We are on the way," he said.

'UNDERDOGS'

The training school is currently home to nearly 200 young players aged nine to 19 who have been recruited from across the country and train up to five hours a day. While Giggs and Scholes add star power and top-level experience, Troussier, 64, has undoubted coaching prowess, after leading Japan to the 2000 Asian Cup title and the 2002 World Cup's last 16.

But despite the big money and big names, the next World Cup may still be a stretch for Vietnam. "I don't think they will qualify for the 2022 World Cup as they have to replace at least one of the Asian powerhouses such as Iran, Japan or South Korea to get one of the few Asian places available," said Steve Darby, the former manager of Vietnam's women's team.

The 2026 World Cup — when the number of teams will jump from 32 to 48 — may be a more realistic target. But even then they would be seen as "underdogs", said Darby.

"Any Southeast Asian nation that qualifies will be seen as a weaker nation and also probably be seeded quite low. It takes time to get to the top," he said. Still, Vietnam's national team have caught the eye with their progress, which has pushed them to an all-time high of 94 in the FIFA world rankings.

The youth teams are also showing promise, bagging their first spot at the U20 World Cup in 2017 and a year later, and reaching the final of the Asian U23 Championship. Fans across the country spill onto the



HUNG YEN, Vietnam: This photograph taken on Jan 13, 2020 shows U-13 football players training at the Promotion Fund of Vietnamese Football Talent (PVF) academy. — AFP

streets in the wake of Vietnam's successes, and celebrations would be frenzied if they manage to qualify for a World Cup.

Defender Tran Hoang Phuc, who comes from a poor family in Ho Chi Minh City, joined PVF in 2012 when he

was 11, dreaming of emulating his idol, Arsenal defender David Luiz. "I will try my best to play for the national team and hopefully to play at the world's biggest tournament, the World Cup," Phuc, who has been called up to Vietnam's U19s, said. — AFP

Chiefs roll on as Highlanders upset Brumbies

TOKYO: Damian McKenzie was in sparkling form as the Waikato Chiefs maintained their unbeaten start to the season with a rout of the Sunwolves, while the Otago Highlanders converted a last-gasp try to stun the ACT Brumbies.

McKenzie, who missed last year's World Cup in Japan because of injury, capped a superb performance with 11 points from a try and three conversions in Tokyo as the Chiefs ran away with a 43-17 victory.

A Folau Fainga'a hat-trick wasn't enough for the Brumbies with Teariki Ben-Nicholas scoring a try after the full-time buzzer and Josh Ioane converting to ensure the Highlanders won 23-22, ending a 10-match win streak at home for the Canberra club.

Elsewhere, the Wellington Hurricanes brought the Coastal Sharks' winning run to a halt. The two sides were locked 17-all at half-time before a Ben Lam double put the momentum firmly with the Canes who won 38-22.

The Chiefs, who rested several top names including regular captain Sam Cane, were caught napping early when flyhalf Garth April wriggled over for the Sunwolves to open the scoring. But with last year's shock loss to the Tokyo outfit still haunting the Chiefs, they quickly came alive with McKenzie releasing Solomon Alaimalo to touch down in the corner.

"If you don't turn up with the right attitude any team can beat you. We found that out the hard way, that (result last year) was a massive driver for us today," Chiefs' stand-in captain Brad Weber said.

Tries by Shaun Stevenson, Weber and McKenzie for the Chiefs before Jaba Bregvadze bowled over on the halftime buzzer for the Sunwolves saw the visitors turn with a 24-12 lead.

Lachlan Boshier raced through to add a fifth try for the Chiefs soon after the restart and after Shogo Nakano pulled one back for the Sunwolves, the New Zealanders hit back with two late scores from Quinn Tupaea and Kaleb Trask. "It was incredibly important," Weber said of the win.

The Dunedin-based Highlanders were desperate for victory after crashing 42-20 to the Sharks in their season opener last weekend, and they delivered for skipper James Lentjes.

"Absolutely proud of the boys. It came down to the wire and we showed composure to get over the line. It's an awesome feeling," he said. "They had won 10 in a row here so to get points, we're bloody happy." The Highlanders exerted early pressure and Ioane put them ahead with a penalty. But it was Fainga'a who crossed for the opening try after a well-organised rolling maul.

A disciplined Highlanders soaked up pressure, but the Brumbies' maul did more damage and Fainga'a bagged his second before the New Zealanders bounced back with Jona Nareki charging down a clearance kick from the restart for their first five-pointer. A late penalty put them 13-12 ahead at the break. Fainga'a struck again with 12 minutes left and Ryan Loneragan's conversion looked enough for victory. But as they attempted to run down the clock, they gave away a penalty and ultimately paid a heavy price with Ben-Nicholas' winning try.

In Wellington, the Sharks produced the first try with an 80-metre move that started with an intercept by skipper Likhayo Am and was finished by Madosh Tambwe. In a flurry of scoring, Wes Goosen crossed for the Canes first, the Sharks responded with a long range try to replacement flyhalf Sanele Nohamba before a Beauden Barrett cross-kick put Ngani Laumape on a 50-metre run to the line. — AFP

South Africa boss asks fans to respect Smith, Warner

CAPE TOWN: South Africa's cricket boss has pleaded with fans to treat Steve Smith and David Warner with respect and not "embarrass" the board with poor behaviour when the Australian batsmen tour the country for the first time since a ball-tampering scandal.

Smith and Warner, who incurred 12-month bans for their parts in the tampering plot during a Cape Town test two years ago, were jeered relentlessly by English crowds during the one-day World Cup and the Ashes series last year.

Cricket South Africa's (CSA) interim chief execu-

tive Jacques Faul said fans who misbehaved would be ejected from venues during the limited overs series, which starts with a Twenty20 match in Johannesburg on Friday.

"I would plead with South African fans to respect our opponents and don't go overboard with these things," Faul told Fairfax media. "It's competitive on the field, and we don't need it. Sport in general doesn't need that behaviour."

"We have a very strict policy in terms of fan behaviour and we will evacuate people but the damage will have been done." Australia's 2018 tour of South Africa was tense on and off the field, and well before the tampering incident at Newlands.

Animosity between opener Warner and South Africa wicketkeeper-batsman Quinton de Kock spilled over into a heated stairwell confrontation during the first test in Durban, with team mates stepping in to separate the players.

Warner and his wife, Candice, were subsequently

targeted by the crowds, and CSA apologised to the Australian team after two of the board's officials were photographed wearing Sonny Bill Williams masks with fans at the ground.

Candice Warner had a tryst with New Zealand rugby international Williams more than 10 years before the incident. "What happened last time (in South Africa), the behaviour was unfortunate," said Faul, who stepped in as CEO in December following Thabang Moroe's suspension for alleged misconduct.

"It's embarrassing when it happens - for the stadium and the national federations. "If there are best practices that we can learn from to prevent it we're happy to look at it." Last month, England all-rounder Ben Stokes was fined by the International Cricket Council after a foul-mouthed row with a fan at the Wanderers ground during the fourth test in Johannesburg.

Stokes said he had been subjected to repeated abuse from the crowd and apologised for his "unprofessional" reaction. — Reuters

England win last-ball thriller, level T20 series

DURBAN: England's Tom Curran took two wickets with the last two balls of the match as they beat South Africa by two runs in an amazing T20 international that produced over 400 runs on Friday as the tourists levelled the series at 1-1 with one game to play.

South Africa needed three off the last two balls but Curran, who had just been smashed for 12 runs in three by Dwaine Pretorius, got him lbw then had Bjorn Fortuin caught off the final ball to cap off a day of almost unrelenting excitement and set up a thrilling decider in Centurion on Sunday.

"The performance and level of intensity was improved," said England captain Eoin Morgan. "The standout for us today was Moeen Ali. To come in and strike the ball like that was such a match-winning innings. Chris Jordan was outstanding. He leads the attack, has a cool, calm head and delivers when it matters. He's a guy you want in your side."

Man of the match Moeen added: "It was nice to go out and middle a few to get going and then I went on instinct to put pressure on the bowlers."

England got off to a great start through Jason Roy (40) and Johnny Bairstow (35) but were then bogged down somewhat before Ben Stokes, who finished on 47 not out, and Moeen took charge as the latter hammered 39 off 11 balls to help reach 204-7.

The highest previous successful T20 international run chase on the ground was 158 but South Africa, roared on in a fantastic atmosphere, were always in the mix after Quinton de Kock smashed eight sixes as they reached 92 without loss in the seventh over.

When he was caught by Stokes off Mark Wood the game seemed to swing England's way and after Chris Jordan took two wickets in two balls it looked all over. But South Africa stuck to their task and a spirited late flurry by Rassie van der Dussen (43 not out) left the hosts, who won the first match by one run, needing 15 off the final over.

Pretorius brought that down to three from the last two balls - the same equation England failed with in the first game - but Curran kept his nerve to trap him lbw with a yorker. Fortuin ambitiously tried to ramp the final ball for four but was caught by Adil Rashid as South Africa finished on 202-7.

Even as England celebrated, the drama was not over as the umpires checked that Rashid had not wandered outside the fielding circle before the batsman played the ball. They eventually ruled it a fair catch and the teams march on to a decider. "It is great cricket," said De Kock. "Both teams are playing really good cricket. They came out and fought right to the end and unfortunately we didn't come across the line. "They bowled really well at the death. We can get better." — Reuters



DURBAN: South Africa's Bjorn Fortuin (R) jumps next to England's Jos Buttler during the second Twenty20 international cricket match between South Africa and England at the Hollywood bets Kingsmead Stadium in Durban. — AFP

India's top four must bat deeper

SYDNEY: Indian's explosive top order needs to bat longer to support their wobbly middle order in the Women's Twenty20 World Cup in Australia, opener Smriti Mandhana said yesterday. Mandhana, teenaged duo of Shafali Verma and Jemima Rodrigues and captain Harmanpreet Kaur headline what Australia coach Matthew Mott described as the most feared batting line-up in the tournament.

Their middle order, however, looked vulnerable in Wednesday's tri-series final against Australia in Melbourne. Chasing 156 for victory, India looked very much on the course before their spectacular

collapse when they lost seven wickets for only 29 runs as the hosts triumphed by 11 runs.

"The middle order could definitely improve," Mandhana said. "There are some things we still have to figure out with our batting and we are trying hard to do that. "The best way to support the middle order is for the top order to bat 20 overs. I think we need to try and bat long as top four."

"We must try not to get out in the 16th or 17th over and the problem will be sorted if we can stay until the 20th over." India will take on defending champions Australia in the Feb. 21 tournament opener in Sydney and Mandhana expects the top order to fire them deep into the tournament.

"We have some great batters and our order is very balanced. The top four or five are quite settled," said the 23-year-old southpaw. "We've had the same top five for the last year and that's been a good thing for us." — Reuters

Sports

Team USA rallies to beat Team World in Rising Stars contest

Bryant named Basketball Hall of Fame finalist, three weeks after death

LOS ANGELES: Team USA outgunned Team World 151-131 in the NBA's Rising Stars event on Friday in a game that lacked little semblance of defense even before it deteriorated into an unofficial dunk contest.

As Team USA put the contest out of reach in the fourth quarter, the players stepped aside to let the impromptu dunking take place, featuring Team USA's Zion Williamson.

The forward even bent the basket with one of his rim-shaking dunks earlier in the game.

Golden State Warriors player Eric Paschall led Team USA with 23 points, and Canadian RJ Barrett of the New York Knicks had a game-high 27 points for Team World at the United Center arena in Chicago.

Williamson, who plays for the New Orleans Pelicans, finished with 14 points.

Miles Bridges of Team USA was named MVP of the game after scoring 20 points.

"We wanted to come out and play hard in the Rising Stars and show what Charlotte is about — me, Devonte' (Graham) and P.J. (Washington)," Bridges said. "I didn't have any extra motivation, really, I wouldn't say that. But MJ (Michael Jordan) putting Chicago on the map, it definitely plays a big part, though."

Team USA seized command in the third quarter when they showed their offensive prowess by outscoring Team World 44-24.

Bridges connected on three-pointers in back-to-back possessions to cut a 12-point lead in half with five-minutes left in the third quarter.

Three minutes later, Charlotte's Devonte' Graham made a pair of threes to put Team USA ahead 104-103. It was their first lead since the opening minutes of the game. Team World led 81-71 at the half after Dallas Mavericks' Luka Doncic sank a shot from half-court with two seconds remaining in the second quarter.

The game was part of the weekend festivities lead-

ing up to the All-Star Game on Sunday night.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, three weeks after Kobe Bryant, one of the most dominant players in NBA history, was killed with his daughter and seven others in a helicopter crash, the global sports icon was named a finalist to the Basketball Hall of Fame.

Bryant, fourth all time in NBA scoring, played for the Los Angeles Lakers during an illustrious 20-year career that was highlighted by five NBA championships, two NBA Finals MVPs and one league MVP.

The announcement came during the NBA All-Star weekend in Chicago, which culminates today with an exhibition game featuring the sport's best players. The three-day event is likely to be muted as the National Basketball Association pays homage to the fallen star.

"I've never seen in my long life an athlete passing that had the impact that Kobe's passing had on people, people on the street, people that didn't even know him," said Jerry Colangelo, chairman of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, after the announcement was made.

"In my case it was personal... so much more difficult for me and family," said Colangelo, a long-time NBA executive who was inducted in the Hall of Fame in 2004.

Bryant won nine All-Defensive First Team honors, four All-Star Game MVP awards and a Slam Dunk Contest title. Bryant also sits as the Lakers' all-time leader in several categories, including games played and steals.

Bryant wore the No. 24 and No. 8 during his career. Both numbers are retired by the Lakers with his jerseys hanging from the Staples Center rafters.

Joining Bryant as finalists were former NBA stars Tim Duncan, Kevin Garnett and Chris Bosh, along with former Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) stars Swin Cash and Tamika Catchings.



CHICAGO: Rui Hachimura #8 of Team World dunks the ball against Team USA during the 2020 NBA All-Star Rising Stars Game at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

Also named as finalists were three-time NCAA National Championship coach Kim Mulkey, five-time Division II National Coach of the Year Barbara Stevens, four-time National Coach of the Year Eddie Sutton and two-time NBA Champion coach Rudy Tomjanovich.

Bryant was on his way with his daughter and seven others to a youth basketball tournament on Jan. 26

when the helicopter they were in crashed in Calabasas, California.

Class of 2020 inductees will be named during the NCAA Final Four in Atlanta, Georgia in early April. The enshrinement ceremony will take place at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass. on Aug 29. — Agencies

Surging Rangers win 4th straight

COLUMBUS: Chris Kreider scored the tiebreaking goal with 3:11 remaining in the third period and the New York Rangers beat the host Columbus Blue Jackets 3-1 on Friday night. The Rangers won their season-high fourth straight game and won for the fifth time in six games thanks to Kreider, who scored his seventh goal in the last nine games. Pavel Buchnevich scored 22 seconds into the game and Ryan Strome added an empty-net goal as the Rangers also won their fifth straight road game. Oliver Bjorkstrand, who scored twice in the Blue Jackets' 2-1 win in New York on Jan. 19, tallied for Columbus, which dropped its fourth

straight game (0-2-2). The Blue Jackets also allowed the winning goal shortly after Boone Jenner's shot went off the post on a short-handed breakout.

PENGUINS 4, CANADIENS 1

Jason Zucker scored two goals in his second game with Pittsburgh, leading the way in a victory over visiting Montreal. Zucker, who was acquired from the Minnesota Wild in a trade on Monday, scored both goals in the final two minutes of the second period to give the Penguins a 3-1 lead.

Sidney Crosby had three assists, Kris Letang and Zach Aston-Reese also scored, and Tristan Jarry made 34 saves for Pittsburgh.

HURRICANES 5, DEVILS 2

Nino Niederreiter and Martin Necas each delivered a goal and an assist as Carolina drilled visiting New

Jersey. Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek made 35 saves for his first triumph in his last four outings. Warren Foegele, Andrei Svechnikov and Joel Edmundson also scored for Carolina, which improved to 23-3-1 when scoring a game's first goal. Mirco Mueller and Joey Anderson scored for the Devils, who were playing their third game in four nights. Anderson, a right winger, scored his first goal of the season with 5:03 remaining.

SHARKS 3, JETS 2

San Jose scored twice in the third period for a come-from-behind road victory over Winnipeg. After Melker Karlsson scored the equalizer 5:18 into the final frame, it took only 89 seconds for Timo Meier to follow up by firing a rebound past Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck. Blake Wheeler had a goal and an assist for the Jets, with both points coming during an 86-second span in the second period. — Reuters

VAR denies Wolves as Choudhury sees red

WOLVERHAMPTON: Nuno Espirito Santo claimed football is in danger of becoming robotic after Wolves were controversially denied by VAR and Leicester's Hamza Choudhury was sent off in a stormy 0-0 draw at Molineux on Friday.

Santo's side thought they had taken the lead when Willy Boly headed home in the first half, but VAR stepped in to chalk off the goal for the tightest of offside calls against Diogo Jota. Wolves were furious, but the officiating turned in their favour after half-time as Leicester had a penalty appeal turned down before midfielder Choudhury was sent off for a second booking.

Still unhappy at full-time, Santo bemoaned the way VAR decisions and long delays are sucking the emotional out of the sport. "It is reality now but each time it happens it upsets you. When you see the images, there is not a clear advantage but the law is the law," he said.

"The ref said it was offside. We have to get used to it and hope it improves. They have to improve, it's obvious. "Something has to be done. Let those who understand do something to have the joy of celebrating. We are in danger of becoming robots."

Leicester remain third in the Premier League, one point behind second placed Manchester City as they bid to qualify for the Champions League. Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers was encouraged by his team's second clean-sheet in their last 11 league games, especially as they had to withstand a late Wolves barrage.

"To keep a clean-sheet is very pleasing. I didn't think the first one was a yellow. I felt Hamza was unfortunate," Rodgers said. "It is the game now, his little toe was offside. They will feel it was harsh," he added of the VAR decision.

Wolves had returned from a winter break in Spain for the 42nd game of a gruelling season that started with Europa League action back in July. But they never looked fatigued in a bruising encounter and climb to seventh in the table.

Pedro Neto cut into the Leicester penalty area and found Jota early on, but Wolves winger's low shot was blocked by the outstretched leg of Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel.

WOLVES FURY

Neto was the provider again when Leander Dendoncker glanced just wide from his corner. Caglar Soyuncu should have put Leicester ahead but he nodded straight at Rui Patricio from James Maddison's free-kick.

Wolves defender Matt Doherty needed lengthy treatment to close a gaping wound that left blood pouring from his head after a clash with Maddison. Doherty was eventually able to continue and played a role in the move that nearly brought Wolves the open-

ing goal in the 44th minute.

Neto's cross was flicked on by Doherty to Boly and he headed home, only for VAR to disallow the goal for an extremely tight offside against Jota, who had passed to Neto in the build-up.

Wolves captain Conor Coady was furious with referee Mike Dean as the players walked off at half-time, reportedly shouting "You're the referee and even you don't know" at the official. VAR went in Wolves' favour after the break when Maddison appeared to be shoved over by Romain Saiss in the penalty area, with Dean giving a goal-kick and the review system backing his assessment.

And it was Leicester's turn to suffer at the hands of Dean again in the 76th minute. Already on a booking, Choudhury slipped over and lost control of the ball, reacting with a lunging tackle that sent Dendoncker sprawling.

Wolves nearly took advantage of their numerical superiority when substitute Adama Traore picked out Raul Jimenez for a header that flashed over. Jimenez was guilty of a worse miss in the closing moments when he again failed to hit the target with a header from Joao Moutinho's delivery. — AFP



WOLVERHAMPTON: Wolverhampton Wanderers' Mexican striker Raul Jimenez (R) heads wide during the English Premier League football match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Leicester City at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton, central England. — AFP

Clijsters to take on Bertens in Dubai comeback

DUBAI: Former world number one Kim Clijsters will return to professional tennis for the first time in seven years at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships tomorrow - but she has been handed a tough first round match-up.

The 36-year-old, who won four Grand Slam titles but last played in 2012 at the US Open, has been drawn against sixth seeded Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands after being given a wildcard entry. "I am really excited to be getting back to the match court. I can't wait to return to the game I love and play in front of the fans again - the support and encouragement that I've received

since the announcement has been overwhelming," she told the Women's Tennis Association website.

Clijsters said last year she would be returning to the court, but a wrist injury ended hopes of beginning her comeback at last month's Australian Open. This will be her second comeback: She first retired from tennis in 2007, taking a break to have the first of her three children, but came back within 24 months to claim three of her four Grand Slam titles and return to the top of the rankings in 2011.

Her latest comeback, she said, was fuelled by a desire to just play again. "Whenever I'm at a Grand Slam playing the legends, if somebody asked me 'Hey, do you want to hit some balls?', I'm the first one to be like 'I'll hit. I'll be the hitting partner for your practice today'," she said.

"The love for the sport is obviously still there. I don't feel like I need to prove anything, but I want to challenge myself and I want to be strong again." Six of the top 10-ranked women are competing at the competition in Dubai. — Reuters



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Aston Villa v Tottenham Hotspur	17:00
beIN Sports	
Arsenal FC v Newcastle United FC	19:30
beIN Sports	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Sevilla FC v RCD Espanyol	14:00
beIN Sports	
CD Leganes v Real Betis	16:00
beIN Sports	
SD Eibar v Real Sociedad	18:00
beIN Sports	
Athletic de Bilbao v Osasuna	20:30
beIN Sports	
Real Madrid CF v Celta de Vigo	23:00
beIN Sports	
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
Udinese Calcio v Hellas Verona FC	14:30
beIN Sports	
Juventus FC v Brescia	17:00
beIN Sports	
UC Sampdoria v ACF Fiorentina	17:00
beIN Sports	
US Sassuolo Calcio v Parma Calcio 1913	17:00
beIN Sports	
Cagliari Calcio v SSC Napoli	20:00
beIN Sports	
SS Lazio v Internazionale Milano	22:45
beIN Sports HD 4	
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA	
FC Koln v Bayern Munich	17:30
beIN Sports	
FSV Mainz 05 v Schalke 04	20:00
beIN Sports	
FRENCH LEAGUE	
Olympique Lyonnais v RC Strasbourg	17:00
beIN Sports	
Stade brestois 29 v Saint Etienne	19:00
beIN Sports	
Stade Reims v Stade Rennais	19:00
beIN Sports	
LOSC Lille v Olympique Marseille	23:00
beIN Sports	

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Mane strikes as Liverpool overcome Norwich

Burnley's Vydra scores spectacular winner in storm-hit match



NORWICH: Joe Gomez of Liverpool is challenged by Ondrej Duda of Norwich City during the Premier League match between Norwich City and Liverpool FC at Carrow Road yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Sadio Mane struck as Liverpool overcame Storm Dennis and feisty basement club Norwich to extend their lead at the top of the Premier League table to 25 points yesterday. Jurgen Klopp's runaway league leaders were short of their fluent best during their 1-0 victory but returned immediately to winning ways after their winter break.

They are galloping towards their first league title for 30 years and can also dream of a treble to match Manchester United's achievement in 1999. The result leaves Daniel Farke's Norwich rooted to the bottom of the table, six points behind 19th-placed Watford and they look set for an immediate return to the Championship despite their battling performance.

Klopp brought back midfielder Naby Keita for his first start in a Premier League match since December and Mane was on the bench as Liverpool started with confidence. The champions-elect bossed possession in the early stages without creating many clear-cut openings but Norwich managed some brief spells of attractive passing football themselves.

Liverpool's silky forward Roberto Firmino was particularly impressive, producing an exquisite piece of

skill to control a long Jordan Henderson pass before the ball was stolen off his toes as he shaped to shoot.

But despite a few hairy moments, Farke's men kept Liverpool quiet and came close to snatching the lead themselves. Lukas Rupp got in behind the Liverpool defence and controlled a long ball over the top. He opted to pass to his left to Teemu Pukki but Alisson Becker produced a superb save, clawing the ball away at the feet of the Finnish striker.

Liverpool were quickly on top again in the second half, keeping Norwich at arm's length, but struggled to create clear chances until Keita tested Tim Krul from distance in the 58th minute. The Anfield giants laid siege to the Norwich goal but frustration mounted as the home side somehow kept the score at 0-0.

Moments later Keita should have done better when he reacted quickly to a rebound off Krul but the goal-keeper dived to his right to deny the Guinea international. Alexander Tettey almost caught Becker out on a rare Norwich foray into the Liverpool half, thundering a shot against the near post as the home crowd roared their team on. But just when it seemed Norwich could become just the second team this season after

Manchester United to deny Liverpool all three points, Mane broke the deadlock. The second-half substitute controlled a long ball from Henderson with his right foot in the 78th minute before lashing home with his left. Pukki had a late chance to equalise but shot straight at Alisson as Liverpool held on for their 25th win in 26 Premier League matches.

Earlier, Burnley withstood a battering from Storm Dennis to beat Southampton 2-1 yesterday and climb to 10th in the Premier League table thanks to Matej Vydra's spectacular winner.

After Ashley Westwood and Danny Ings had traded first-half goals, substitute Vydra score the decisive goal on the hour mark at a rain-soaked St Mary's. It was Burnley's third win in four Premier League matches and lifted Sean Dyche's side to 10th in the table but Ralph Hasenhuttl was left to ponder his side's third defeat in four Premier League games.

Storm Dennis brought heavy rain and strong winds to the south coast of England just a week after Storm Ciara lashed Europe. Saints debutant Kyle Walker-Peters was straight into the action as he conceded a corner in the second minute. Westwood went over to

take the kick and scored the opener after 93 seconds.

The midfielder curled a cross into the front post and Southampton forward Ings let it go, anticipating the ball would go out for a goal kick, but it crept in before Alex McCarthy could stop it going over the line.

Hasenhuttl's men recovered from their poor start and began to dominate and former Burnley striker Ings curled into the corner from outside the area in the 18th minute for his 15th Premier League goal of the season.

Burnley's problems increased when Chris Wood could no longer continue due to injury and was replaced by Vydra. Even heavier rain arrived at the beginning of the second period, but Vydra gave the away fans something to celebrate on the hour mark.

Jeff Hendrick's ball forward was superbly controlled by the substitute, who took a touch to get away from Walker-Peters before he rifled an effort into the top corner. Saints continued to create chances but also struggled to hit the target.

Burnley, who were the better side after the break, had to survive a late VAR check, but Ben Mee was adjudged not to have deliberately handled in the penalty area. — AFP

What now for Abu Dhabi's Man City project?

LONDON: Manchester City have enjoyed a meteoric rise from mid-table mediocrity to serial trophy winners thanks to the deep pockets of Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour. But now they face their biggest challenge of the new era.

European football's governing body UEFA on Friday banned City from European competitions for the next two seasons and imposed a fine of 30 million euros (\$32 million, £25 million) on the English champions. City are up for the fight and will have their day in court. The club immediately responded that they would appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport for what they called "an impartial judgement". However, failure to overturn the ban, even if it is reduced to just a one-season suspension, would have huge ramifications for City on and off the field. Since the Sheikh Mansour takeover in 2008, City have won 10 major

trophies — four Premier League titles, two FA Cups and four League Cups. Yet the prize that has eluded them is the one the Abu Dhabi project most desires — the UEFA Champions League.

WHAT DID CITY DO WRONG?

City have been found to be in breach of UEFA's financial fair play rules, which place restrictions on how much money a club can lose. Over a three-year period, clubs are not permitted to lose more than 30 million euros with exceptions for some costs such as youth development and women's teams. UEFA's Club Financial Control Body found that City ensured they did not fall foul of those restrictions by overstating their sponsorship revenue between 2012 and 2016. The case against City was reopened when German magazine Der Spiegel published a series of leaked emails in 2018 that seemed to show how City had manufactured extra sponsorship revenue from a series of companies with connections to the Abu Dhabi United Group, owned by Sheikh Mansour. City strenuously deny that accusation.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A BAN

Should City's appeal fail, there could be repercussions

for the futures of manager Pep Guardiola and a host of star players. Guardiola's contract runs until the end of the 2020/21 season, but the only major task left for the Catalan in Manchester is to make City European champions for the first time.

Under the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss, the club rewrote the record books in storming to the Premier League title with 100 points in 2017/18 and won a first-ever domestic treble of trophies in English football last season. City have fallen off the pace in the title race this season, 22 points behind leaders Liverpool in second place. Guardiola suggested this week he could even be sacked if his side fail to beat Real Madrid in the Champions League last-16 but while that is highly unlikely, he may not want to hang around for another season if there are only domestic prizes up for grabs.

Similarly, players such as Kevin De Bruyne and Raheem Sterling are unlikely to want to waste two of their peak years without Champions League football.

It would still take huge fees from rival clubs to tempt City to sell, but they may be forced to downsize to gain re-entry to the Champions League even after their ban is over. City made 93 million euros from UEFA prize money and TV rights from last season's Champions League, with

gate receipts and extra sponsorship revenue from Europe's premier club competition added to that tally.

It would be almost impossible for the club to lose that level of revenue for two years and remain FFP-compliant without cutting costs on transfer fees and wages, or selling players. The sanctions may not even have stopped with UEFA. A Premier League investigation into City's compliance with FFP is also ongoing and could result in a points deduction.

WILL ABU DHABI INVESTMENT DRY UP?

The great unknown is how Abu Dhabi reacts to the setback. Former City CEO Garry Cook told The Athletic in December the aim of their takeover was to "create a proxy brand for Abu Dhabi."

Is that brand now damaged goods, particularly if FFP restrictions mean City's success on the field is curtailed?

On the other hand, the huge investment from Abu Dhabi has already lifted City to the status of one of the world's heavyweight clubs. The club have reported a combined profit for the past five years of £51 million and revenues have risen to £535 million a year. City are strong enough financially to compete and be FFP-compliant. It is how they got to that stage that has been their downfall. — AFP