



## 8 German far right arrests reveal 'shocking' mosque attack plot



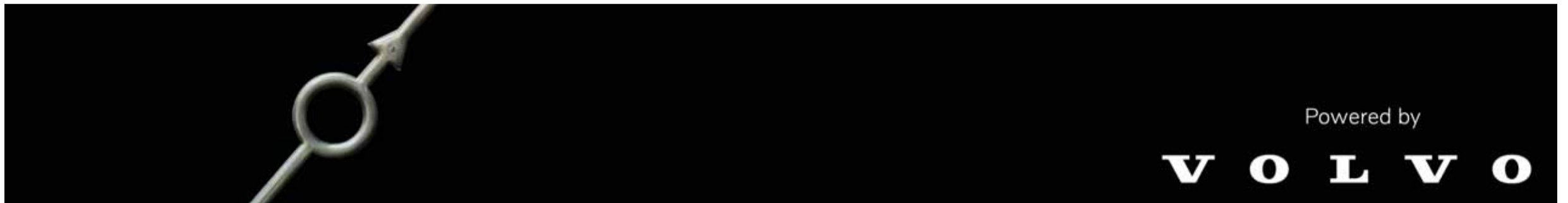
## 19 Unchained melody: Traditional music revived as security improves



## 24 Indian FM defends citizenship law as he promotes EU ties



## 28 Munich hero and Man United goalkeeper great Gregg dies



# UAE issues license for first Arab nuclear power plant

### Four reactors have the capacity to generate 5,600 megawatts of electricity

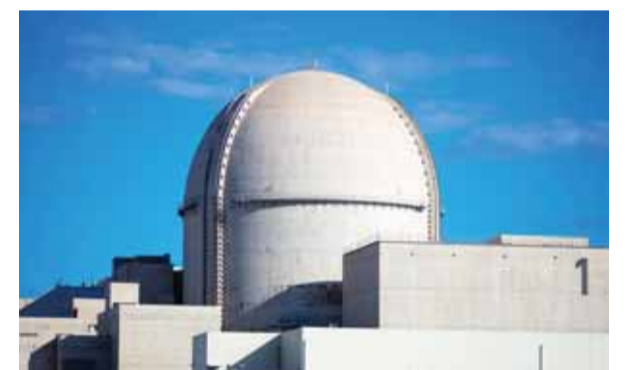


KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attend the graduation ceremony of the 46th batch of cadets at Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 2)

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates said yesterday it has issued an operating license for a reactor at its Barakah nuclear power plant, the first in the Arab world, hailing it as a "new chapter". The UAE has substantial energy reserves, but with a power-hungry population of 10 million it has made huge investments in developing alternative power sources including solar. "Today marks a new chapter in our journey for the development of peaceful nuclear energy with the issuing of the operating license for the first Barakah plant," Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan said in a tweet. "As we prepare for the next 50 years to safeguard our needs, our biggest strength is national talent."

The Barakah plant, located on the Gulf coast west of the capital, had been due to come online in late 2017 but faced a number of delays that officials attributed to safety and regulatory requirements. The national nuclear regulator has now given the green light to the first of four reactors at the plant, Hamad Al-Kaabi, the UAE representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told a press conference. Abu Dhabi authorities said in January that the plant would start operating within a few months. No new date was given yesterday but Kaabi indicated it would happen soon.

"The full operation of Barakah plant in the near future will contribute to the UAE's efforts for development and sustainability," he said, adding that the operator would "undertake a period of commissioning to



A handout picture obtained on Feb 13, 2020 shows a general view of the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant in the Gharbiya region of Abu Dhabi on the Gulf coastline about 50 km west of Ruwais. — AFP

prepare for commercial operation". The plant is a regional first - Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, has said it plans to build up to 16 nuclear reactors, but the project has yet to materialize. It is being built by a consortium led by the Korea Electric Power Corporation at a cost of some \$24.4 billion. When fully operational, the four reactors have the capacity to generate 5,600 megawatts

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## News in brief

### CSC: 3-day national holidays

KUWAIT: February 25 and February 26 will be official holidays on the occasion of Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced yesterday. February 27 (Thursday) will also be a holiday because it falls between a public holiday and the weekend, the CSC said in a statement. — KUNA

### MEA scraps dollar-only plan

BEIRUT: Crisis-hit Lebanon's national carrier on Sunday said it was scrapping plans to only accept payments in US dollars, a decision that had earlier sparked anger among Lebanese. Earlier Sunday, the state-run National News Agency reported that "From Monday, Middle East (Airlines) and other airline companies operating in Lebanon will only accept payments in US dollars". Hours later the MEA, which is majority-owned by the Lebanese state and administrated by the country's central bank, reversed the controversial decision. "At the request of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, the management of MEA has decided to cancel its decision to sell tickets only in dollars tickets," said a statement published by local media. In recent months, the pound has plunged against the greenback on the parallel exchange market. — AFP

### Egypt pulls plug on street music

CAIRO: The union of Egyptian musicians has banned performances by singers of mahraganat (Arabic for festivals) after the lyrics of a chart-topping song were deemed too racy for the conservative country. Earlier this month, the song "Bint al-Giran" (The girl next door) reached over 100 million views on YouTube and was the second most played hit on SoundCloud. On Valentine's Day, crooner Hassan Shafoosh performed his hit at a packed Cairo stadium to tens of thousands of fans. But the song's lyrics - "I drink alcohol and smoke hashish" - sparked the ire of the union. The head of the musicians union Hany Shaker was quick to react and on Sunday banned mahraganat singers from performing at clubs, cafes, hotels and concerts. The manager of Shafoosh apologized. "We are very sorry for our mistake and respect the union's decision," manager Camba told AFP yesterday. — AFP

## Snubbed by Gulf, Lebanon PM Diab hosts Iran speaker

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who is getting the cold shoulder from Gulf Arab states, yesterday met Iran's parliament speaker, the first senior foreign official to visit since Diab's government took office. The heavily armed Hezbollah, an ally of Iran, is a main backer of Diab's cabinet, which took office last month after efforts failed to strike a deal with Saad Al-Hariri, a traditional Western ally.

Gulf Arab states had long channeled funds into Lebanon. But now, alarmed by the rising influence of Hezbollah, Lebanon's rich neighbors appear loathe to help it out of an unprecedented economic and financial crisis. The crisis came to a head last year as slowing capital inflows led to a liquidity crunch and protests erupted against the ruling elite. Banks are curbing access to cash, the Lebanese pound has slumped, inflation has spiked and firms are shedding jobs. Foreign donors say they will only help once Lebanon enacts long-delayed reforms.

Analysts say Hezbollah's role in forming Lebanon's

## Height matters in US politics, and Trump knows it

WASHINGTON: When Donald Trump literally belittles his perceived enemies - by mocking their stature - he is weaponizing a long-standing maxim of US presidential politics: Taller guys tend to win the White House. Trump - who stands at about 6'3" depending on which source you use - has hammered away of late at Mike Bloomberg, the former New York mayor whose campaign for the Democratic nomination is gathering pace. Bloomberg officially is 5'8", but in recent tweets and interviews, Trump has lopped four inches off and alleged that Bloomberg asked to stand on a box during Democratic primary debates. He also christened the media mogul with a new nickname: "Mini Mike".

All this height-shaming is not new for the Republican leader. He also has slapped 'little' or 'liddle' (or even 'liddle', apostrophe included) on a number of lawmakers of varying heights - Adam Schiff, Marco Rubio, Bob Corker, to name a few. Indeed, Trump seems keenly aware that in America, height matters. What sets Trump



BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab (right) meets Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larjani at the government headquarters yesterday. — AFP

new cabinet could make it harder to get aid from Western and Gulf states that are worried about Tehran's clout in the region. Diab has said his first trip abroad would be to the Arab region, particularly the Gulf monarchies. But none of them have officially commented on the government nor extended public invitations to Diab. An Arab diplomat in the Gulf said only Qatar had invited Diab to visit so far. "No other government in the Gulf will invite him," the diplomat said. Qatar did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether it had sent an invitation.

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## Israeli aircraft flies over Sudan for first time

JERUSALEM: An Israeli aircraft has flown through Sudanese airspace for the first time, in what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called another example of warming ties with formally hostile states. Israel remains technically at war with Sudan, which supported hardline Islamists - including, for a period, Al-Qaeda - during the rule of president Omar Al-Bashir. Bashir was ousted by the army last April following months of mass anti-government demonstrations.

"The first Israeli airplane passed yesterday over the skies of Sudan. This is quite a change," Netanyahu told American Jewish leaders in Jerusalem on Sunday evening, saying the route cut some three hours off flights from Israel to South America. Israeli daily Haaretz quoted an Israeli government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, saying that the plane was "a private Israeli executive jet".

Netanyahu met Sudan's leader Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan two weeks ago for what the Israeli premier's office described as talks aimed at normalizing ties. A Sudanese government spokesman said later that Burhan "did not give a promise of normalizing or having diplomatic relations".

Israel previously considered Sudan a security threat because it suspected Iran used Sudan as a conduit for overland smuggling of munitions to the Gaza Strip. In 2009, regional sources said, Israeli aircraft bombed an arms convoy in Sudan. The corridor described by Netanyahu would also take planes over Egypt, which made peace with Israel in 1979, and Chad, which in 2018 restored long-severed relations with Israel.

Since Netanyahu's meeting with Burhan, the air corridor is the most prominent development that has been discussed publicly by both sides. Israeli commentators have speculated that the new contacts with Khartoum could allow for the repatriation of illegal Sudanese migrants in Israel, and that Israel could in turn lobby the United States to improve Sudan's standing in Washington. Sudan has been part of a decades-old Arab boycott of Israel over its treatment of the Palestinians and its occupation of Arab lands. In the wake of the Six-Day War of 1967 in which Israel occupied the Palestinian territories and seized the Golan Heights from Syria, Arab leaders gathered in Khartoum to announce what became known as the "three noes": No peace, no recognition and no negotiations with Israel.

Netanyahu said Sunday that visible signs of a thaw in relations with Sudan and other Muslim-majority

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ST LOUIS, Missouri: In this file photo taken on Oct 9, 2016, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump listens to Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton during the second presidential debate at Washington University. — AFP

apart is how unabashedly he is trying to use it to his advantage. "It is not typical of what presidents do," said Gregg Murray, a political scientist at Augusta University in Georgia who has studied the role of height in how Americans vote.

Look back at Trump's recent predecessors and they were all at least six feet tall, or close to it - Barack

Continued on Page 24

# Amir attends Kuwait military academy graduation ceremony



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior state officials attend a graduation ceremony for the 46th batch of cadet students at Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy yesterday. —Photos by Amiri Diwan and Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, patronized and attended a graduation ceremony for the 46th batch of cadet students at Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy yesterday. His Highness the Amir was warmly welcomed to the venue by Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chief of the Army General Staff Lt Gen Mohammad Al-Khedhr and other army generals. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and several other senior state officials also attended the event. The National Anthem was played and some Holy Quran verses were recited at the onset of the army graduation ceremony.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior state officials rise for the National Anthem.

Addressing the event, Assistant Commander of Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy Brig Khaled Al-Otaibi thanked His Highness the Amir for patronizing and attending the event. He said the new army graduates are totally ready for sacrificing themselves to defending and protecting Kuwait, boasting that they are well-trained, active, strong and loyal to their own nation. He added that nowadays science has become a stupendous and influential force and that some countries have greatly developed thanks to science. Training is now the core element of military efficiency, he stressed, believing that experiences have proved that strong armies are not only built on preparedness and armament but on principles, morale and confidence as well. The army officer went on to say that Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy is keen on living up to training missions and equipping itself with technological means and efficient human elements. Finally, he urged the

new graduates to capitalize on their high military knowledge and training to prop up the performance of their military units in various domains.

As the graduation festivities got underway, Dhari Al-Bouqan, one of the graduating officers, recited a poem before his fellow cadets who lined up ready to march in for their graduation ceremony. Afterwards, Col Adel Al-Kandari, Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy's director of

academic affairs, announced the names of the graduating officers, before His Highness the Amir began to bestow awards upon the top honor graduates. Col Salah Al-Hamdan then began reciting the oath of enlistment as the national anthem began to play to conclude the ceremony, with His Highness the Amir being handed a commemorative gift to mark the occasion.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and

Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Sabah was quoted as saying that he was proud of the officers as they reach a milestone in their lives, urging them to put their newly acquired knowledge to good use. He thanked the military academy for its efforts to mold a determined batch of cadets, wishing Kuwait continued prosperity, security and development amid a lavish ceremony attended by the country's top military leaders. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a sword from an officer during the ceremony.



Servicemen perform during the graduation ceremony.



Graduates celebrate with their families during the ceremony.

Local

# Large global participation in Kuwait Int'l Invention Fair of Mideast

More than 100 inventors from 40 countries participate in four-day event



KUWAIT: Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Capital Governor, and Talal Jassem Al-Kharafi, Chairman of the higher committee of IIFME during the opening ceremony. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Talal Jassem Al-Kharafi with the inventors.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The 12th International Invention Fair of the Middle East (IIFME) kicked off on Sunday at Arraya Conference Hall in Kuwait City under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and in collaboration with the International Exhibition of Inventions Geneva and Kuwait Science Club (KSC). "The success of the exhibition can be seen through a large number of participants from around the world, as the fair has a good reputation and excellent support for inventors," Capital Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said. He expressed hope to see good results of this fair

that will develop scientific research because of its great importance in various fields, praising the role of the organizers, including administrators and participants headed by the chairman of Kuwait Science Club. Talal Jassem Al-Kharafi, Chairman of the higher committee of IIFME, expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to HH the Amir for sponsoring IIFME. "We also appreciate HH the Amir's guidance and instructions, which had a significant impact on the development of this international scientific event, thus becoming an international distinction that Kuwaiti youth are able to achieve in the science field," Kharafi said. He voiced pleasure in welcoming 40 countries to the annual fair and thanked the participating inventors and HH

the Amir for patronizing the fair.

KFAS Scientific Culture Director Dr Salam Al-Ablani affirmed that the foundation is one of the supporters and sponsors of this fair, based on its strategic goals to spread science and encourage the younger generation to get involved in science. "What distinguishes this exhibition is international participation, as the youth of Kuwait and the Gulf compete in presenting their ideas, inventions and innovations, and this generates many creative ideas for the next generation," he said.

Ablani said the exhibition brings the industrial sector closer to the inventors, which opens up great prospects. With more than 100 inventors from 40 countries, the four-day fair held under the slogan

"Where inventors meet investors" is an important opportunity for inventors to show their innovations at one of the most important exhibitions for international inventions, especially since it is considered the first in the Middle East and second globally.

This fair is the first-of-its-kind to present huge prizes exceeding \$50,000. These prizes were set to encourage and support inventors, where the main prize is \$15,000, KSC's prize is \$10,000, International Exhibition of Inventions of Geneva presents a \$5,000 prize and the GCC Patent Office presents 50,000 Saudi riyals, in addition to a prize presented by the World Intellectual Property Organization and another by the International Federation of Inventors' Associations.

## Kuwait FM meets Egyptian counterpart

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah held talks on Sunday with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shukry on the sidelines of the 56th Munich Security Conference (MSC-2020). Both sides discussed the historical deep-rooted relations between the State of Kuwait and the Republic of Egypt and ways to strengthen cooperation in all areas, as well as regional and international issues of common concern. The meeting also gathered Kuwait Ambassador to Germany Najeeb Al-Bader and Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe Affairs Mohammad Hayati. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shukry. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Capital Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Kuwait Science Club Talal Al-Kharafi and Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti at Zain's booth in the fair.

## Zain supports Kuwaiti, Arab inventors at Int'l Invention Fair

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, took part in the inauguration ceremony of the 12th International Invention Fair in the Middle East under the theme "Where Inventors Meet Investors." The event, which comes in strategic partnership with Zain, runs from 16-19 February at Al-Raya Ballroom in the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel, and is held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The event's opening ceremony witnessed the presence of His Highness the Amir's representative, Capital Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Kuwait Science Club Talal Al-Kharafi, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, as well as a number of ambassadors from the participating countries and Kuwait's scientific community.

Zain's continuous support to this unique initiative since its inception comes in line with the company's Corporate Sustainability and social Responsibility strategy, which aims at supporting the local scientific arena and contributing to the further development of science in Kuwait and the Arab region. This is especially true as the event's success in past

years greatly contributed to highlighting Kuwait's rich cultural involvement in scientific areas across regional and international levels, proving itself to become the biggest in the Middle East and the second in the world.

Through supporting this event, Zain is keen on encouraging Kuwaiti and Arab talents in the fields of science and innovation, as it believes such initiatives offer a valuable opportunity for young inventors to benefit from the expertise and knowledge of international inventors who visit Kuwait to share their experiences with the local scientific community. The 12th edition of the fair will feature over 100 inventions from 40 different countries, and Zain will take part through its own dedicated booth through which it will showcase the latest Zain Business solutions for SMEs to serve the needs of participating inventors.

The International Invention Fair in the Middle East - organized by the Kuwait Science Club in partnership with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) - is officially held in collaboration with the International Exhibition of Inventions - Geneva. The event is one of the most significant and major specialized exhibitions of inventions in the Middle East region, and is considered the second largest exhibition of its kind in the world after the Exhibition of Geneva. The event offers an opportunity for inventions from different cultures to be exhibited and for inventors to build connections with investors. Zain will spare no efforts in offering its support and encouragement to any entity that adopts creativity and innovation within the community and contribute to the further progress of national economy.

## Kuwaitis top tourists to Turkish city in 2019

ANKARA: Kuwaitis came first on the tourists list of the Turkish city, Bursa, in 2019 with more than 50,000 visitors, a report said yesterday. The total number of foreign tourists to the city located in western Turkey reached 1.6 million visitors last year, including 150,000 Arab tourists, according to the report, issued by Bursa's governor. Kuwaitis came on top of the list with 64,606 tourists to the city in 2019, followed by Saudis with 36,211 visitors, it added. Syrians came in third place with more than 9,000, Iraqis with 6,000, Qataris with 7,000 and Bahrainis with 6,000 tourists, Anadolu Agency reported. Bursa abounds in religious, cultural and historical monuments, and it embraces areas that are listed in the World Heritage Sites of the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO). —KUNA



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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: An evening view of Kuwait Towers taken from the beach in Kuwait City. — Photo by Renjish Sasinath (Instagram: @renjishs) (Submit your photos for consideration to be featured in the 'Photo of the Day' section at local@kuwaittimes.com)



Down Syndrome Society organizes artwork gallery

KUWAIT: Kuwait Down Syndrome Society opened a gallery at Al-Adwani hall in Abdullah Al-Salem on Sunday evening to showcase artworks and handicrafts made by children with Down syndrome. The event, organized in collaboration with National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), was themed 'with you our lives get colored.' Speaking on the sidelines of the opening ceremony, NCCAL Assistant Secretary-General for the Arts Sector Dr Bader Al-Dowaihs said the gallery is part of the society's efforts to integrate children with DNS into the Kuwaiti community. He expressed admiration for the creative products displayed by "this important segment of the community." Meanwhile, Chairperson of Kuwait Down Syndrome Society Dr Seddiqa Al-Awadhi said the society works relentlessly to improve the lives of people with disabilities and help reach their full potentials. "The five-day event showcases distinguished portraits and handicrafts, most of them were sold, thanks to the large number of visitors," she pointed out. Dr Awadhi thanked the Awqaf Secretariat and NCCAL for supporting the activities of the society and helping organize the gallery. — KUNA



ABK participates in MGRP job fair

KUWAIT: In its effort to attract top talent for the sustained growth of the banking industry, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) sponsored the annual job fair hosted by the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program (MGRP). The event was held under the patronage of Mariam Al-Aqel, Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs.

At the career fair which took place on February 12-13, ABK presented opportunities available within the organization and students, were provided with information about

ABK and its approach towards business. Speaking on the bank's involvement, Ali Akbar, AGM - Human Resources at ABK said, "ABK's sponsorship of the MGRP job fair is in line with our strategy of investing in national talent. ABK continuously works towards recruiting the best talent in the country. Through training at 'ABK Academy,' we have educated 650 graduates on the banking industry and ways to develop their skill sets to assist them in pursuing a career in banking."

ABK's strategic partnership with MGRP for the third consecutive year is part of the Bank's commitment to the Kuwait Vision 2035, particularly the tenant regarding the value of creative human capital through Kuwaitization of the private sector. ABK's participation reinforces its commitment to playing an active role in supporting Kuwait's youth during the early stages of their work life.



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# Assembly committee to meet with premier over oil appointments

## Controversial amnesty bill up for heated debate

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** A National Assembly panel formed to investigate allegations of irregularities in the appointments of employees in the oil sector has decided to invite His Highness the Prime Minister for a meeting next month.

Rapporteur of the panel MP Bader Al-Mulla said the committee, appointed following the grilling of the former oil minister, has already held 14 meetings and made important findings. He said the panel will hold two more meetings; one with a technical committee that probed issues raised during the grilling of the former oil minister and the second with the Supreme Petroleum Council (SPC) which is headed by His Highness the Prime Minister. The lawmaker said the meeting with the SPC is crucial because of the key information the investigation has arrived at, adding that the report of the panel will include all the details. Mulla said the committee has also decided to meet with Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-

Sabah on March 15 to complete the investigation.

In the meantime, the National Assembly is expected to debate today the controversial issue of public amnesty for prisoners jailed on political issues especially former opposition MPs and activists who were jailed for storming the national assembly building in November 2011.

The legal and legislative committee headed by MP Khaled Al-Shatti decided to combine three draft laws on the issue and presented a joint report to the assembly, a move that was categorically rejected by opposition MPs because the combined draft law calls for granting amnesty also to around 20 Kuwaiti activists jailed for forming a cell linked to Iran and which plotted to carry out attacks in Kuwait.

Opposition MPs want to debate the draft laws separately in order to be able to approve the one that covers the former opposition MPs and activists and not the cell members. National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said he prefers that each draft law is debated

separately. The assembly has the right to reject the legal committee's report and demand separate reports.

Ghanem recalled that he had repeatedly said that amnesty is requested from the leadership and not imposed, citing the examples of a few opposition members who returned to the country on special pardons by the Amir.

The assembly is also due to debate another controversial draft law on pensioners and several MPs are insisting that the law should be in line with Islamic Sharia law that bans banking interest. Eleven MPs have submitted a request calling on the assembly to debate the pensioners law before the amnesty bill.

The assembly session comes a day after a limited Cabinet reshuffle in which Mariam Al-Aqel was moved from the finance to the social affairs portfolio, Khaled Al-Fadhel was given only the oil ministry, taking the ministry of electricity and water away and appointing Mohammad Bushehri as its minister. Also, newcomer Barrak Al-Sheetan was appointed finance minister.

## Movement rejects 'fooling around' with amnesty bill

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** The Civil National Movement yesterday issued a statement about the agenda of today's parliamentary session, including the comprehensive amnesty bill. The statement hailed the "endless number of citizens' spontaneous tendency" to flock to the National Assembly today to attend the session and stop what it described as constant "fooling around" with proposals made by the parliamentary legislative affairs committee about the amnesty bill and the government's maneuvering through its "representative" in parliament - the speaker and his followers there. The statement said ever since dissolving the parliament in 2012, an unconstitutional law was used to bring in lawmakers who do not actually represent the nation.

### Kuwaitis' employment

MP Osama Al-Shaheen said the parliamentary human resources committee decided making a legislative amendment prioritizing the employment of Kuwaitis, followed by the children of Kuwaiti women, and then Arabs. "We hope we can provide enough job opportunities for Kuwaitis and set a mechanism to employ the children of Kuwaiti women," he said. Meanwhile, Shaheen wished Minister Mariam Al-Aqel all the best in being appointed minister of social affairs and minister of state for economic affairs.

### MEW undersecretary

New Minister of Electricity and Water Mohammed Bushehri authorized engineer Hmoud Al-Roudhan to act as MEW undersecretary in addition to doing his duties as assistant undersecretary for water projects. Notably, the MEW's undersecretary position became vacant after the appointment of Bushehri as minister. Informed sources said Bushehri will select a new undersecretary by next month at most. The sources added there is a likelihood of selecting the undersecretary from outside MEW.

## Manpower authority coordinates with traffic department

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

**KUWAIT:** As part of the Public Authority of Manpower's (PAM) ongoing cooperation with the Ministry of Interior (MoI), PAM deputy director Abdullah Al-Motoutah visited the traffic department, where he was received by MoI's assistant undersecretary for traffic affairs to discuss regulations of some activities including logistical backup, goods transport and delivery services. Both sides agreed to hold periodic meetings to discuss further issues.

### Prisoners released

On the occasion of celebrating the national anniversaries, an Amiri decree was issued to release 840 prisoners and write off the fines and bails of 569 others.

### 54 percent complete

Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Planning and Development Khaled Mahdi announced 54 percent of con-

struction of Sabah Al-Salem University project has been completed and the project is scheduled to conclude in Sept 2022. Speaking on the sidelines of a visit to the project site yesterday, Mahdi stressed that the project's significance lies in the fact that it invests in creative well-trained and educated manpower to serve the state's development plan, adding that the project will also boost higher education facilities' capacity and link the outcome with market needs. Mahdi also said the project's total cost is KD 278.6 million and that 31,795 workers work on the site, only 7 percent of whom are citizens.

### Cyclotron device

Kuwait Cancer Control Center (KCCC) Manager Dr Ali Al-Mousawi announced concluding the modernization of the cyclotron device at Faisal Sultan bin Essa Center, and that the device is back in service, diagnosing and treating patients. Head of the nuclear medicine unit Dr Farida Al-Kandari said modernizing the cyclotron will facilitate the production of high quality radioactive materials to be used in positron imaging.

### Ahmadi crackdown

Ahmadi municipal inspectors toured the storage sites used by companies to make sure their licenses are valid and that there are no public property violations. Ahmadi municipal safety manager Al-Humaidi Al-Mutairi said the tour resulted in filing four citations and KD 247,000 in fines to companies utilizing public property with expired licenses.

## Authorities ready for locust swarms

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti farms are concerned of a possible attack by locusts after a swarm reached four Saudi agriculture areas in Riyadh, Qassim, Hail and Sharqija. This can threaten Kuwait's agriculture areas, especially Wafra, as it was attacked last April by locusts coming from Saudi Arabia. According to reports, Saudi Arabia has the situation under control, but strong winds may hamper efforts and cause the locusts to reach Kuwait. The swarm originally spread from Somalia and Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa to Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait's farms may also be threatened by locust attacks from the Iranian side.

The Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources announced taking precautions to deal with the huge number of locusts. It announced it is in contact with the Saudi authorities about the situation, who have confirmed the situation is under control. Kuwaiti farmer Yousef Al-Kreibani told Kuwait Times the locusts haven't reached Wafra yet. "We haven't registered any locusts yet, and hope they won't reach us. But we have concerns that strong winds may assist the insects in reaching Kuwait. We are prepared for any attacks with insecticides," he said.

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Indian students stripped for menstruation checks

## Coronavirus leaves 1,770 dead in China and five elsewhere



HONG KONG: An aerial view yesterday shows residential and commercial buildings on Hong Kong island (foreground and top left) and Kowloon (top center and right), either side of Victoria Harbour. —AFP

# Gang steals toilet rolls in Hong Kong

## Toilet paper becoming hot property amid virus outbreak

**HONG KONG:** A gang of knife-wielding men jumped a delivery driver in Hong Kong and stole hundreds of toilet rolls, police said yesterday, in a city wracked by shortages caused by coronavirus panic-buying. Toilet rolls have become hot property in the densely packed business hub, despite government assurances that supplies remain unaffected by the virus outbreak. Supermarkets have found themselves unable to restock quickly enough, leading to sometimes lengthy queues and shelves wiped clean within moments of opening.

There has also been a run on staples such as rice and pasta, as well as hand sanitizer and other cleaning items. Police said a truck driver was held up yesterday by three men outside a supermarket in Mong Kok, a working-class district with a history of "triad" organized crime gangs. "A delivery man was threatened

by three knife-wielding men who took toilet paper worth more than HK\$1,000 (\$130)," a police spokesman said.

A police source told AFP the missing rolls were later recovered and two suspects were arrested on scene although it was not clear if they were directly involved in the armed robbery. Footage from Now TV showed police investigators standing around multiple crates of toilet roll outside a Wellcome supermarket. One of the crates was only half stacked. Hong Kongers reacted with a mixture of bafflement and merriment to the heist.

One woman passing by the scene of the crime who was interviewed by local TV station iCable quipped: "I'd steal face masks, but not toilet roll."

The city, which has 58 confirmed coronavirus cases, is currently experiencing a genuine shortage of face

masks. The hysteria that has swept through Hong Kong since the coronavirus outbreak exploded on mainland China is partly fuelled by the city's tragic recent history of confronting a deadly disease. In 2003, some 299 Hong Kongers died of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), an outbreak that began on the mainland but was initially covered up by Beijing - action that left a lasting legacy of distrust towards the authorities on public health issues.

The new coronavirus outbreak also comes at a time when the city's pro-Beijing leadership has historic low approval ratings after refusing to bow to months of angry pro-democracy protests last year. Authorities have blamed online rumors for the panic-buying and say supplies of food and household goods remain stable. But the panic-buying has

itself created shortages in one of the world's most densely populated cities where supermarkets and pharmacies have limited floor space. Photos posted online have shown some people proudly stuffing their cramped city apartments with packets of hoarded toilet rolls.

On Sunday, the head of the city's Consumer Council warned people not to stockpile toilet rolls in their flats as they were prone to mould in the notoriously humid climate. She also reiterated that there were ample stocks of paper. Supermarket chain Wellcome called yesterday's robbery a "senseless act", and called on people not to bulk buy or hoard toilet roll. "We want to emphasize that we have sufficient toilet roll supply to meet demand," it said in a statement. "The temporary shortage was caused by the sudden and unusual surge in demand." —AFP

## 22 villagers massacred in Cameroon

**YAOUNDE:** Armed men have massacred 22 villagers including 14 children in an anglophone region of Cameroon, according to the United Nations, with the opposition blaming the killings on government troops. The bloodshed occurred on Friday in the Northwest region of Cameroon, James Nunan, a local official with UN humanitarian coordination agency OCHA, told AFP on Sunday.

The central government has been battling separatists in the minority English-speaking regions for three years, a conflict that has left 3,000 people dead and forced more than 700,000 to flee their homes. Nunan said the massacre took place in the village of Ntumbo on Friday, with his team receiving numerous witness testimonies about the incident. The army has denied any involvement.

"Up to 22 civilians were killed, including a pregnant woman and several children," Nunan said, adding that 14 children including nine under age five were among the dead. Eleven of the children were girls, said Nunan, head of OCHA's office for the Northwest and Southwest regions, which are home to the West African country's large English-speaking minority.

### 'Dictatorial regime to blame'

The Movement for the Rebirth of Cameroon, one of the country's two main opposition parties, issued a statement condemning the attacks. "The dictatorial regime (and) the supreme head of the security and defense forces are chiefly responsible for these crimes," it charged. A key figure in the separatist movement, lawyer Felix Agbor Mballa, in a Facebook post also accused "state defense forces" of carrying out the killings.

An army official contacted by AFP denied the allegations, saying simply: "False". No other official response was immediately available. Years of grievances at perceived discrimination by the francophone majority snowballed into a declaration of independence by anglophone forces in October 2017, to which the government responded with a crackdown.

The declaration of independence has not been recognized internationally, although the government has lately responded to the crisis by decentralizing some of its powers. Friday's killings followed elections on February 9 that were marred by violence in the regions blamed both on separatists and security forces. Armed separatists prevented people from voting, threatening reprisals, while government soldiers were a heavy presence.

Separatists kidnapped more than 100 people and torched property in the run-up to the elections. Human Rights Watch (HRW) said. The government has not yet announced the results of the elections or turnout figures. The UN refugee agency said Thursday that almost 8,000 people had fled into Nigeria from Cameroon in the previous two weeks to escape fighting between security forces and armed separatists. The latest arrivals brought the number of refugees to almost 60,000, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a statement. "Refugees reported fleeing violence and some even arrived across the border with gunshot wounds," it said. —AFP

## Storm Dennis wreaks havoc across Britain, parts of France

**LONDON:** Britain yesterday grappled with the fallout from Storm Dennis, with several major incidents declared due to flooding and hundreds of warnings still in place after it battered the country over the weekend. The second severe storm in a week to hit Britain brought high winds of more than 90 miles an hour and more than a month's worth of rain in 48 hours in some places, leading officials to issue rare "danger to life" warnings. The storm also pummeled much of France, with some 20,000 people still without electricity yesterday after suffering power cuts in the northwest of the country and rail traffic disrupted.

"This is not yet over," warned James Bevan, chief executive of the Environment Agency, which is responsible for flood protection in England. "We still have many flood warnings in force and we may still see significant flooding in the middle of this week from larger rivers," he told BBC radio. Bevan said more than 400 homes in England had been flooded while at least 1,000 agency staff were working around the clock alongside emergency officials "to protect and support those communities which have been hit".

### Major incidents declared

More than 600 warnings and alerts - a record number - were issued on Sunday, extending from the River Tweed on the border of England and Scotland, to Cornwall in southwest England. After

a day of torrential rain, major flooding incidents were later declared in south Wales and parts of western England. Some five "severe" warnings - denoting lives could be endangered by the flooding - remained active yesterday on two rivers in Worcestershire and Herefordshire in west central England. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue service on Sunday airlifted to hospital one man pulled from the River Teme, who was in a stable condition yesterday.

But emergency responders suspended the search overnight for a missing woman also swept away by the floodwater near the town of flood-prone town of Tenbury, according to police. "The search has continued this morning, including the use of the police helicopter," said Chief Superintendent Tom Harding, from West Mercia Police. "Sadly, however, due to the circumstances of the length of time in the water and other conditions we believe that this will now be a recovery rather than rescue operation."

Two rivers in south Wales burst their banks, prompting rescue workers to launch operations in several places to evacuate people and their pets trapped in their homes. Police said a man in his 60s died after entering the River Tawe, north of the Welsh city of Swansea but later clarified that the death was not "linked to the adverse weather". On Saturday, the coastguard said the bodies



ROSS ON WYE, United Kingdom: A man uses a plank of wood to paddle a kayak on floodwaters after the River Wye burst its banks yesterday in the aftermath of Storm Dennis. —AFP

of two men were pulled from rough seas off the south coast of England as the storm barreled in. One is thought to have been the subject of a search triggered when a tanker reported that one of its crew was unaccounted for.

### 'More extreme'

In northern England, the defense ministry deployed troops in West Yorkshire, which suffered badly from flooding caused by last weekend's Storm Ciara. There are fears rivers there could burst their banks later on. Newly appointed environment secretary George Eustice said the government had done "everything that we can do with a significant sum of money" to combat increased flooding. "We'll never be able to protect

every single household just because of the nature of climate change and the fact that these weather events are becoming more extreme."

France was also affected by the storm, especially northwestern Brittany where the Finistere and Morbihan regions were temporarily placed on orange alert for rain and flooding, according to the national weather service Météo-France. Electricity provider Enedis said it had deployed 450 staff to restore power to 30,000 homes in Brittany. Power cuts also hit parts of northern and central France. The storm interrupted two high-speed TGV train services, one stopped by a fallen tree and the other by a power failure, the national rail company SNCF said. —AFP

International

# Supreme Leader's loyalists may tighten grip at Iranian elections

## Hardline body disqualifies over 50% of hopefuls

DUBAI: Hardliners are set to tighten control of Iran this week in a parliamentary election stacked in their favor, as the leadership closes ranks in a deepening confrontation with Washington. Big gains by security hawks would confirm the political demise of the country's pragmatist politicians, weakened by Washington's decision to quit a 2015 nuclear deal and reimpose sanctions in a move that stifled rapprochement with the West.

More hardliner seats in the Feb. 21 vote may also hand them another prize—more leeway to campaign for the 2021 contest for president, a job with wide day-to-day control of government. Such wide command of the power apparatus would open an era in which the elite Revolutionary Guards, already omnipresent in the life of the nation, hold ever greater sway in political, social and economic affairs.

Allies of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have ensured hardliners dominate the field, removing moderates and leading conservatives and permitting voters a choice mostly between hardline and low-key conservative candidates loyal to him. "Literally, it is not a race anymore. Hardliners want the presidency. This is the end of moderation for at least a decade if not more," said an official on condition of anonymity.

Like hardliners, conservatives back the ruling theocracy, but unlike them support more engagement with the outside world. Faced with little choice, many voters are likely to be focused on bread-and-butter issues, in an economy hurt by US President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" policy towards Iran. With Iran facing growing isolation and threats of conflict over its nuclear standoff with the United States, and growing discontent at home, the turnout is seen as a referendum on the establishment—a potential risk for the authorities.

### Revolutionary Guards power

Many Iranians are furious over the handling of

November protests against fuel price hikes which swiftly turned political with demonstrators calling for "regime change", leading to the bloodiest unrest in the history of the Islamic Republic. A crackdown overseen by the Revolutionary Guards killed hundreds and led to the arrest of thousands, according to human rights organizations.

The public is also livid over the accidental shooting down of a Ukrainian passenger plane in January that killed all 176 people on board, mainly Iranians. After days of denials, Tehran admitted that the Guards were to blame. But Khamenei's loyalist candidates are backed by core supporters of the establishment who identify in all aspects of life with the Islamic Republic, insiders said.

"Their supporters believe in the establishment and they will vote because they see it as a religious duty. Hardliners will benefit from a low turnout," said the government official. Speaking to Reuters, some authorities predicted a turnout of about 60% for the 290-seat assembly, compared to 62% and 66% respectively in the 2016 and 2012 votes. Some 58 million Iranians out of 83 million are eligible to vote.

"Iran is not only Tehran or other major cities where voters are politically motivated. In small cities, towns and generally in rural areas people will vote," a hardline official said. With no independent, reliable opinion polls in Iran it is hard to gauge which way the ballot will go, let alone the extent to which Khamenei and the Guards will exert their influence over the vote to cement their grip on power.

But pro-reform voters are dismayed by disarray in their camp and the failure of pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani to abide by an election pledge to ease social and political restrictions. "Many Iranians (who voted for Rouhani) have lost their hope for reforms," said a reformist former official. "They don't trust the reform movement anymore. They want change and only change."

A hardline dominated parliament could mount pressure on Rouhani, architect of the nuclear pact, who has been criticized by Khamenei's influential allies for his performance in power. "I beg you not to be passive ... I am asking you ... not to turn your back on ballot boxes," Rouhani said in a speech on Feb. 11. The slate of hardline candidates is dominated by the Guards, who answer directly to Khamenei, and their affiliated Basij militia, insiders and analysts say.

Aside from its vast economic holdings, the Guards have grown more politically assertive in recent decades, with increasing numbers of veterans in legislative and executive powers. Former Guards commander Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who according to a leaked US diplomatic cable from 2008 has benefited from strong support from Khamenei's son Mojtaba, tops the parliamentary lists of main hardline groups in Tehran.

### Balance of power

"We will serve wherever the revolution and our Imam (Khamenei) need us," said a former Guardsman, who served in the government of former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. His re-election in 2009 sparked protests for months against alleged vote-rigging. Parliamentary elections have scant impact on Iran's foreign or nuclear policies, which are set by Khamenei, and major reform parties have been either banned or dismantled since 2009. But the vote shows shifts in the factional balance of power in Iran's unique dual system of clerical and republican rule.

Mass disqualifications of candidates in 2004 parliamentary polls sidelined reformists for years. It ushered in hardline Ahmadinejad in 2005. In 2016 voters handed gains to centrists and moderates, suggesting many sought more open democracy and wider freedoms. This time, the Guardian Council, a hardline vetting body, has disqualified 6,850 hopefuls out of 14,000, ranging from moder-



BAABDA, Lebanon: A handout picture shows Lebanese President Michel Aoun (right) meeting with Iran's Parliament Speaker Ali Larjani at the presidential palace east of the capital Beirut yesterday. — AFP

ates to conservatives, from contesting parliament polls. About a third of sitting lawmakers have also been barred.

"We did what we were supposed to do, now it is your (voters) turn," said head of the Council Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati. Several politicians including Rouhani strongly criticized the Council's rejection of over 50% of hopefuls. The watchdog denied any bias. Khamenei, who has the final say in Iran's complex ruling system, has backed the watchdog, saying parliament has no place for "those scared of speaking out against foreign enemies". — Reuters

## Hairdresser breaks taboos to keep 'Afro' alive

MAPUTO: Cadino Chipanga decided 20 years ago to take up a trade then seen as taboo in Mozambique: a male hairdresser looking after women. He also resolved to focus on dreadlocks - a style unacceptable in some African communities. Now 38, Chipanga has no regrets. He owns Carapinha, a small business that includes three salons in Maputo and a range of hair products.

"The idea was to create a salon whose focus was to tend to natural hair at a time when no one cared about it anymore. People were using more and more chemicals and synthetic hair," Chipanga said in the workshop where he makes his hair products on the outskirts of the capital. "Our mission is to bring back the love for Afro hair. That's why I embarked on this endeavour."

Chipanga makes his hair products,

including shampoo, from a plant called Nlhelho or Devil's Thorn, which was used by his mother and grandmother. The hair master, as Chipanga is popularly known, also uses sunflower and coconut as ingredients. Even though Chipanga is not Rastafarian, dreadlocks in Africa are often associated with Rastafarianism and most communities have been slow to embrace the culture. In some countries, Rastafarian children have been sent home from school because of their dreadlocks.

"In the old days when we saw a person with dreadlocks we thought it was weird and an aberration ... our mindset has changed, that's why we can have dreadlocks today," said Felicidade Langa, a client at one of Chipanga's salons. "I started this hairstyle because a Carapinha salon is in my neighbourhood. I think other neighborhoods around also want to have a typical Rastafarian salon, so if he keeps opening salons in other places it will be good," said Langa. Chipanga is betting on it. "It took some time, but nowadays there are more people embracing their natural hair and things are working out," he said. — Reuters

## Disgruntled Iranians to boycott polls

TEHRAN: Many Iranians, battered by economic sanctions, political turmoil and the lingering threat of military conflict, say they are in no mood to vote in general elections this week. Speaking of heavy hearts and a sense of bitterness, Tehranis complain they are tired of politicians who have failed to keep their word or to raise living standards. "No way! There's no way we are going to vote!" 62-year-old Pari said under the gaze of her daughter who also intends to boycott the parliamentary polls Friday because she no longer trusts politicians.

"It's difficult for everyone in Iran nowadays. We're fed up. We want to send a message that we're not satisfied with the situation," the mother added. President Hassan Rouhani, re-elected in 2017, promised more social and individual freedoms and gave assurances that Iranians would be able to benefit from the fruits of engagement with the West. But many people feel their lives have been crippled by the economic slump and exacerbated by harsh US sanctions since US President Donald Trump in 2018 pulled out of a landmark nuclear deal with Iran.

Added to this has been the threat of military conflict as Trump has ramped up a campaign of "maximum pressure" against the Islamic republic. Pari and her daughter Kiana were strolling through Tajrish, one of the capital's most exclusive neighborhoods where displays of wealth contrast sharply with extreme poverty. Elegant women in dark glasses steered their SUVs through streets lined with roadside vendors who displayed their wares on the grimy pavement.

A shoeshine boy sitting on the curb of



TEHRAN: Pari Aghazadeh, a 27-year-old Iranian woman who works in fashion, speaks during an interview in the southern district of Nazi Abad in the capital on Feb 12, 2020. — AFP

the icy sidewalk was narrowly missed by a motorcycle online food delivery rider speeding the wrong way up a traffic-choked street. "There's no work, no future," said Kiana, her jet-black hair falling out from under her headscarf. Above all, she said, she no longer "trusts the authorities" and is dismayed by their "lack of honesty". The credibility of Iran's leaders took a hit among many when authorities denied last month that Iranian armed forces had mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian airliner, before they came clean days later.

At Tehran's Grand Bazaar, beyond the stunning turquoise-blue mosaic entrance, hundreds of people scrambled into the historic market, a labyrinth of alleys and shops underneath stone vaulted ceilings. Browsing for brass dishware, linen bedding, refined carpets and clothes, shoppers elbowed their way through the crowd. Standing at the entrance was Amir Mohtasham, a 38-year-old who has been jobless for two years and who said he worries about the lack of vision of those candidates allowed to stand for elections. "It seems none of the candidates has a plan for anything," he said. — AFP

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## International

# Hundreds of Americans flown home from cruise ship, 14 with coronavirus

## Coronavirus leaves 1,770 dead in China and five elsewhere

SHANGHAI: More than 300 American passengers have been flown home from a cruise ship after two weeks under quarantine off Japan, including 14 found to have coronavirus who were kept isolated on the flight. The cruise ship Diamond Princess, by far the largest cluster of coronavirus cases outside China, has become the biggest test so far of other countries' ability to contain an outbreak that has killed 1,770 people in China and five elsewhere.

Across mainland China, officials said the total number of coronavirus cases rose by 2,048 to 70,548. That was slightly more new cases than were reported on Sunday, but hundreds fewer than reported on Saturday. Chinese authorities say the stabilization in the number of new cases is a sign that measures they have taken to halt the spread of the disease are having an effect.

However, epidemiologists say it is probably still too early to say how well the outbreak is being contained within China and its central Hubei province, where the virus first appeared. China has responded to the COVID-19 virus by effectively locking down Hubei's provincial capital Wuhan, a megacity of 11 million people. The Communist Party is also struggling to prevent the economy from crashing, as the movement of people and goods around the country and to and from China faces major disruption.

Yesterday China's central bank cut the interest rate on its medium-term lending, a move that is expected to pave the way for a reduction in the benchmark loan prime rate on Thursday. Beijing has also announced plans for cuts in taxes and fees. Even so, economists expect China's economic growth to slow. Ratings agency Moody's yesterday lowered its 2020 GDP growth forecast to 5.2%, making it likely China would miss a goal to double GDP over the decade to 2020.

### Cruise ships

Outside China, around half of all known cases of the virus have been found aboard the Diamond Princess, where around 400 people have tested positive since the cruise liner was ordered to stay under quarantine

off Japan on Feb 3. The United States was the first country to evacuate its passengers from the ship, flying them out overnight on two chartered aircraft to military bases in Texas and California, where they would be held in quarantine for two weeks.

The state department said that after passengers were sent to the airport, officials discovered 14 had tested positive. They were isolated on the flight and permitted to fly home, it said. Other countries were expected to follow swiftly, having announced plans to repatriate citizens from the ship. Around half of the 3,700 passengers and crew are Japanese.

Authorities around the world were also trying to track down passengers from another cruise liner, the Westerdam, which was turned away from ports across Southeast Asia for two weeks before docking in Cambodia on Thursday. One American passenger who disembarked in Cambodia tested positive for the virus in Malaysia on Saturday. Carnival Corp, which operates both cruise liners, said it was cooperating with authorities in trying to trace passengers from the Westerdam. None of the other 1,454 passengers and 802 crew had reported any symptoms, it said.

"Guests who have already returned home will be contacted by their local health department and be provided further information," a statement from the company's Holland America Line unit said. Hundreds of passengers are still in Cambodia, either on the ship or in hotels. "We will all be tested for the coronavirus today and tomorrow by the Cambodian Ministry of Health," said passenger Holley Rauen, a public health nurse and midwife from Fort Myers, Florida. "We have no idea when we get to get home."

### China back to work?

After an extended Lunar New Year holiday, China urgently needs to get back to work. There is a proposal to delay the opening of the annual session of parliament, due on Feb 24. Some cities remain in lockdown, streets are deserted, employees are nervous, and travel



PHNOM PENH: A handout photo shows passengers, who disembarked from the Westerdam cruise ship in Sihanoukville, sitting on a bus for a visit of the capital yesterday. —AFP

bans and quarantine orders are in place around the country. Many factories have yet to re-open, disrupting supply chains in China and beyond.

In Japan, where data showed yesterday that the economy had already shrunk last quarter at the fastest pace in almost six years, the impact of the virus is expected to show up in the current quarter, stoking fears of recession. Trade-dependent Singapore downgraded its 2020 economic growth forecast and has said recession is possible. It is set to unveil measures to

cushion the blow today.

Organizers of the Tokyo Marathon have decided to limit the March 1 race to top-level athletes, banning 38,000 general participants, a person with knowledge of the issue said. Japan's Imperial Household Agency said it would cancel Emperor Naruhito's public birthday address on Feb 23, his first since his coronation last year. The event regularly attracts tens of thousands of people to the inner grounds of the Imperial Palace in the heart of Tokyo. —Reuters

### News in brief

#### 24 killed in church attack

OUAGADOUGOU: Gunmen have killed 24 people and wounded 18 in an attack on a Protestant church in a village in northern Burkina Faso, the regional governor said yesterday. A group of "armed terrorists" burst into the village of Pansi, in Yagha province "and attacked the peaceful local population after having identified them and separated them from non-residents", Colonel Salfo Kabore said in a statement sent to AFP. The assault occurred on Sunday during a weekly service, security officials said. "The provisional toll is 24 killed, including the pastor... 18 wounded and individuals who were kidnapped," Kabore said. A resident of the nearby town of Sebba said Pansi villagers had fled there for safety. One of the poorest countries in the world, Burkina Faso is on the front line of a jihadist insurgency advancing in the Sahel. —AFP

#### Pakistan to import insecticides

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is likely to import insecticides from arch-rival India to brace itself for any locust attacks this summer, bypassing a ban on trade between the neighboring nations. A copy of Cabinet agenda for a today meeting seen by Reuters has the import option on it. Pakistan severed all diplomatic and trade ties with New Delhi in August after India revoked the special status of Kashmir, a disputed territory between the two rivals, who have fought two of their three wars over the Himalayan region. "Yes definitely, there is a fear of locust attack in June-July, this is the reason we are planning and preparing in advance," Dr Falak Naz, Director General Department of Plant Protection, Ministry of National Food Security and Research said. China, currently battling the coronavirus outbreak, is the other place from where Pakistan can import the insecticides. —Reuters

#### Taliban kills five soldiers

KABUL: At least five Afghan soldiers were killed when Taliban fighters stormed their base in northern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, as the country waits for an expected "reduction in violence" before a US-Taliban deal. The attack happened in Shora Khak area of volatile Kunduz province on Sunday, days after US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said an agreement with the Taliban was in place for a "conditions-based" seven-day reduction in violence. "Unfortunately, five army soldiers were martyred and three wounded," the Afghan defense ministry said in a statement, adding that Taliban fighters also suffered casualties. Enhamuddin Rahmani, a spokesman for Kunduz police said the fighting lasted several hours and both sides suffered casualties. The Taliban's official spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed on Twitter that the militants had killed 19 security forces in the attack. —AFP

#### Egyptian academic probed

CAIRO: The Egyptian public prosecutor's office is pursuing a criminal investigation into an Egyptian researcher studying in Italy on charges of spreading fake news that posed a threat to security and social stability, it said on Sunday. Patrick Zaki, a graduate student at the University of Bologna, was arrested on Feb 7 when he arrived at Cairo airport on a visit to see his family, according to a statement the following day from the Cairo-based Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) where he is also a researcher. Zaki is being investigated over charges of "broadcasting false news aimed at disrupting security and social peace and for using the internet to disrupt public order and endanger society," the prosecutor's statement said. —Reuters

## Far right arrests reveal 'shocking' mosque plot

BERLIN: Members of a German extreme right group arrested last week were believed to have been plotting "shocking" large-scale attacks on mosques similar to the ones carried out in New Zealand last year, the government said yesterday. Officials said that investigations into 12 men detained in police raids across Germany Friday had indicated they planned major attacks, following media reports over the weekend the group aimed to launch several simultaneous mass-casualty assaults on Muslims during prayers.

"It's shocking what has been revealed here, that there are cells here that appear to have become radicalized in such a short space of time," interior ministry spokesman Bjoern Gruenewaldt told reporters at a Berlin press conference. "It is the task of the state, and of course of this government, to protect free practice of religion in this country, with no reference to what religion it might be." Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert said. "Anyone practicing their religion in Germany within our legal order should be able to do so without being endangered or threatened."

## Fear of Big Brother guides rules on AI

BRUSSELS: Amid fears of a Big Brother-style society ruled by machines, the EU will urge authorities and companies to think hard before rolling out facial recognition technology. But the bloc, which will make a much-anticipated announcement this week on the role of artificial intelligence (AI), will stop short of imposing an outright ban, a top official said. Tomorrow, the European Commission will set the stage for European rules on the subject with innovation in the growing sector so far dominated by the US and China.

The commission, the EU's powerful regulator, is eager to answer the worries of European citizens about the rising importance of AI in their lives, amid reports from China of facial-recognition technology used to crack down on dissent. "I find it truly really scary what I saw in Hong Kong," said the EU Commission's executive vice president on digital policy, Margrethe Vestager, who will spearhead the policy. During a wave of anti-Beijing protests, she said, "People could get a message on the phone: 'We know you're there, maybe you should go home'. Not really supportive of the freedom to assemble, or to express yourself." But instead of an outright ban or moratorium, which would require member state backing, Vestager told reporters in Brussels she would recommend that authorities and companies use caution. "What we will say in the paper in a very layered up language is, let's pause and figure out if there are any... circumstances where facial recognition remotely should be authorized," she told reporters.

"Because if we do not pause, then it will... just be everywhere," she warned comparing it to the sudden rise of CCTV security in city centers. Describing the

### Suspended policeman

According to media reports, the group planned to use semi-automatic weapons to copy last March's attacks in Christchurch in New Zealand in which 51 people were killed at two mosques. Investigators learned about the plot from someone who had infiltrated the group, the reports said. The alleged leader of the group, which was known to the authorities and whose meetings and chat activity had been under observation, had detailed his plans at a meeting organized with his accomplices last week.

According to German daily Bild, the leader was a 53-year-old from Augsburg named by investigators as Werner S. Prosecutors said Friday they had launched early morning raids to determine whether the suspects already had weapons or other supplies that could be used in an attack. Of the 12 men arrested on Friday, four are believed to have founded the group while eight more had promised to support them with money and weapons.

The suspects, all of whom are German citizens, also included a police officer previously suspended over his links to the far right. North-Rhine Westphalia state interior minister Herbert Reul said Friday. Bild claimed to have identified him as Thorsten W, a 50-year-old medieval history enthusiast whose posts online included pictures of himself with a sword and shield and rants describing Germany as a "radical left dictatorship".

spread of cameras, she said: "First you put up one, but then it has a blind angle and then you put the other one... All of a sudden you have cameras everywhere." Caution is also needed because the uses of facial recognition are wide-ranging - from unlocking smartphones to capturing criminals - and often inaccurate and in need of development.

### 'For real'

The former Danish finance minister, who is also in charge of enforcing EU competition rules, underlined that AI was a vast subject and that any regulation should be mindful of not punishing smaller innovators, which would only benefit major players. Big tech firms familiar to everyday users - such as Facebook or Tencent - are mainly from the United States or China. Europe meanwhile is seen as a leader on regulation, notably with rules on data privacy that have been widely replicated elsewhere.

But with AI, Vestager said Europe wanted to be a player and not just a sheriff. And if Europe is to develop tech giants, it will probably be in business services and network infrastructure, and not mass market sites or social media. "If you want to have a say about things that we consider risky then you should be able to do it yourself," she said. Europe wants to be "sovereign" on AI and protect "the integrity of our grids, of our infrastructure of our research," she said.

But this was not against anyone, she insisted, amid talk of a high tech cold war between the US and China with Europe caught in the middle. "It's about us, what we would like to be able to do." Other proposals tomorrow will include a push to make data centers more energy-efficient and be carbon neutral by 2030. The EU will also offer a voluntary labeling scheme for companies that abide by EU rules and values on AI. "We don't want to regulate anything that starts with A and ends with an I. That doesn't make any sense," Vestager said. "But where there is risk, it will be for real." —AFP



KARLSRUHE, Germany: Picture shows police officers bringing a man believed to be one of the 12 men arrested a day earlier in a nationwide probe into an extreme-right at the Federal Supreme Court (Bundesgerichtshof) on Feb 15, 2020. —AFP

### 'Vigilant'

German authorities have turned increased attention to the country's underground extreme right scene since the murder of conservative local politician Walter Luebeck last June. In an October attack on a synagogue in eastern city Halle, an assailant armed with home-made weapons killed two people at random on the street and in a Turkish restaurant after failing to breach the temple's solid wooden door. Interior ministry spokesman Gruenewaldt said police have identified around 50 extreme right adherents as "dangerous" individuals

who could carry out a violent attack, compared with 660 Islamists and fewer than 10 far-left extremists.

In the summer of 2019, authorities arrested more than 30 people linked to a neo-Nazi movement called "Northern Cross". They were suspected of planning to murder a number of leftwing and pro-migrant figures after ordering body bags and quicklime, a chemical often spread at mass grave sites, regional newspaper group RND reported. Yesterday, Gruenewaldt said that the latest arrests "prove that the security services are remaining vigilant". —AFP

## Death squad disrupters: Filipina patrols help keep drug killings at bay

MANILA: Late each night, a dozen women chat and share a meal before hitting the narrow streets of a Manila suburb where a death squad once roamed. They are the "women's patrol", a group of 18 mothers and grandmothers whose nightly walks through the dimly lit alleys of Pateros have been helping to deter shadowy gunmen behind murders of residents linked to illegal drugs.

Not long after Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte declared a war on drugs in 2016 and promised thousands would die, Pateros was being terrorized by attackers in hoods and ski masks, known locally as the "bonnet gang". With the town of 63,000 paralyzed by fear, the women decided to arm themselves with flashlights and patrol their community, keeping up a nightly presence to disrupt the bonnet gang.

"When we started patrols, the enthusiasm came back to our community and the fear disappeared. Back then, people were afraid to go out," said Jenny Helo, 39, who leads the women through the labyrinth of shops, shacks and informal dwellings. "But when they saw how effective we are, because of how we really go around the community, people regained confidence." The killers have not been caught.

In the deadliest periods of the crackdown, there were as many as four murders linked to drugs each day in the Philippines, many by gunmen riding pillion on motorcycles. The total number of drug-related killings since Duterte unleashed his drugs war is unknown. Police say they killed 5,400 suspects in self-defense during their anti-drugs operations, but deny allegations by activists that elements of the force are involved in the mystery killings that plagued Pateros and other parts of Manila. —Reuters



## International

# India's use of facial recognition tech during protests causes stir

## Activists say India lacks regulation, warn of overreach

**MUMBAI:** When artist Rachita Taneja heads out to protest in New Delhi, she covers her face with a pollution mask, a hoodie or a scarf to reduce the risk of being identified by police facial recognition software. Police in the Indian capital and the northern state of Uttar Pradesh - both hotbeds of dissent - have used the technology during protests that have raged since mid-December against a new citizenship law that critics say marginalizes Muslims.

Activists are worried about insufficient regulation around the new technology, amid what they say is a crackdown on dissent under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose Hindu nationalist agenda has gathered pace since his re-election in May. "I do not know what they are going to do with my data," said Taneja, 28, who created a popular online cartoon about cheap ways for protesters to hide their faces.

"We need to protect ourselves, given how this government cracks down." Critics also accuse authorities of secrecy - highlighting, for instance, that the software's use during Delhi protests was first revealed by the Indian Express newspaper. India's home ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment on facial recognition technology.

Modi's government has rejected accusations of abuse during demonstrations, and accused some protesters of stoking violence. A spokesman for his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party had no immediate comment on concerns over the use of the technology and referred questions to the government. But police said worries about facial recogni-

tion were unwarranted. "I'm only catching targeted people," said Rajan Bhagat, a deputy commissioner of police at Delhi's Crime Records Office. "We don't have any protesters' data, nor do we plan to store it."

He declined to give details of potential arrests, however. When it comes to surveillance, India trails far behind neighboring China. New Delhi, for example, has about 0.9 CCTV cameras for every 100 people, versus about 11.3 per 100 in China's commercial hub of Shanghai, a 2019 report by PreciseSecurity.com showed. The Delhi police use Indian startup Innefu Labs' facial recognition software AI Vision, which also includes gait and body analysis.

"If somebody is throwing stones at a police officer, doesn't he have a right to take a video and identify him?" said Innefu co-founder Tarun Wig, 36. Police in about 10 Indian states use Innefu products, Wig said. Financial fraud analytics are among the services provided by Innefu, which published a social media analysis in January that concluded much criticism of the new citizenship law came from arch-enemy Pakistan to "destabilize the harmony" of India.

The company is representative of homegrown artificial intelligence startups tapping into booming demand for facial biometrics in India, in part thanks to their testing on Indian faces and more affordable prices. A few established foreign firms, such as Japanese telecommunications and IT giant NEC Corp, also operate in India, where the market is expected to grow from about \$700 million in 2018 to more than \$4 billion by 2024, TechSci Research said in a report.

### Uttar Pradesh arrests

Facial recognition helped police in Uttar Pradesh, home to 220 million people, detain a "handful" of the more than 1,100 people arrested for alleged links to violence during protests, said O P Singh, its police chief who retired last month. Singh gave no details but said the technology helped cut the numbers of wrongful arrests and highlighted the state's extensive database of more than 550,000 "criminals". Rights groups have decried what they call excessive force in Uttar Pradesh, which has the largest number of representatives in parliament and is governed by hardline Hindu priest and Modi ally Yogi Adityanath. The state says tough policies have restored order. Startup Staqu is supplying its product, the Police Artificial Intelligence System, to police in eight states, including Uttar Pradesh, says the firm's co-founder, Atul Rai.

Fears of mass surveillance in India were exaggerated, said Rai, 30, citing difficulties in collecting information because of India's large population of 1.3 billion. But there was a need for regulation to avoid potential problems, he added. Police should have clear rules on use of facial recognition technology and there should be disclosure of the software's audits and algorithms, the non-profit Internet Freedom Foundation says. "What India is seeing is a kind of personal data Wild West," said its executive director Apar Gupta.

### Pan-India facial recognition

Law enforcement across India could soon be using

facial recognition technology. Modi's government is seeking bids to create a nationwide database, the National Automated Facial Recognition System, to help match images captured from CCTV cameras with existing databases, including those of passport and police authorities. A foreign firm is expected to win the contract, since the bid terms require firms' algorithms to be evaluated by the United States' National Institute of Standards and Technology. Both Innefu and Staqu said they were not bidding.

Japanese firm NEC's India subsidiary helped develop the Aadhaar biometrics identity system and supplies facial recognition technology to law enforcement in the diamond industry hub of Surat in western Gujarat state. The software has not been used during protests, however, the city's police commissioner, R B Brahmabhatt said. NEC spokesman Shinya Hashizume declined to comment on whether the company was bidding to build the nationwide database.

The system will boost police efficiency, says the National Crime Records Bureau, which launched the tender that closes at the end of March. But critics say it puts India on the path to China-style mass surveillance. Worried about being identified, a 21-year-old Muslim protester in New Delhi has adopted the pseudonym Moosa Ali and sometimes covers his face with handkerchiefs. "We don't know enough about these things, but we are trying to take some precautions," he said. — Reuters

## India's apex court orders equal roles for women in army

**NEW DELHI:** India's top court ruled yesterday that women could serve as army commanders, dismissing the government's stance that male soldiers were not ready to accept orders from female officers as "disturbing". The Supreme Court also ordered the government to extend permanent service - which has only been applicable to men so far - to all women officers, signaling a move towards gender parity in the traditionally male bastion.

With this women will get the same opportunities and benefits as their male colleagues, including ranks, promotions and pensions, and be allowed to serve longer tenures. Currently women are inducted through a short service commission that lets them work for up to 14 years, and only allowed permanent commission in the army's legal and educational wings.

"To cast aspersions on their abilities on the ground of gender is an affront not only to their dignity as women but to the dignity of the members of the Indian Army," judges said in their ruling. Last week the government opposed women being appointed to top roles such as colonels and brigadiers, saying most soldiers were men from rural backgrounds who were not "mentally schooled to accept women officers in command". The government also argued that men and women officers were physically different and could not be treated equally.

The top court rebuked the government, describing its views as "disturbing" and urged "the need for change in mindsets to bring about true equality in the army". It,



**WAGAH, India:** Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel patrol at the India-Pakistan Wagah border post, some 35 km from Amritsar, yesterday. — AFP

however, did not rule on deploying women in combat roles, saying a competent authority needed to decide. India, with one of the largest armies in the world, has long resisted including women in combat roles, citing concerns over women's vulnerability if captured and over their physical and mental ability to cope with front-line deployments.

India's air force and navy offer permanent commission to women as well as select combat roles. Most countries employ women in various roles in their armed forces but only a handful, including Australia, Germany, Israel and the United States, allow them to take on combat roles. India

began recruiting women to non-medical positions in the armed forces in 1992, yet they make up about 4% of the army's more than one million personnel, according to latest data.

Aishwarya Bhati, a lawyer who represented female officers at court, lauded yesterday's judgment as one that would remove discrimination and boost women's role in the army. "They (judges) have completely negated all the farcical stands raised by the army to deny women equal opportunities," she said. "These battles are watershed moments not just for women in the Indian army, but for women across the world." — Reuters

## Syria forces consolidate control of Aleppo, vow to wipe out militants

**BEIRUT:** The Syrian army said yesterday it had taken full control of dozens of towns in Aleppo's northwestern countryside and it would press on with its campaign to wipe out militant groups "wherever they are found". The advances were made after President Bashar Al-Assad's forces drove insurgents from the M5 highway linking Aleppo to Damascus, reopening the fastest route between Syria's two biggest cities for the first time in years in a big strategic gain for Assad.

Backed by heavy Russian air strikes, the government forces have been fighting since the start of the year to recapture the Aleppo countryside and parts of neighboring Idlib province where anti-Assad insurgents hold their last strongholds. Government air strikes yesterday hit Darat Izza, near the Turkish border about 30 km north of Aleppo city, wounding several civilians and forcing two hospitals to close, according to hospital staff.

Witnesses also reported air strikes in southern areas of Idlib province. The advances have sent hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians fleeing towards the border with Turkey in the biggest single displacement of the nine-year-old war. It has also upset the fragile cooperation between Ankara and Moscow, which back opposing factions in the conflict. Turkey and Russia began a new round of talks in Moscow on Monday after several demands by Ankara that Assad's forces should back down and a ceasefire be put in place.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that militant attacks on Russian bases and Syrian positions have continued and "it is not possible to leave this unanswered". "Troops from Russia and Turkey on the ground in Syria, in Idlib, are in constant contact with each other, looking at changes in the conditions. They have a full understanding of each other," said Lavrov. However, the Syrian armed forces said in a statement they would push on with what they called their "sacred and noble task to rid what remains of terrorist organizations wherever on Syria's geography they are found".

They had taken full control of dozens of towns in Aleppo's northwestern countryside, they said. Pro-Damascus Al-Watan newspaper said the M5 highway, a vital artery in northern Syria, would be ready for civilian use by the end of the week. Aleppo city, once Syria's economic hub, was the scene of some of the most vicious fighting of the war between 2012 and 2016.

The Syrian army had also opened the international roadway from northern Aleppo to the towns of Zahraa and Nubl towards the Turkish border, a military news service run by Lebanon's Assad-allied pro-Damascus Hezbollah



**DARRET EZZA, Syria:** A member of the Syrian Civil Defense, also known as the "White Helmets", inspects debris and rubble while searching for survivors at a destroyed hospital in this town about 30 km northwest of the northern city of Aleppo yesterday after a reported air strike hit the building. — AFP

group said. The insurgent forces arrayed against Assad include Western-backed rebels and jihadist militants.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has said his military will drive back Syrian forces if they do not withdraw from Idlib by the end of the month. On Saturday, he appeared to move that date forward, saying Turkey would "handle it" before the end of the month if there was no pull-back. Alarmed by the new refugee crisis on its border, Turkey has sent thousands of troops and hundreds of convoys of military equipment to reinforce its observation posts in Idlib, established under a 2018 de-escalation agreement with Russia.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump has called for Russia to end its support for the Syrian regime's "atrocities" as he expressed US concern over violence in the Idlib region, the White House said Sunday. Turkey's foreign minister also pressed his Russian counterpart over the attacks by Damascus on the last rebel-held bastion in the country. Backed by Russian air power, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made fresh gains Sunday as he intensified his assault on the holdout northwestern province of Idlib.

In a call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Trump "expressed concern over the violence in Idlib, Syria and... conveyed the United States' desire to see an end to Russia's support for the Assad regime's atrocities." Turkey has 12 observation posts in Idlib as part of a 2018 deal reached between Ankara and Moscow to prevent a regime offensive, but Syrian regime forces have pressed ahead

regardless. Four of the Turkish posts are believed to be encircled by Syrian forces, and Ankara has threatened to attack Damascus if they do not retreat by the end of February. "I stressed that the attacks in Idlib must stop and it was necessary to establish a lasting ceasefire that would not be violated," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told journalists at the Munich Security Conference, after he met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Rebel supporter Turkey and Damascus ally Russia have worked closely on Syria in recent years despite being on opposing sides of the nine-year conflict. A Turkish delegation will head to Moscow, after Russian officials visited Ankara last weekend but failed to reach a concrete deal. War monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on Sunday said regime forces "were in control of all the villages and small towns around Aleppo for the first time since 2012."

Regime forces have for weeks been making gains in northwestern Syria and chipping away at territory held by jihadists and allied rebels, focusing their latest operations on the west of Aleppo province. The Russian-backed offensive has triggered the largest wave of displacement in Syria's civil war, with 800,000 people fleeing since it began in December, the United Nations has said. Backed by Russia, Iran and the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah, Assad's forces now control more than 70 percent of Syria and the president has repeatedly vowed to retake the entire country. — Agencies

## India summons Turkey envoy over Erdogan's remarks on Kashmir

**NEW DELHI:** India summoned the Turkish ambassador yesterday to lodge a diplomatic protest over President Tayyip Erdogan's remarks on the disputed region of Kashmir and warned it would have a bearing on bilateral ties. During a visit to Pakistan last week, Erdogan said the situation in Indian Kashmir was worsening because of sweeping changes New Delhi introduced in the Muslim-majority territory and that Turkey stood in solidarity with the people of Kashmir.

India, which considers all of Kashmir an integral part of the country, told Turkish envoy Sakir Ozkan Torunlar that Erdogan's comments lacked any understanding of the history of the Kashmir dispute, the Indian foreign ministry said. "This recent episode is but one more example of a pattern of Turkey interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. India finds that completely unacceptable," foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said.

He said that India had served a strong demarche, or formal diplomatic note. India withdrew Kashmir's autonomy in August and brought it under federal rule as a way to integrate the territory fully into India and quell a 30-year revolt. Pakistan, which controls a part of Kashmir, slammed the measure, and other Muslim-majority countries such as Turkey and Malaysia joined in calls for India to reconsider its actions.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration has put curbs on palm oil imports from Malaysia in retaliation and officials have said it is planning to cut some imports from Turkey as well. India blames Pakistan for stoking the revolt in the territory in which tens of thousands of people have been killed. It accused Turkey of trying to justify its arch foe's use of "cross border terrorism."

"These developments have strong implications for our bilateral relations," the foreign ministry spokesman said, referring to Erdogan's comments. Pakistan denies direct involvement in the rebellion, but says it provides diplomatic and moral support to the Kashmiri people in their struggle for self-determination. Erdogan told Pakistan's parliament that the Kashmir problem cannot be solved through pressure but on the basis of justice and fairness. — Reuters

## Indian students stripped for menstruation checks

**AHMEDABAD:** Scores of women students staged a protest outside an Indian college saying they were forced to strip to check if they were menstruating. The students were told to undress after a used sanitary napkin was found in a garden outside Sahjanand Girls Institute, where they are banned from the hostel when they are having their periods. "There are no words to describe the humiliation that we faced," said one of the students protesting outside the college in Bhuj, in the western state of Gujarat.

Deep-rooted social taboos remain in India around menstruating women. In some rural areas, women are made to sleep separately during periods. They are banned from entering some temples. College authorities lined up 68 students in the washroom and ordered them to undress one by one, the students told reporters. The college is run by the conservative Hindu sect Swaminarayan. The sect runs lavish temples around the world, including in London. Its rules bar students from staying in the hostel during their periods.

Menstruating women students must stay in an isolated basement area and keep away from the kitchen and the place of worship. They also have to sit at the back of the classroom during lectures. The college said it had set up an inquiry and indicated action could be taken against the staff behind the checks. College trustee Pravin Pindoria said: "The girls were informed about the hostel rules before they took admission. I have called a meeting of the administrative committee which will take action against the responsible persons." — AFP

## Analysis

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## Farmers find sweet spot with nutritious, drought-hardy crop

A sweet scent filled the air as workers dressed in white gumboots, aprons and hats mixed ingredients and rolled out dough at a modern factory in central Kenya, the only one of its kind in Meru County. The dozen products made there, including bread, cakes, doughnuts and crisps, all share the same main ingredient: sweet potato. Owned and run by Meru Friends Sacco, a savings and credit cooperative, the facility in Maua town was established two years ago as a way to help people access nutritional food in a region where crops are routinely destroyed by drought.

The cooperative's members of more than 1,000 farmers were motivated by a UN report warning climate change and poverty were major threats to health in the lower parts of Meru, explained Patrick Mbaabu, the factory's general manager. They wanted to find a crop that would boost climate resilience in the area while also addressing the issue of malnutrition, he added. After first considering bananas and Irish potatoes, the farmers settled on sweet potatoes because they are known for being rich in Vitamin A and essential minerals, Mbaabu said.

In addition, the hot, dry weather that makes it hard to grow thirsty crops in Meru is ideal for the sweet potato plant, said Julius Inyngi, chairman of Meru Friends Sacco. "The warmer the area, the faster the crop grows," he said. Kenya's National Drought Management Authority and the European Union helped pay for the factory, which cost 40 million Kenyan shillings (\$398,000), and also provide training for the farmers on how to run it and grow the potatoes.

As the farmers in Meru Friends Sacco urge their neighbors to grow more sweet potato, they highlight the fact that the under-rated plant is easy to cultivate - even in poor soil - and versatile, which adds value to the crop, Mbaabu explained. Interested farmers are provided with drought-tolerant, disease-resistant vines that have been propagated for the project by the Kaguru Agricultural Training Centre, under Meru County's agriculture department.

There is no accurate figure yet for the number of farmers supplying the factory with sweet potatoes, but their ranks are steadily growing as farmers are drawn by the extra income and a nutritional boost for their families, Mbaabu said. After registering with the project last year, Grace Kiambi planted her sweet potato vines among the bushes of khat on her 0.5-acre farm in Maua. Growing the crops together means each benefits from the nutrients the other releases into the soil and also makes watering more efficient, Kiambi said. Before the project, she would earn an average of 8,000 Kenyan shillings each month selling khat, a mildly narcotic leaf - today, she brings in nearly double that. "Planting sweet potatoes has helped transform my life," Kiambi said.

### All-year food supply

Sweet potatoes are well-suited to the county's erratic rainfall, said Inyngi of Meru Friends Sacco. The vines can be planted at any time of year and require little water, he added. They grow fast as long as the weather is warm, so farmers are often advised to leave the roots in the ground for as long as they can and only harvest them when needed, he noted. "That helps provide farmers with a continuous food supply, even when other crops have failed," he said. Hellen Ringera, a nutrition coordinator for Meru County, said growing sweet potato could help improve health in the area. She pointed to the county's latest malnutrition survey, carried out in 2014, which revealed a quarter of Meru's children were stunted - too short for their age. "Besides providing a rich source of energy and nutrition, the project will also help increase household incomes (and) employment opportunities," she said.

### High demand

Before they joined the project, farmers used to rely on brokers who bought their produce at "throw-away prices", said Martin Munene, agriculture director for Meru County. Now they sell directly to the factory for 50 Kenyan shillings per kilogram, double what they got before, he added. "With the sweet potato value addition, we are in line with the government's agendas of having a food-secure and healthy country while creating employment for the youth and women," Munene said.

The factory sells its sweet potato-based products and flours - all certified by the Kenya Bureau of Standards - to local businesses and schools. It produces about 3,000 loaves of bread and 320 crates of doughnuts per day, as well as flour, among other goods. Although the factory guarantees the farmers payment within seven days, it sometimes does not make enough profit to also cover the wages of all the factory workers, Mbaabu said.

And demand for sweet potato products is higher than the current roster of farmers can handle, he explained, a problem the group is trying to solve by bringing more into the project. — AFP

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(Clockwise from top left) Linette Kirungi, who was attacked with acid by her boyfriend in 2012 because she wanted to focus on her career first and not marry him, poses for a portrait in her office in Kampala on Sept 12, 2019, where she is a program officer at End Acid Violence Uganda; Jennifer Mutesi, who had acid poured over her face in 2011 by a co-worker that was jealous of her success, poses for a portrait outside her small bar in Kampala on Nov 1, 2019; Daniel Kasolo, who was attacked with acid when he was 18 years old by his close friend, poses for a portrait at his home in Nansana on Nov 1, 2019; Namudu Madina, who was attacked by her husband with acid, poses for a portrait at her home on the outskirts of Kampala on Oct 15 2019. — AFP photos

## Uganda acid attack survivors seek justice

Ugandan university student Linette Kirungi was on her way to class when she heard footsteps behind her. The next thing she felt was liquid on her face - then burning agony. She had just turned down a marriage proposal from her ex-boyfriend. He responded by throwing acid. "I screamed and fell down," the 27-year-old told AFP. "The pain was too much. The skin was peeling off."

Acid is cheap and easy to find. Some just use acid for car batteries. It melts the flesh, sometimes to the bone. That attack was in 2012. Today, Kirungi works to support survivors of acid attacks in Uganda -and close a legal loophole that allows attackers to easily evade justice. In

Uganda, in 2018, 42 cases were reported to the End Acid Violence campaign group, listing motives including jealousy and relationship arguments.

More go unreported, activists say, who are pushing the government to declare acid attacks a "serious crime" and police to take action. Uganda's Justice Minister Ephraim Kamuntu said he wanted to stamp out the attacks. "We are working... to see that a new law is in place to stop this crime," Kamuntu said. But Kirungi, whose ex-boyfriend was never arrested, said that police lose interest if victims don't follow the case - but they are in hospital struggling with the pain.

"You are in the intensive care unit, and at times you

find you even don't know what is happening," Kirungi said. "Once you fail to appear they will close the case." Survivors of the attacks can spend months in hospital, often lose their jobs, and then end up homeless. "You fear people seeing you," said Jennifer Mutesi, who also was attacked with acid. "If they see you, they are scared of you. And you cry, because of the pain, and your appearance."

It is not just a Ugandan problem. Such attacks happen worldwide. ActionAid, an international organization working for social justice, say acid attacks mainly target women - and the method is used because of the importance placed on a woman's physical appearance. — AFP

## Libya's rival factions dig in for long conflict

Libya's combatants are readying for a long conflict, as foreign weapons flood in, tribesmen close oil ports and rival alliances wrangle over revenues from Africa's largest petroleum reserves. The moves signal deepening animosity in a war that could worsen regional instability and swell the flow of migrants from the Middle East and Africa almost a decade after Muammar Gaddafi's fall in 2011. From his large villa in Libya's east, tribal leader Sanoussi Al-Zwai sees plenty more trouble ahead for the huge country, for years contested by two rival authorities in the east and west.

He is an ally of Commander Khalifa Haftar, whose self-styled Libya National Army (LNA) also has the support of Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan and Russian mercenaries as it tries to capture the capital Tripoli. Zwai's tribe is blocking oil ports, resisting calls by the United States and the United Nations to restart flows of Libya's vital income source, which is run by Haftar's foe, the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA).

Zwai's price for unlocking the ports is for the GNA, based 1,000 km away in Tripoli, to funnel more income to his people. If the GNA resists, he suggests there could be worse to come. "We are not happy with what is happening now, but we have ways to escalate if the international community does not listen to us," said Zwai, leader of a tribe living near eastern oil facilities. "There will be a major escalation. We have other things

(means) to use at the time. If it comes to it, the world knows what escalation is," he told Reuters in the main eastern city of Benghazi, without saying what any escalation would involve.

### Racing to rearm

The standoff over oil is only one of several factors that could prolong the almost year-long conflict over the capital, where the GNA last month secured military backing from Turkey including Turkish-backed fighters from Syria. The combatants are racing to rearm, receiving shipments both before and after foreign backers agreed to enforce a truce at a summit in Germany in January. The inflow of advanced artillery and fighters and advisers breaches pledges made in Berlin to respect an arms embargo, diplomats say.

On Thursday, the UN Security Council called for a ceasefire but Russia, a Haftar backer, abstained from the vote. Diplomats took this as sign that Moscow might not be committed to a UN-led political mediation. Haftar's forces and their foreign backers have stopped fighter jet strikes on the capital. But Western diplomats and experts say this is not due to a genuine desire for peace but because of better air defenses supplied by Turkey.

Until Turkey's intervention, Tripoli officials had started to panic they might lose the capital, the diplomats said. Instead, Syrian fighters sent by Turkey have helped reverse small LNA gains, restoring frontlines to roughly where they settled just after the LNA attack began in April 2019. Estimates from diplomats in Turkey about the number of Syrian fighters vary from 1,500 to 3,000, while the number of Turkish troops was seen at between 200 to 500 including special forces, conventional troops and drone operators. "Both sides are preparing for the next battle," said a Western diplomat.

Diplomacy repeatedly founders on mutual suspicions. "Each time we have any kind of agreement ... we always

saw the same pattern," said Taher El-Sonni, the GNA ambassador to the UN. "It's more like gaining time, then (Haftar decides to) just use force." Turkey has sent heavy trucks by sea, while the UAE flew in 89 shipments totalling 4,680 metric tons between Jan 12 and Feb 16, according flight tracking data and a security source. The UAE did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

### Control of oil wealth

Newly-shipped big guns are already making their presence felt, as shelling from long-range artillery blamed on the LNA hit the city centre for the first time this week. Away from the Tripoli battle, which has displaced at least 150,000 people, the conflict has shifted to the control of oil wealth. Forces allied to Haftar have kept the ports shut for a month, causing losses of some \$1.4 billion. The blockade echoes complaints of neglect going back to Gaddafi, who punished the east for dissent in his long rule.

Pressure from international powers and the United Nations has so far failed to persuade Haftar to reopen the ports and the southern El Sharara oilfield, Libya's largest. The veteran commander has even won some new recognition from Western countries that oil revenues need to be distributed fairly. A senior US diplomat said it was important that oil revenues are distributed equally, something he said should be discussed in UN-led intra-Libyan economic talks, part of a mediation to overcome divisions.

Neither side discloses how much it spends on the conflict. Diplomats say the Tripoli government is less dependent on oil than before, as up to a third of the budget is covered by a fee it levies on all private transactions involving hard currency. Some of the Syrian fighters sent by Turkey are paid directly by Tripoli, diplomats say. — Reuters

## Food firms in China step up 'contactless' pickup and delivery

With the coronavirus outbreak in China continuing to spread, McDonald's Corp, Starbucks Corp and other fast-food companies are ramping up "contactless" pickup and delivery services to keep their workers and customers safe, the companies said. McDonald's has implemented contactless pickup and delivery of Big Macs, fries and other menu items across the China as the outbreak has unfolded. Customers order remotely - on mobile phones or by computers in store - and employees seal the meals in bags and put them in a special spot for pickup without human contact, McDonald's says on its website.

For delivery orders, drivers drop McDonald's packages at building entrances, disinfect their delivery bags and wash their hands more frequently. Drivers carry ID cards showing that they - and the people who made and packaged their food - had their body temperature scanned to prove they do not have a fever. "While we look at how to further improve the process, the stepped-up preventive measures apply to all of our servicing channels," McDonald's said in a statement to Reuters.

The flu-like virus has infected more than 68,500 people globally and killed 1,665 as of Sunday, mostly in the central Chinese province of Hubei. Some major Chinese cities still resemble ghost towns as China struggles to get its economy back on track after a prolonged Lunar New Year holi-

day. In early February, 83 percent of all stores on the Meituan-Dianping delivery platform - one of the largest in the country - were closed, according to Beijing-based data firm BigOne Lab.

Earlier this month, China's National Health Commission recommended that deliveries limit contact. Starbucks suggests customers order coffee via its app and then wait outside its cafes until they get a pick-up notice. Orders are placed on tables just inside cafe entrances. If they do enter Starbucks locations, customers have their temperature taken at the door, as fever is one of the main symptoms of infection, and baristas wear masks.

For delivery, Starbucks said it regularly sterilizes containers and that its delivery people have their temperature taken daily. Indoors staff must wash hands every 30 minutes, and public areas are sterilized every 2 hours. Starbucks delivery is provided by ele.me, owned by e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. The measures illustrate how companies are quickly adapting in order to sell prepared food while keeping people safe. Yum China Holdings Inc rolled out contactless delivery on Jan. 30, with contactless pickup coming two days later at its KFC and Pizza Hut locations, the company said.

### Changing human transactions

There had been contactless delivery in China prior to the crisis, when couriers would drop packages at a consumer's door or lobby or place parcels in lockers for later pickup. But since the outbreak, many residential compounds are limiting access for drivers and asking customers to pick up their own packages. In transactions that previously would have involved one person handing a package to the other, the driver now puts the food down - on the back of a moped, for

instance - and then steps back and waits for the customer to take it and leave. One customer, for example, asked a delivery person to put a parcel in the elevator and press the button for the designated floor. The customer grabbed the package when the doors opened - unaccompanied by the courier, according to a post on CCTV News' social media account on Weibo, said Allison Malmsten, a marketing strategy analyst at Daxue Consulting in Shanghai. The outbreak "redefines contactless food delivery," Malmsten said via email.

Since the start of the outbreak, Yum China has closed more than 30 percent of its locations. There have been "significant interruptions", with sales off as much as 50 percent in those that remained open since the Lunar New Year holiday, versus the same time last year, Chief Financial Officer Ka Wai Yeung said in a Feb. 5 earnings call. The crisis has accelerated the rollout of Yum China's contactless services in China, it said in a statement. "These services have been well-received by customers and are playing an important role in ensuring that our delivery business continues to hold up during this period of significantly reduced dine-in traffic," it said.

Early during the epidemic, meal delivery took a hit because customers feared contact with drivers would put them at risk of infection, according to news reports. Cases of couriers being diagnosed with the virus after working for days arose in Shenzhen and Qingdao cities. The companies' reliance on pickup and delivery to offset some losses does, however, have limitations. Malmsten said many drivers cannot return to work due to travel restrictions, and those who can return face long hours and physical and mental fatigue. As a result, SF Express, the second-largest courier in China, has ramped up hiring, she said. — Reuters

## Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2020

**12** Kuwait credit growth at 4.3% in 2019**13** Singapore lowers growth forecast**14** Al-Nahedh to discuss agility of banks in 4th industrial revolution

BRUSSELS: (Left to right) German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, President of the European Central Bank (ECB) Christine Lagarde, European Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni and French Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire speak as they attend a Eurogroup meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

## Eurozone cautiously eyes fiscal boost

### Eurogroup chief says coronavirus 'temporary' drag on economy

BRUSSELS: Eurozone finance ministers discussed yesterday a document that calls for a more growth-friendly fiscal policy, a move that could lead to Germany's spending more as fears of a downturn grow amid uncertainty from the coronavirus outbreak.

The 19-country eurozone has for years stuck to a "broadly neutral" fiscal policy in its annual recommendations, despite repeated calls from the European Central Bank and slow-growth states for it to invest more. But weak growth last year in Germany, the bloc's largest economy, and fears of a new downturn, fuelled by the coronavirus outbreak in China, are pushing Berlin to soften its stance.

Until now, Germany has preached austerity to reduce fiscal imbalances in high-debt countries, like Italy and Greece. "If downside risks were to materialize, fiscal responses should be differentiated, aiming

for a more supportive stance at the aggregate level," the European Union document says, confirming a Reuters report earlier in February.

China's coronavirus outbreak is among the main downside risks facing the eurozone economy, according to forecasts released last week by the European Commission. Eurogroup chief Mario Centeno yesterday said the effects of the coronavirus outbreak on the European economy would be short-lived despite its big impact on China.

"We expect it to be a temporary effect," said the Portuguese finance minister who also chairs the monthly meetings of his eurozone counterparts.

"We must be concerned with that, but we also need to look at the more long term prospects of growth Centeno said before the meeting that the outbreak's effects on

the eurozone economy were expected, at present, to be "temporary", but he said constant monitoring was necessary to gauge its long-term impact.

Italian Finance Minister Roberto Gualtieri told reporters it was too early to gauge the economic impact of the coronavirus. Regardless of the virus, Gualtieri said "data of the last quarter of 2019 confirm the need that we have at euro area level a supportive fiscal policy, supportive to growth and in particular to investments".

In the last three months of the year, the German economy stagnated due to weaker private consumption and state spending, data showed last week, renewing fears of a recession.

The EU document stresses that higher spending would need to comply with EU fiscal rules which mandate deficits below 3

percent of gross domestic product, among other requirements. It is also not clear how the euro zone defines a downturn that would trigger more expansionary policies.

The ultimate decision on turning the recommendation into more spending lies entirely with national governments.

"We are prudent in our estimations of the disease in China and if that impact will be limited to some decimals of GDP for China, so very limited impact and for Europe, or if it will be bigger," Gualtieri said as he arrived for talks.

Last week the European Commission maintained its eurozone growth forecast at 1.2 percent for 2020, but warned the new coronavirus outbreak could yet hit the economy. The EU's executive said that the outbreak was a new threat to growth in Europe, but expected it would peak in the first quarter. —Agencies

## Facebook sees risks to innovation ahead of EU rules

BRUSSELS: Facebook warned of threats to innovation and freedom of expression yesterday, ahead of the release of a raft of rules by the European Union this week and in the coming months to rein in US and Chinese tech companies. The social media giant laid out its concerns ahead of a meeting of Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg with EU antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager and EU industry chief Thierry Breton in Brussels yesterday.

Vestager and Breton are due to announce proposals tomorrow aimed at exploiting the bloc's trove of industrial data and challenging the dominance of Facebook, Google and Amazon. They will also propose rules to govern the use of artificial intelligence especially in high risk sectors such as healthcare and transport. Other

rules will be announced in the coming months.

Referring to the possibility that the EU may hold internet companies responsible for hate speech and other illegal speech published on their platforms, Facebook said this ignores the nature of the internet.

"Such liability would stifle innovation as well as individuals' freedom of expression," it said in its discussion document. "Retrofitting the rules that regulate offline speech for the online world may be insufficient. Instead, new frameworks are needed."

It suggested instead that authorities could require companies to set up a system for reporting content, publish enforcement data periodically and also define what is illegal content.

Such requirements should not be too onerous, Facebook said. "A regulation requiring companies to 'remove all hate speech within 24 hours of upload' would create still more perverse incentives," it said, suggesting that regulators balance safety with freedom of expression and privacy interests.

It urged regulators to understand the capabilities and limitations of technology in assessing content and



BRUSSELS: European Commission vice-president in charge for Values and Transparency Vera Jourova (L) shakes hands with the founder and CEO of US online social media and social networking service Facebook Mark Zuckerberg (R), in Brussels, yesterday. —AFP

allow internet companies the flexibility to innovate. Zuckerberg's visit came on the heels of visits by Alphabet Chief Executive Sundar Pichai and Microsoft President Brad Smith to Brussels last month. —Reuters

## Dubai's DP World to return to full state ownership

DUBAI: Dubai port and logistics giant DP World said yesterday it would return to full state ownership and delist from the Nasdaq Dubai, in a deal worth some \$2.7 billion. State-owned parent company Port and Free Zone World has offered to acquire the 19.55 percent of DP World's shares currently traded on the Nasdaq Dubai stock exchange, DP World said in a statement.

Returning to full ownership by the emirate of Dubai would free the firm from the demand for short-term returns in the public market.

"The global ports and logistics industry has been undergoing a significant transition," said Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, DP World's chairman and CEO. The move will "enable the company to focus on implementing our mid-to-long-term strategy to build the world's leading logistics provider" backed by a global network including ports, economic zones, industrial parks and inland transportation, he said.

The parent company offered to buy each share of DP World for \$16.75 — a premium of around 29 percent on the market closing price of \$13 per share on Sunday, the statement said.

The new deal puts the market value of DP World, which operates some 78 ports and terminals in 40 countries, at just under \$14 billion. DP World listed part of its equity on the Nasdaq Dubai in 2007 and made another listing on the London Stock Exchange in 2011 before withdrawing less than four years later, citing weak trading volumes. —AFP



## Business

# Traveling the world is easier and more enjoyable with NBK seasonal deals

## Discounts of up to 20% on flights on leading airlines, tailored to customers

**KUWAIT:** Launching exclusive and unique offers all year long to satisfy the needs of its customers in line with their interests and preferences, the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) introduced a new season of these exclusive offers and discounts tailored for travelers when using their eligible NBK Credit or Prepaid Cards to book for flights this year.

The new offers and discounts give NBK Customers the opportunity to travel to any destination in the world and onboard leading airlines while enjoying up to 20 percent discounts on tickets when paying with their eligible NBK credit or prepaid cards.

### Kuwait Airways

NBK Customers avail to a 10 percent discount when booking a flight on Kuwait Airways and on any cabin class including first, business and economy. Customers can book with their eligible NBK Credit or Prepaid Cards on the dedicated link and travel until 1st July 2020.

### British Airways

NBK customers receive up to 15 percent discounts when booking a flight on any cabin class on British Airways with their eligible NBK Credit, Debit or Prepaid Cards. They also receive a 10 percent discount on First Class flights from Kuwait to UK, Europe, USA and Canada. Reservations can be made on the dedicated link while the travel period is valid until 30th June 2021.

### Emirates Airline

NBK Customers will also enjoy exclusive discounts when travelling with Emirates Airline and booking with their NBK Credit, Debit or Prepaid Cards. Customers receive a discount of 12 percent on Business Class and 6 percent on First Class when traveling on regular fares to all Emirates destinations, excluding Jeddah and Madinah. Customers can purchase tickets from the Emirates Airline dedicated link using the promo code KWNBK17. Travel period is valid until 30th October 2020.

### Ethihad Airways

Customers can purchase tickets on Ethihad Airways on the dedicated link with their NBK Credit or Prepaid Cards to avail for a 10 percent discount on first, business and economy classes. Travel period is valid until 30th April 2022.

### Jazeera Airways

NBK Credit and Prepaid Cardholders also avail to up to 12 percent discount on Business Class for flights to Cairo only and up to 15 percent discounts on Economy Class when travelling with Jazeera Airways. Customers can purchase tickets from the Jazeera Airways dedicated link using the promo code NBK20. Travel period is valid until 31st March 2020.

### KLM - Royal Dutch Airlines

NBK Customers receive a 15 percent discount on Business Class and 20 percent on Economy Class when purchasing a ticket with KLM on the dedicated link. Customers avail to the discounts using the promo code KLM4NBKCO for Economy Class tickets, and the promo code KLM4NBKBUS for Business Class tickets. Travel period is valid until 31st December 2020.

Commenting on the exclusive discounts now available to customers, Ghadeer Al-Awadhi, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait said: "We are always looking for ways to reward our customers with the most attractive and exclusive offers while ensuring we provide them with these offers on services and products that satisfy their needs. Our seasonal offers in this first quarter of the year reveal exceptional discounts reaching 20 percent on travel tickets onboard the world's most popular airlines. We have no doubt that our customers will enjoy a unique travel experience with these discounts."

Al-Awadhi added: "NBK is constantly introducing



Ghadeer Al-Awadhi

● Al-Awadhi: We are enabling our customers to enjoy a unique travel experience that satisfies their needs and complements their lifestyle

● We promise to launch more exclusive offers and discounts throughout the year

unique offers that enrich the banking experience of our customers. We promise many more offers to come, all of which will be tailored to their needs and specific lifestyle requirements as they came accustomed to receiving in 2019. We are focused on ensuring their aspirations are heard and that our offers complement them."

Al-Awadhi highlighted that the NBK Credit and Prepaid Card offer their holders an array of privileges and exclusive promotions that enable them to enjoy a unique lifestyle at all times.

NBK offers a wide variety of banking products and services that are tailored to the lifestyle of customers. Customers can choose between NBK's Credit Cards that are designed to meet their different needs and provide them with an array of benefits and rewards.

## Japan suffers worst economic slump in 5 years

**TOKYO:** Japan has suffered its worst quarterly GDP contraction in more than five years, with a tax hike and a deadly typhoon taking a toll on the world's third-largest economy.

The nation's gross domestic product in the three months to December shrank 1.6 percent from the previous quarter, even before the novel coronavirus outbreak in China hit Japan, according to official data published yesterday. The quarter was marked by a rise in consumption tax from eight percent to 10 percent, as well as Typhoon Hagibis, which killed more than 100 people and caused widespread flooding.

Economists were braced for a contraction of around one percent but had not expected such a poor figure, with Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute, saying it was "quite an undershooting". "There was a hit from natural disasters but consumer sentiment was particularly weak after the tax hike despite government measures to ease the impact," he told AFP.

Yesterday's data snapped four quarters of growth and was the biggest con-

traction since the second quarter of 2014 when the economy shrank 1.9 percent.

That quarter followed a hike in the sales tax from five percent to eight percent and the latest slump also appears to have been affected by a rise in consumption tax to 10 percent that came into effect on October 1. Private consumption was hard hit, dropping by 2.9 percent—the first fall in five quarters.

Expenditure on factories and equipment decreased 3.7 percent despite investment getting a boost from cashless-payment systems that allow consumers to alleviate the consumption tax hike.

### 'Bleak prospects'

Economists are now carefully watching to see what impact the new virus will have on the world's third-largest economy, as it hits Japanese companies' manufacturing activities and tourism. Japan has only a "bleak" prospect of returning to growth in the first quarter of this year, said Minami.

Private consumption would likely pick up from the October-December quarter but how much it will recover in the coming months would depend on the spread of the virus, he said. "Also, exports might struggle as delays of parts shipments from China could disrupt supply chains," he said.

He added it was "possible" that the economy will shrink for a second consecutive quarter, the technical definition of a recession. Health minister Katsunobu



TOKYO: Japan's gross domestic product in the three months to December shrank 1.6 percent from the previous quarter, even before the novel coronavirus outbreak in China hit Japan, according to official data published yesterday.

Kato on Sunday urged the public to avoid crowds and "non-essential gatherings", including Japan's notoriously packed commuter trains, to prevent the virus from spreading.

However, Naoya Oshikubo, senior economist at SuMi Trust, predicted the new coronavirus outbreak would not impede recovery in the first quarter of 2020.

"External demand should continue to grow in Q1 2020 despite the outbreak of the coronavirus, which we forecast to have only a small impact on Japan's inbound tourism industry, which constitutes only 0.8 percent of real GDP," he

said in a commentary ahead of the data release. "Going forward, we should see positive growth in Q1 2020 and beyond. Domestic consumption should recover as the impact of the higher consumption tax abates," he said.

"In addition, with the Tokyo Olympics just a few months away, we will undoubtedly see a significant positive economic impact of the Games for the Japanese economy." Japan's government is to allocate 15.3 billion yen (\$139 million) to fight the economic impact of the virus, including measures to enhance airport inspections and testing capacity. —AFP

## European shares hit record high; carmakers cheer China stimulus

**LONDON:** European shares hit a record high yesterday, with automobile stocks leading gains amid fresh attempts by China to limit the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak. Automobile stocks, which are highly sensitive to Chinese demand and industrial output, surged 2 percent, led by French car parts group Faurecia after reporting a rise in annual profits and sales.

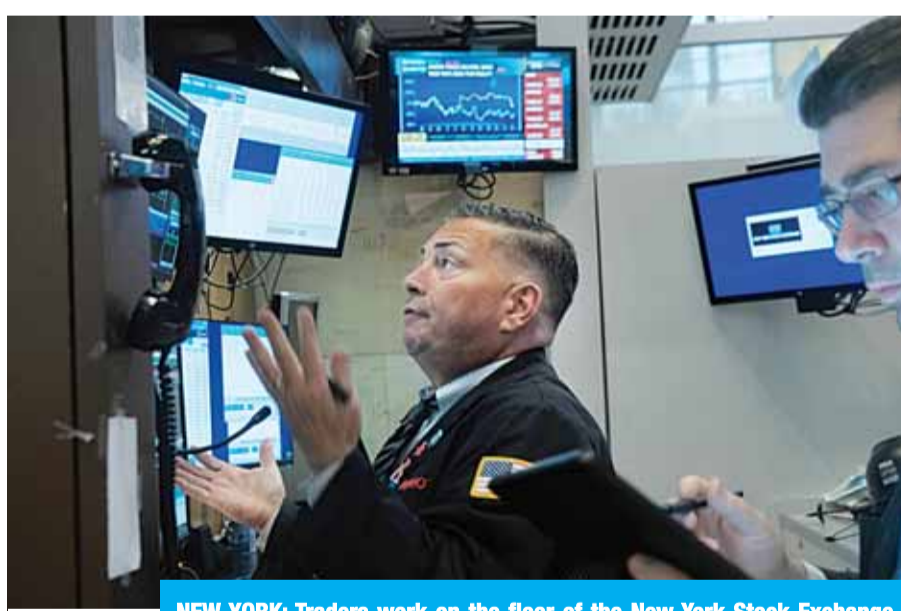
Given that several European companies, particularly the automobile sector, depend on China as part of their supply chain, local markets are likely to take any fresh stimulus measures as a positive.

China cut interest rates and flagged possible tax cuts as it struggles to limit the economic impact from the coronavirus outbreak, which has killed more than 1,700 people in the country.

"The fact that China keeps signalling that they're ready to somewhat bubblewrap the economy by pumping in stimulus - that's what's keeping markets in the green today," said Connor Campbell, analyst at financial spread better Spreadex. The pan-European STOXX 600 index rose 0.2 percent by 0906 GMT, having touched a record high of 432.48 earlier in the day. Market activity is expected to be light through the rest of the day on account of a US holiday. The automaker-heavy German stock index also touched a record high. "This week is interesting because we've got manufacturing PMIs (on Friday). I think it will give an idea of some impact on supply chains from the coronavirus," Spreadex's Campbell added.

The resources and oil and gas sectors were also among the best performing subindexes for the day, given their heavy export exposure to China. Both sectors have also taken some support from recent weakness in the euro and the pound.

Among individual movers, London-listed Jupiter Fund Management topped the STOXX 600 after it agreed to buy Merian Global Investors in a deal that



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. —AFP

will make Jupiter Britain's second-largest retail funds provider. German herbicide providers Bayer AG and BASF SE fell 2.3 percent and 1.1 percent, respectively, after a US peach grower was awarded \$265 million in a lawsuit

against the two. French aircraft maker Airbus SE fell 1.7 percent after the US on Friday said it would lift tariffs on aircraft imported from the EU amid a nearly 16-year transatlantic dispute over aircraft subsidies. —Reuters

## Thailand raises \$3.2bn in 5G license auction

**BANGKOK:** Thailand has raised more than \$3.2 billion in an auction of 5G licenses, as operators race to snap up high-frequency spectrums needed for a commercial rollout of the next-generation technology.

A subsidiary of Advanced Info Services, the country's top mobile operator, dominated Sunday's bidding, securing 23 of the nearly 50 licenses up for grabs. Governments around the world are rolling out 5G networks, which offer vastly faster mobile internet speeds. Washington has been pressing countries to ban Chinese tech giant Huawei from providing equipment for the networks, saying it is a security risk.

Key US allies in Europe, notably Britain and France, have said they will not ban Huawei but will impose restrictions. Thailand, like other Southeast Asian countries with close ties to China, has mostly shied away from the issue. Thailand's National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) hailed the auction as a "good day" for the country.

"We are becoming a 5G country, which will help Thailand to lead in (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations)," NBTC secretary general Thakorn Tantasil said in a statement. It is not clear when the 5G network will be rolled out, but Fitch Ratings said Advanced Info Services was clearly aiming for this year. "They would like to be the first mover of 5G rollout," said Obboon Thirachit, director of the credit ratings agency in Thailand.

"In the past, one of the keys to competitiveness... is the spectrum they hold and the speed of introducing the new technology." —AFP

## Singapore lowers growth forecast

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore cut its economic growth forecast for this year yesterday as the coronavirus batters tourist arrivals and trade. The city-state is one of the worst affected places outside China, with 75 cases of the virus so far. China has more than 70,000 infections.

Singapore downgraded its 2020 growth estimate to a range of -0.5 percent to 1.5 percent. That compares with its previous forecast in November of 0.5 percent to 2.5 percent. "The outbreak of the coronavirus... has affected China, Singapore and many countries around the world," the trade ministry said in a statement.

"In Asia, the outbreak is likely to dampen the growth prospects of China and other affected countries this year." Tourism arrivals have already started to decline,

exports are expected to take a hit, and domestic consumption is likely to fall as people cut back on shopping and dining out, it added. China is Singapore's largest source of tourists and a major export destination. The city-state was at risk of sliding into a technical recession, warned Song Seng Wun of CIMB Private Banking. "There is a real possibility of two quarters of contraction or even two quarters of year-on-year decline," he said.

"Mathematically it's possible because of the integrated nature of the global supply chain and the impact of the slowdown in China that could have far-reaching implications on small trade-oriented economies like Singapore." As a small and open economy, Singapore is often the first to be hammered during global crises but it also recovers quickly when conditions improve. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong last week warned the effect of the virus was already worse than that of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, as economies in the region are more closely linked and raised the possibility of a recession for Singapore. —AFP

## Business

# Al-Nahedh to discuss agility of banks in 4th industrial revolution

## KFH to participate in IIF G20 conference in Riyadh on Feb 21

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) will participate in the IIF Islamic Finance G20 conference, to be held in Riyadh on February 21, as part of the G20 summit meetings in Riyadh G20.

KFH participation in the conference, which will be launched under the title "The economic growth perspectives and the future of banking in the Middle East and North Africa", comes within the framework and commitment to contributing and enriching international economic and financial conferences, in addition to promoting global banking services, as well as viewing the latest economic developments and discussing them with industry leaders and global financial experts.

During his participation in the conference, Group Chief Executive Officer at KFH, Mazin Al-Nahedh will discuss the importance of cyber risk in the banking industry and enhance efforts to face challenges and risks in this field, while continuing to upgrade the level of cyber risk systems and related technology to global standards.

Al-Nahedh also addresses the importance of social responsibility, community service, achieving sustainability at various levels, and the transition to a low-carbon economy. He will also address the obligations and responsibilities the bank serves. Al-Nahedh will also discuss during the conference the importance of small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) as engines of economic growth, in line with Kuwait's 2035 vision to transform into a global commercial hub, while reviewing the leading role of KFH in supporting this sector.



Mazin Al-Nahedh

Al-Nahedh will tackle the importance of digitization in banking services and the opportunity for banks to achieve huge business model transformation, in line with the accelerating global technological developments. In addition to the banks' need to devise strategic plans to ensure the safety of all their customers' financial data.

Al-Nahedh will also present his vision on Fintech, artificial intelligence, how banks can become more agile in the 4th industrial revolution, and the need to enhance the role of innovation in the work of banks. Al-Nahedh deals with various other topics and themes, such as the need to continue developing human resource strategies in attracting talent and designing special training programs that meet global needs in the banking industry. KFH is keen to participate in events and conferences that have a great impact aimed at developing the banking industry. KFH has long-standing experience, due to its long career, wide geographical spread and its leading position in the Islamic finance industry globally.

## Rishi Sunak: Rapid rise of UK's new FM

**LONDON:** Rishi Sunak, a 39-year-old high-flying business investor who only entered politics five years ago, has enjoyed a rapid rise to become Britain's new finance minister. Sunak entered parliament in 2015 and got his foot on the most junior rung of government in January 2018 — and was still there just over six months ago.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, after taking office in July last year, promoted Sunak to chief secretary to the Treasury, number two in the finance ministry. He was therefore the obvious person to turn to after Sajid Javid sensationally walked out as finance minister during Johnson's government reshuffle on Thursday in a row over advisors.

Sunak is privately wealthy through his business career and is probably better-known in India than in Britain through his wife Akshata. She is the daughter of Indian business magnate Narayana Murthy, the billionaire co-founder of Infosys, India's second-largest IT outsourcing firm. Sunak is Britain's first Hindu chancellor of the exchequer, and swore his oath of allegiance in parliament on the Bhagavad Gita. He is also the first person born in the 1980s to hold one of the so-called four great offices of state: prime minister, finance minister, foreign secretary and

interior minister. He misses out on being the youngest chancellor of the past century by just a single year, as George Osborne was 38 when he took charge of the Treasury in 2010.

### Election TV frontman

Sunak is the member of parliament for Richmond in Yorkshire, northern England — a safe Conservative seat he took over in 2015 from former party leader and foreign secretary William Hague, who described Sunak as an "exceptional individual". Theresa May gave him his first job in government in January 2018, making him a parliamentary under-secretary of state with responsibility for local government, parks and troubled families.

When Johnson replaced May in July last year, he promoted Sunak to be Javid's number two. He went on to stand in for Johnson during the main multi-party television debates in the December 2019 general election. A Brexit supporter, Sunak produced a report in 2016 on the merits of introducing free ports after leaving the European Union — a concept that Johnson cherry-picked for his own leadership campaign and Sunak launched on Monday.

### Southampton to Stanford

Sunak's grandparents were from Punjab in northern India and emigrated to Britain from eastern Africa in the 1960s. They arrived with "very little", Sunak told MPs in his maiden speech. The eldest of three children, Sunak's father was a family doctor in Southampton on the southern English coast, and his mother ran a local pharmacy.



**LONDON:** Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak leaves after the first meeting of the cabinet the day after a reshuffle, at 10 Downing Street in central London on February 14, 2020. — AFP

Born on May 12, 1980 in Southampton, he studied at Winchester College, one of Britain's leading private boarding schools, before graduating with a first class honours degree from the University of Oxford in philosophy, politics and economics. Sunak then gained a business administration master's degree from Stanford University in California on a Fulbright scholarship. He met his wife Akshata at Stanford and they lived in California before returning to Britain. The couple married in Bangalore in

2009. Guests included Wipro chairman Azim Premji and India's former Test cricket captain Anil Kumble.

The Sunaks have two young daughters, Krishna and Anoushka. Sunak worked internationally in business and finance and co-founded an investment firm. He was an analyst for investment bank Goldman Sachs before going on to work in hedge and investment fund management. Sunak lists his spare time interests as keeping fit, cricket, football and movies. — AFP

## Sterling stays above \$1.30

**LONDON:** Sterling remained above \$1.30 yesterday as investors priced in looser financial conditions under Britain's new finance minister. Rishi Sunak was appointed on Thursday when incumbent Sajid Javid unexpectedly quit as Prime Minister Boris Johnson reshuffled his cabinet. As result, last week ended up being sterling's best in two months.

Johnson wants to increase spending on everything from infrastructure and police to health and education. Sunak has backed higher public spending, most recently speaking in support of multi-billion-pound transport projects. Sunak is preparing to ease Britain's fiscal rules in his first budget, as he comes under pressure from Downing Street to open the spending taps, the Financial Times reported on Friday. "Building expectations for looser fiscal policy are helping to boost optimism that the UK economy could outperform this year at least relative to downbeat expectations and other major economies," said Lee Hardman, currency analyst at MUFG.

"The positive impact on the pound from the improving outlook for the UK's economy is outweighing the negative weight provided by continued concerns over the UK's future trading relationships in the near-term," Hardman said. A human resources group said jobs in Britain's public sector look set to rise at the same pace as private sector jobs for the first time since 2008, reflecting an easing of government cuts in many departments. The pound was last trading down 0.2 percent at \$1.3017, moving away from the recent low of \$1.2873. Against the euro, the pound fell 0.3 percent at 83.29 pence.

But leveraged funds were slightly more positive about the British currency as they have added a small amount of long positions on the pound in the week to Feb. 11, taking the total amount of longs at \$1.71 billion. Investors were looking out for David Frost's speech later. EU advisor will set out what Britain wants from its future relationship with the European Union. British consumers face higher prices and reduced availability of goods if the government fails to agree pragmatic solutions with the bloc on regulatory checks at ports in any post-Brexit deal, the retail industry's lobby group warned yesterday. Traders will be watching the February flash composite purchasing managers' index data due on Friday, which could serve as a guideline to the Bank of England's future monetary policy.

The BoE left interest rates unchanged at 0.75 percent last month. Some market participants had expected the central bank to cut interest rates and loosen monetary policy.

"After the strong bounces in the January PMI data, the extent to which this is sustained in February will be key for UK rate sentiment," said Adam Cole, currency strategist at RBC Capital Markets. — Reuters



**PARIS:** Protesters demonstrate in front of Paris' Opera Garnier yesterday in Paris as part of a multi-sector strike against the French government's pensions overhaul. — AFP

## French MPs debate pensions bill

**PARIS:** The battle over the French government's pension reforms moved from the street to parliament yesterday, with the opposition vowing to torpedo an overhaul that sparked weeks of strikes and protests. Leftist unions are up in arms over President Emmanuel Macron's bid to fuse France's 42 different retirement schemes into a single points-based system.

Public transport workers walked off the job for a month and a half in December and January, causing travel misery for millions, particularly in the Paris area. The government argues that the changes are necessary to make the system fairer for all, but critics say they will force most French people to work longer for smaller payouts. Labor leaders called for renewed strike action yesterday to coincide with the start of two weeks of parliamentary debates. But there were only minor disruptions to the Paris metro and regional trains were running as normal. The start of the debate comes as Macron's centrist party reels from a sex scandal that topped its candidate for mayor of Paris in next month's municipal election, Benjamin Griveaux. To replace him, the government chose Health Minister Agnes Buzyn, one of the most prominent defenders of the pension reform, which will now be steered through parliament by her successor Olivier Veran.

### 41,000 amendments

With the government refusing to back down on one of

Macron's signature reforms, opposition MPs have stepped into the fray, hoping to derail the bill by tabling a record 41,000 amendments. Macron's centrist Republic on the Move (LREM) party aims to get the bill through parliament before next month's municipal elections.

While the party has a comfortable majority in parliament, some LREM lawmakers have suggested the legislation may have to be forced through by executive decree if the opposition tries to hold it up indefinitely. But to do so would see the government accused of curtailing democratic debate on one of the most contentious issues of Macron's presidency.

The reforms would sweep away the separate pension schemes, some dating back hundreds of years, that offer early retirement and other benefits to public-sector workers as well as lawyers, physiotherapists and even Paris Opera employees. Tens of thousands of people, including large numbers of teachers and doctors, took part in seven separate days of nationwide protests in December and in January. The government argues that the French, who retire earlier than most Europeans, need to work for longer to keep the pension system afloat at a time when people are living longer.

Opponents say the plan will force people to invest in private US-style pension plans and have accused Macron, a former investment banker, of rolling out a red carpet to foreign asset managers like US investment giant BlackRock. Last week, dozens of activists stormed BlackRock's Paris offices and spray painted the walls and carpets with anti-capitalist and environmental slogans—the second such incident at the site since the pensions battle began. BlackRock has denied trying to influence the reforms. — AFP

## Gulf Bank announces Al-Danah winners

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank held its weekly draw on 16th February 2020 announcing the names of the winners for the week of 9 - 13 February 2020. The weekly draw consists of five winners who receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

### The winners this week are:

Sulaiman Thunaiyan Al-Ghanim  
Nasir Adel Nasir  
Mina Hassan Safaryyan  
Wedad Abdulnabi Mohammed Almousa  
Salma Mohammed Abdulah Al-Fadly

Gulf Bank's announced that Al-Danah is now bigger, and that the prize of the annual draw will be KD 1,500,000 as of 2020. The annual draw will be held on 14 January 2021, and the last chance to participate by depositing in the Al-Danah account will be on 30 September 2020.

Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app. Furthermore, loyal Al-Danah customers are rewarded with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances accumulated from the previous year, which are added to the customer's chances the following year. Therefore, the total chances earned by Al-Danah customers in 2019, have been added to their 2020 chances, and the same process will take place in 2021, and so on. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of K D200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2020 quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw.

## Shamal Al-Zour Al-Oula holds extraordinary general meeting

**KUWAIT:** Following the public offering of 50 percent of Shamal Al-Zour Al-Oula Power and Water Company KSCP to the Kuwaiti Public last quarter, the company shareholders approved the distribution of interim profits in an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) that was held yesterday.

Shareholders approved the addition of a new paragraph (no. 11) to Article 49 of the core company structure to allow the distribution of interim profits in accordance with Article 226 of the Companies Law 1/2016 and its amendments and to amend Article 56 of the core company structure to adjust references to the relevant laws.

Shamal Al-Zour Al-Oula Power and Water Company KSCP CEO Paul Frain said: "We welcome our new shareholders and extend our gratitude for their support and confidence in the Board's recommendations. We look forward to working together to move forward with the listing process of the company's shares on Boursa Kuwait."

In the last quarter of 2019, the Kuwait Authority for Public and Private Partnership (KAPP) had successfully completed a public offering of its 50 percent stake in Shamal Al-Zour Al-Oula Power and Water Company. The offering attracted over 127,000 Kuwaiti citizens, who are now new shareholders in the company.

The remaining 50 percent continue to be owned by current shareholders (40 percent by a private investor represented by Al-Zour North One Holding Company KSCP owned by a consortium comprising Engie, Sumitomo Corporation), 5 percent by Kuwait Investment Authority, and 5 percent by the Public Institution for Social Security.

Shamal Al-Zour Al-Oula Power and Water Company KSCP is the owner and operator of Kuwait's first independently owned power and water plant established under Kuwait's Independent Water and Power Project (IWPP) Law and the country's first Public-Private Partnership (PPP) project to be offered for public subscription. Power and water produced by the company are entirely supplied to the national power and water grid, owned and operated by MEW under a 40-year long-term Energy Conversion and Water Purchase Agreement (ECWPA).

The Al-Zour North One Power and Water Plant commenced commercial operations in November 2016 and is the first stage of the country's plan to significantly increase its capacity over the coming years as part of a larger effort to meet an anticipated peak demand of 25 gigawatts (GW) by 2025. The plant is currently providing 27 percent of Kuwait's power requirements at peak production (1,524MW) and 25 percent of water generation (107 million gallons per day).

What's On



A Kuwaiti woman offers Kuwaiti food to guests.



Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Syed Haidar tours an exhibition held on the sidelines of the ceremony. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Group picture with Sheikhha Hala Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Syed Haidar, and DWC Consultant Narjis Al-Shatti, along with officials and ambassadors.

# Pakistani community shares with Kuwait joy of national celebrations

By Faten Omar

Pakistan's Ambassador to Kuwait Syed Haidar praised the organizing of the Pakistani Business Center for a 'Hala February' celebration, saying that it is held by the Pakistani community to share with their Kuwaiti brothers the joy of celebrating Kuwait's National and Liberation Days, pointing out that such celebrations aim to bring people of the two countries closer.

On the sidelines of the event, the ambassador told the press that the celebration of National and Liberation Days is held in cooperation with the Diplomatic Women's Committee (DWC) and the Pakistani Business Center and the presence of a large number of ambassadors, sheikhs, and officials. He stated that commercial relations

between the two countries are good, amounting to about \$1 billion, in addition to the presence of large Kuwaiti investments in Pakistan, as well as more than 100,000 Pakistanis working in Kuwait in various sectors.

Meanwhile, Sheikhha Hala Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah stressed that the ceremony reflects Kuwait's rapprochement with all peoples of the world, noting that the Kuwaiti leadership and people are keen on continuing humanitarian work. "This connections achieves progress in brotherly and human relations at all levels," she explained. She expressed her appreciation for the ceremony, hoping that the friendly relations between everyone living in Kuwait and abroad will be sustained.

In the meantime, Samargyul Adamkolova, DWC President and the Kyrgyz Ambassador to Kuwait, said that such activities work to bring peoples closer to a

great extent, revealing that in March, they will hold an event to highlight the culture of Central Asian countries.

DWC Consultant Narjis Al-Shatti said that the event celebrates the National and Liberation Days by showing Kuwait's modern history, folklore and traditional wedding, in addition to a Kuwaiti fashion show that includes showcasing the traditional dress in modern designs, which people of Kuwait still wear during special occasions.

Moreover, the Director of Pakistan Business Center Kuwait Hafiz Muhammad Shabbir said that the celebration of the National Day of Kuwait is a celebration for every citizen and expat living on the land of Kuwait, stressing that Kuwait is a second home for the Pakistani community, wishing for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah everlasting health, and stability for Kuwait.

"Everyone lives in security, safety, and peace in Kuwait," he said, stressing the desire of the Pakistani community to strengthen and increase commercial, social and cultural relations between the two countries more than they currently are. He pointed out that the commercial and cultural relations between the two countries started since the 1950s, stressing that these relations are rooted through history and are increasing in strength over the years.

Shabbir pointed out that the Kuwaiti-Pakistani relations have achieved remarkable growth during the past years thanks to the historical political and economic rapprochement between the two countries, which was evident in the volume of trade exchange between the Kuwait and Pakistan, as well as visits of trade and political delegations.

## French ambassador holds farewell party

By Ben Garcia

French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy organized a farewell party at her residence in Jabriya, as she ends her stint as her country's ambassador to the State of Kuwait. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the event, Masdupuy cited several achievements made in the field of improving Kuwaiti-French relations during her two-year stay in Kuwait. "There are several achievements, and of course there are still many ways to improve those relations," she said. "It is just a matter of will from both sides; but to mention a few, we [made] several achievements in the fields of education, health, culture, economy, commerce, defense and security. Those are very crucial and positive achievements, and we are very optimistic that [the relations] will continue to soar further."

Masdupuy also noticed a 'change of attitude' during her stay among many French people with regards to engaging into the business in Kuwait. "They are all positive changes... and [French nationals] are getting more familiar to the culture and people of Kuwait," she said. "This is a



French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy delivers a speech during the event.

great advantage especially as investment and business."

"You have special and unique features in this country that you should enjoy more, be aware of and make them flourish," Masdupuy told representatives of the Kuwaiti press. "Freedom of expression is a very interesting experience here. You have a very powerful parliament and many institutions that uphold democracy. The Kuwaiti society is really different from any other society in the region, especially the openness, which is absolutely extraordinary. It makes Kuwait a singular country. Where else in the world you would visit a



A general view of people in attendance. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy poses with military personnel during the event.

house without being invited, without security checks, except in Kuwait? This is unique. Kuwait enjoys high level of stability

and security, and the history and political culture of Kuwait is making it possible to benefit from the 'diwaniya' culture,

which foreigners can enjoy in Kuwait." Masdupuy was assigned as France's envoy to Kuwait in December 2017.

## Burgan Bank celebrates graduation of Kuwaiti bankers

Burgan Bank celebrated the graduation of the 2019 - 2020 batch of Kuwaiti trainees from its dedicated Academy program. Led by the Learning and Development department, 24 ambitious trainees were inducted into the world of banking through theoretical and experiential learning.

The new bankers were coached on the respective domain skills that would equip them to function in various positions. The latest program included an intensive 2-week field training across the bank's branches to aid the employees to transform their theo-



retical knowledge into practical experiences. The specialized training workshops also consisted of an in-depth introduction to the various banking products and services, including training in core areas such as customer experience and selling to ensure optimal customer satisfaction.

The program was designed as part of Burgan Bank's long-term growth strategy to nurture young Kuwaiti banking professionals and facilitate their integration into the busi-

ness community as industry leaders. Empowered with hands-on expertise, the participants' efforts and commitment demonstrated during the learning period was commended by the Bank's Human Resources department at the end of the academic program.

Burgan Bank's Senior Manager - Learning and Development, Ghada El-Kadi said: "The Learning and Development department's goal is to raise and strengthen the banking

workforce capacity as well as fulfill the country's overall objective of advancing national talent. The Bank has embedded a culture that is customer-focused, collaborative, persevering and growth-oriented which is accomplished through the provision of highly-qualified and proficient talents. Entrusted with the responsibility to manage and elevate in-house capabilities, we imbibe these values and vital work ethics in our graduates to ensure a positive and sustainable future."

Burgan Bank Group is a diverse regional financial powerhouse, with a wide network of 169 branches strategically distributed across Kuwait, Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey. The Group aims to provide challenging, dynamic, and highly progressive career opportunities for, driven by the belief that investing in human development within Burgan Bank Group is an investment in the country's human development and overall progress.

## Tiffany & Quanta Off-Road Mania winners awarded

Winners of Tiffany & Quanta Off-Road Mania promotion were felicitated in a ceremony held at LuLu Hypermarket, Al-Rai. Jetti Ayyavarappa is the winner of grand prize - Jeep Wrangler. Other winners are Mohammed Nizam Layin (iPhone XS Gold), Al-Saeed Abdul Tawab Al-Saeed (Apple Watch) and Adham Abu Al-Makram Abdullah (Apple Watch). The prize distribution ceremony, held at the Al-Rai outlet of LuLu Hypermarket on February 11, 2020, was witnessed by a large gathering of shoppers, well-wishers and media personnel, as well as top officials of LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait and IFFCO - Kuwait. Ayaz Butt (GM - IFFCO), Ibrahim Dalal (Marketing Manager IFFCO), Mahmoud Serhan (Sales Head IFFCO), Kunjachan Kachappilly (Sales Manager IFFCO) were presented at the event.



## ISN, US Embassy to hold educational seminar in Kuwait

On Thursday, February 20, the International Student Network (ISN) will return to Kuwait to host a free educational seminar and open house at the Regency Hotel in Bidaa from 5:00-9:00 pm. The Embassy's EducationUSA Adviser and consular officers will be present at the fair. Additionally, eight US colleges and universities will participate in the event to provide information about their schools and answer questions from students and parents about educational opportunities in the United States. This educational event is organized by ISN, in cooperation with the US Embassy.

**Agenda:**

5:15-6:00 pm: Information session about education in the US and student visas.  
6:00-9:00 pm: Open house. Come and speak face-to-face with university admissions officers and learn about the programs they offer, student life, the costs of studying in the US and much more.  
Participating universities: University of California - Northridge, Utica College, Irvine Valley College, Savannah College of Art and Design, Austin Peay State University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fordham University, DePaul University.

# Unequal cities bear the brunt of deadly disease outbreaks

**BANGKOK:** As the Chinese city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the new coronavirus, becomes the latest urban center to face a deadly disease outbreak, city planners and physicians say such densely packed hubs are particularly vulnerable and may need a redesign. Wuhan, a city of about 11 million, has been under virtual lockdown for over three weeks. More than 1,400 people on the mainland have died, according to authorities.

The outbreak has brought to mind another deadly epidemic, SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which killed more than 770 people between 2002 and 2003. That disease's epicenter was a housing estate in Hong Kong, amongst the most densely populated and unequal cities in the world. With more than two-thirds of the global population forecast to live in urban areas by 2050, cities need to be designed for good health, said Sreeja Nair, a policy researcher at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities (LKYCIC) in Singapore.

"While urban living offers prospects of better economic opportunities and infrastructure, including healthcare facilities, the way cities densify and expand plays a huge role in the spread of infectious diseases," she said. Wealth inequality in cities also affects their vulnerability and capacity in terms of preparedness and response, Nair told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"This skew on account of socio-economic disparities and governance puts some parts of the population at higher risk," including those lacking access to proper housing, healthcare and basic utilities such as water and sanitation, she said. Cities have long been magnets for people seeking economic opportunities and a better quality of life.

But these areas with people living in close proximity

have also enabled the fast spread of disease, from bubonic plague in the Middle Ages to bird flu, SARS and the novel coronavirus. Although urban residents generally have better health than rural populations, the risks are distributed unequally, with most of the burden falling on vulnerable segments such as slum dwellers, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

### Human behavior

The WHO has identified urbanization as one of the key challenges for public health in the 21st century, even as it notes municipal agencies often implement health policies first and act more quickly than federal bodies in emergencies. The urban environment is linked to a large number of non-communicable diseases such as obesity, heart disease and pulmonary disease, as well as communicable diseases such as tuberculosis from crowding and poor ventilation, and waterborne and vector-borne diseases such as dengue, according to the WHO.

Urban areas also have more points of risk because of contact between humans and animals, said David Heymann, a professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. That includes areas with rodents, live domestic and wild animal markets, and suburban areas where animals are raised in industrial agricultural facilities, said Heymann, a former executive director at WHO where he led the response to SARS.

"Urban areas are unique and must develop solutions in addition to strong disease detection and response systems to rapidly control emerging infections," he said. The proliferation of drug-resistant infections and the myriad methods of transmission can overwhelm

even the cleanest and wealthiest of cities. Singapore, among the world's best-planned cities but also among the most connected, has reported nearly 60 coronavirus cases, one of the highest tallies outside China. Modern cities are better able to leverage technology to strengthen monitoring of cases and populations at risk, and create strong communication channels for building awareness and avoiding panic among residents, said Nair at LKYCIC.

But in addition, cities need good design and infrastructure, noted Matt Benson, program director at Think City, a government-backed urban regeneration agency in Malaysia. "More than density, what facilitates the spread of diseases in cities is human behavior. You can have a neighborhood of low density, but if no one picks up their waste that could lead to a dengue outbreak," he said.

Planners should focus on building "20-minute cities", or villages within the city, where one can get to their job, the doctor or their friends all within 20 minutes, he said. Melbourne is already testing such neighborhoods where most daily needs are within a 20-minute walk, bike ride or public transport commute.

And Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo is aiming for the "quarter-hour city" to reduce pollution and improve the quality of life. These high-density areas create greater social cohesion and bring more economic and environmental benefits, said Anjali Mahendra, research director at the World Resources Institute's Ross Center for Sustainable Cities in Washington, D.C. What stops such areas from becoming overcrowded environments where disease transmission can be high is the availability of good quality physical infrastructure, with planning standards that pro-



**WUHAN:** A worker measures body temperature of people leaving a supermarket in Qingshan district following an outbreak of the novel coronavirus in Wuhan, Hubei province. — Reuters

mote livability for all, she said. Informal settlements in cities in developing countries have particular trouble accessing such services, she added. "Cities represent places of innovation, amenities, and opportunity, so we continue to see cities grow," Mahendra said.

"But our urban institutions should function such that the economic benefits of cities, and the value created, are more equitably shared." — Reuters

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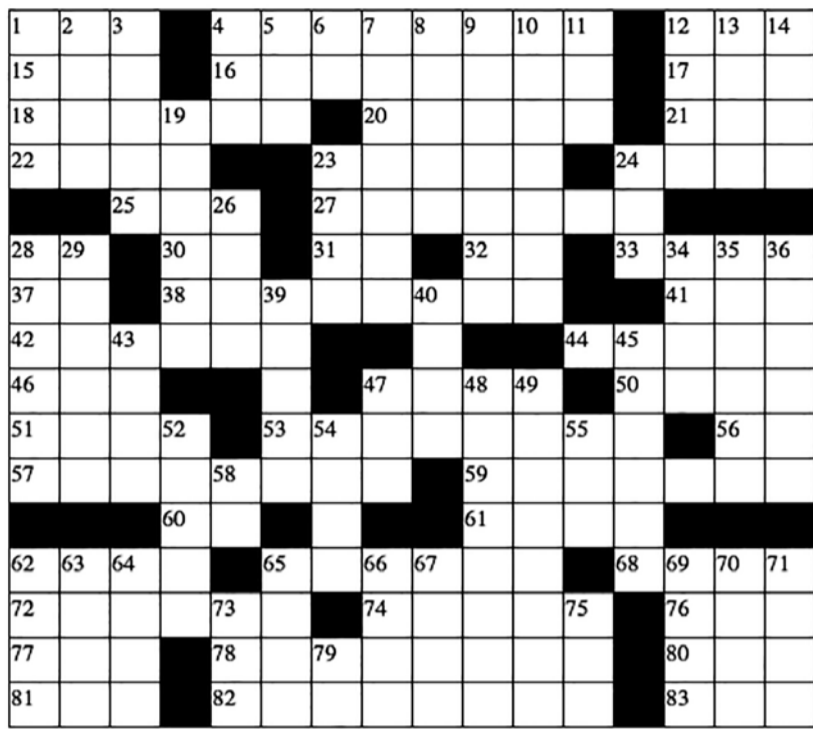
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ACROSS

1. An internationally recognized distress signal in radio code.
4. Genus of slender often tree-like spiny cacti with solitary showy nocturnal white or pink flowers.
12. The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
15. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
16. Polished courtesy.
17. The 21st letter of the Greek alphabet.
18. Assembly possessing high legislative powers.
20. Person who does no work.
21. An ugly evil-looking old woman.
22. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
25. The part of the nervous system of vertebrates that controls involuntary actions of the smooth muscles and heart and glands.
27. Mites and ticks.
28. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
30. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
31. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
32. North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in northwest North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
33. A message received and understood that reduces the recipient's uncertainty.
37. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
38. A member of a Kannada-speaking group of people living chiefly in Kanara in southern India.
41. An association of countries in the western hemisphere.
42. Type genus of the Anhimidae.
44. Any of various usually white herons having long plumes during breeding season.
46. (astronomy) A measure of time defined by Earth's orbital motion.
50. Beyond what is natural.
51. A metrical unit with unstressed-stressed syllables.
53. Generalized edema with accumulation of serum in subcutaneous connective tissue.
56. Before noon.
57. A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Clinoril).
59. With rapid movements.
60. A Russian river.
61. A city in north India.
62. (of molten metal or glass) Formed by pouring or pressing into a mold n.l.
68. Open-chest surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
72. (Greek mythology) One of the three Graces.
74. United States writer (born in 1925).
76. The cry made by sheep.
77. The federal agency that insures residential mortgages.
78. Bottom-livers having large eyes with metallic green luster.
80. A cgs unit of work or energy.
81. Take in solid food.
82. 10 grams.
83. A nucleic acid consisting of large molecules shaped like a double helix.

DOWN

1. A strong-smelling plant from whose dried leaves a number of euphoriant and hallucinogenic drugs are prepared.
2. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
3. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
4. Temporary military shelter.
5. A unit of surface area equal to 100 square meters.
6. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali metal group.
7. A wheeled vehicle adapted to the rails of railroad.
8. A republic in the Asian subcontinent in southern Asia.
9. Type genus of the Siluridae.
10. Specify individually.
11. A port in southwestern Scotland.
12. An ancient Hebrew unit of dry measure equal to about a bushel.
13. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
14. Port city that is the capital and largest city of Latvia.
19. A member of the Algonquian people of Maine and southern Quebec.
23. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
24. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
26. A fraudulent business scheme.
29. Soviet physicist who worked on low temperature physics (1908-1968).
34. Any of the three Fates or goddesses of destiny.
35. Foul with waste matter.
36. Surgical procedure that creates an artificial opening for the elimination of bodily wastes.
39. Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
40. An unledged or nestling hawk.
43. A set of tags and rules (conforming to SGML) for using them in developing hypertext documents.
45. Hard greenish-brown wood of the lignum vitae tree and other trees of the genus Guaiacum.
47. Resinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects.
48. Someone who attacks in search of booty.
49. A river in central Brazil that flows generally northward (with many falls) to join the Tocantins River.
52. All the plant and animal life of a particular region.
54. (Babylonian) God of wisdom and agriculture and patron of scribes and schools.
55. An emergency procedure consisting of external cardiac massage and artificial respiration.
58. A soft gray ductile metallic element used in alloys.
63. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
64. A thin strip (wood or metal).
65. Female equine animal.
66. The part of the eye that contains the iris and ciliary body and choroid.
67. The imperial dynasty of China from 1368 to 1644.
69. In bed.
70. An outlying farm building for storing grain or animal feed and housing farm animals.
71. Mentally or physically infirm with age.
73. One of the five major classes of immunoglobulins.
75. A spacecraft that carries astronauts from the command module to the surface of the moon and back.
79. An international organization of European countries formed after World War II to reduce trade barriers and increase cooperation among its members.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Someone who is a student of natural healing may come to visit you and share some ideas today. You tend to be interested in matters concerning health, and you might want to learn not only about herbs and nutrition but also spiritual healing. This is a good time to train your own healing abilities. Aries, as your sensitivity is high and you're more able than usual to tune in to the healing energies.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Books and movies may inspire you to get involved in artistic activities. Your aesthetic sense is very high today, Taurus, and you may be drawing your inspiration from the higher realms. You might want to stroll through an art gallery or museum and try to sense the feelings of those from the past. A warm and loving letter or phone call could come from a romantic partner, elevating your mood even more. It's a very emotionally gratifying day.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You could be feeling a bit flush today, Gemini, and therefore you might decide to do a little work on your house. This is more likely to be redecorating than any major repairs, as you're more into beauty right now than practical matters. Your aesthetic sense is very high, inspired from the higher realms, and therefore decorating decisions you make today are likely to be beautiful. Go to it!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You're feeling especially psychically and mystically inclined today, Cancer. You might want to read about such matters or attend a lecture or workshop given by someone in the field. Telepathic communications are coming your way. Don't be surprised if more than once during the course of the day you and another say the same thing at the same time. You might also experience a powerful kinship with people from the past.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You're usually a very practical and down-to-Earth person, but today you may be more inclined than usual toward mysticism. Spiritual matters seem extremely appealing, and you could find yourself gravitating toward metaphysical bookstores or seeking discussions with people who are well versed in such matters. You also find your imagination working overtime. Indulge in a few flights of fancy, Leo. We all need to escape from time to time!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Group activities involving meditation, psychic or spiritual topics, or artistic pursuits are probably very appealing to you right now, Virgo. This is the perfect day to start a class or attend a lecture on such subjects. You could meet some interesting people who become close friends. You're likely to feel a psychic bond with anyone you meet today, and you're likely to get the feeling that your life has changed for the better. Enjoy!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You're normally a very intuitive person, and today you may experience clairvoyance that could rival Jeane Dixon's. You could be feeling especially attuned to other planes, and your dreams are likely to be powerful and vivid. Use the messages you receive to inspire creative pursuits. Try your hand at painting, music, or poetry. You might not only be amazed by the results but learn even more from the work itself.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your imagination is flying high today, Scorpio. Your interest in mystical and metaphysical matters is at an all-time high, and you could find yourself strolling through New Age bookstores. Travel to distant places may seem especially appealing, and you might dream of flying to India, Israel, Egypt, or Ireland. This is all wonderful as long as you stay grounded. Plan a trip if you can. Join a meditation group. Go with the flow!



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Some wonderful news concerning money and career matters could come your way today, Sagittarius. Your natural kindness and sympathy for others has led you to make some good friends who are also valuable business contacts. This is definitely paying off. Your aesthetic sense is at an all-time high, so this is a great day to start any creative projects that you have in mind. Success is definitely coming your way!



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

A minor conflict with a romantic partner in the morning is likely to end with a tearful reunion and much reassurance by mid-afternoon. The end of the day could find the two of you planning a romantic trip abroad, even down to the restaurants you want to try! Discussions of spiritual or psychic matters could also bring you closer together. All in all, it's a tumultuous but romantic day.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Your intuition, imagination, and insight have served you well on the job, and should pay off soon. A raise, commission, or perhaps a chance to invest in the company could be offered to you. Your self-esteem will definitely receive a boost! You might also find that you're growing even more intuitive than usual, and people are looking up to you because of it. Give yourself a pat on the back. You deserve it.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You can count on a very idyllic and romantic day today, Pisces. You're feeling especially warm and sensual, and you tend to view the partner in your life through rose-colored glasses. He or she is very likely to regard you in the same way. If you've been longing for a dinner for two, complete with champagne, candlelight, and red roses, this is the day to go for it. And don't forget the violin music!

Wordsearch Puzzle

Movies: Science Fiction 2

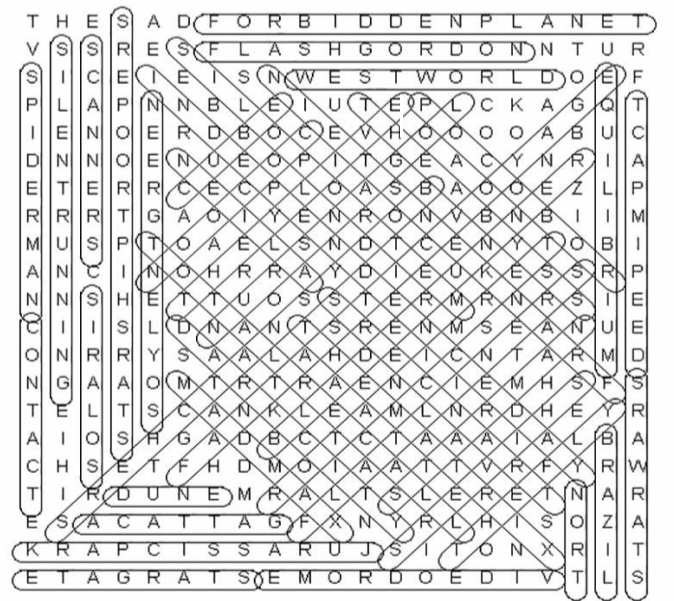
Find and circle all of the Science Fiction movies that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the title of an additional Science Fiction movie.



- AEON FLUX
- ALIEN NATION
- ALIENS
- ARMAGEDDON
- AVATAR
- CLOVERFIELD
- DARK STAR
- DEATH RACE
- DEJA VU
- DONNIE DARKO
- FLATLINERS
- FREEJACK
- FREQUENCY
- GAMER
- GODZILLA
- HULK
- INCEPTION
- IRON MAN
- JUMPER
- KING KONG
- KNOWING
- MEN IN BLACK
- MIMIC
- MOON
- OUTBREAK
- OUTLAND
- PANDORUM
- PREDATOR
- PUSH
- RED PLANET
- ROLLERBALL
- SERENITY
- SIGNS
- SLEEPER
- SLITHER
- SPECIES
- SPHERE
- STAR TREK
- SUNSHINE
- SUPERMAN
- THE ABYSS
- TIMECOP
- TIMCRIMES
- TRANSFORMERS
- WATCHMEN
- ZARDOZ

Yesterday's Solution

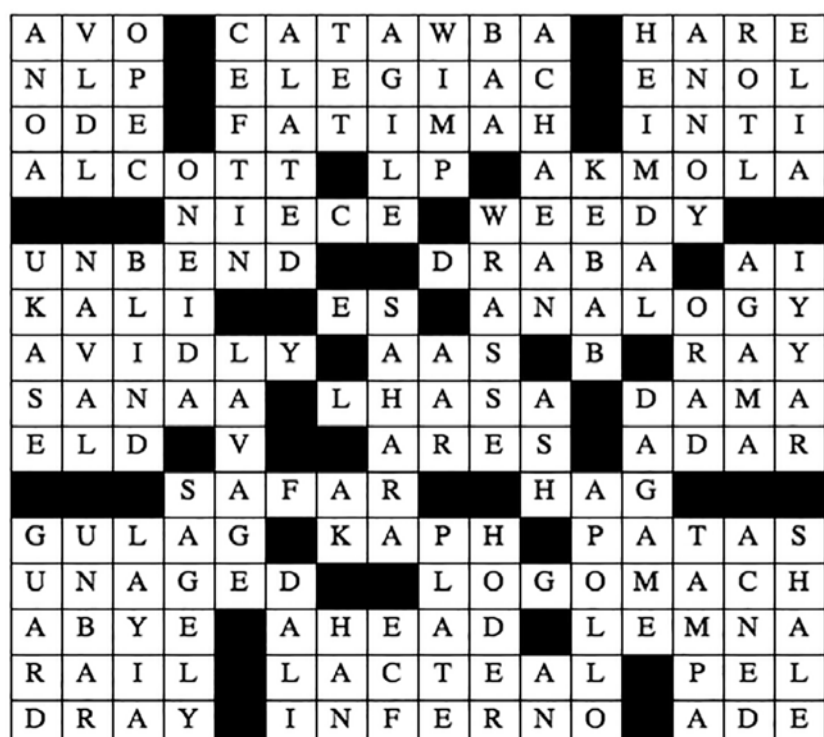
Movies: Science Fiction



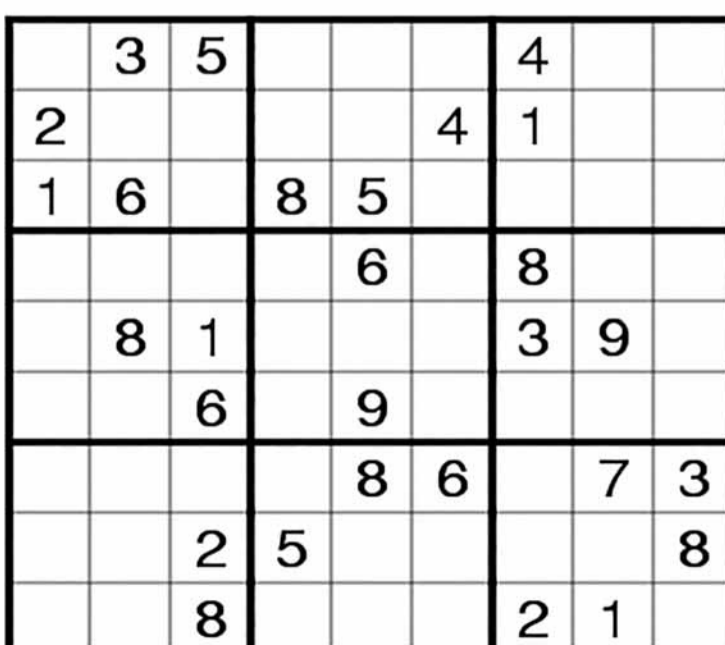
- ALIEN
- BLADE RUNNER
- BODY SNATCHERS
- BRAZIL
- COCCON
- CONTACT
- CUBE
- DARK CITY
- DEEP IMPACT
- DUNE
- EQUILIBRIUM
- FANTASTIC VOYAGE
- FLASH GORDON
- FLATLINERS
- FORBIDDEN PLANET
- FRANKENSTEIN
- GATTACA
- INDEPENDENCE DAY
- JURASSIC PARK
- LOGAN'S RUN
- MAD MAX
- METROPOLIS
- ROBOCOP
- SCANNERS
- SHIVERS
- SILENT RUNNING
- SOLARIS
- SOYLENT GREEN
- SPIDER-MAN
- STAR WARS
- STARGATE
- STARMAN
- STARSHIP TROOPERS
- TERMINATOR
- THE ABYSS
- THE FLY
- THE MATRIX
- THEY LIVE
- TOTAL RECALL
- TRANCERS
- TRON
- VIDEODROME
- WESTWORLD

Hidden movie: THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI ACROSS THE EIGHTH DIMENSION

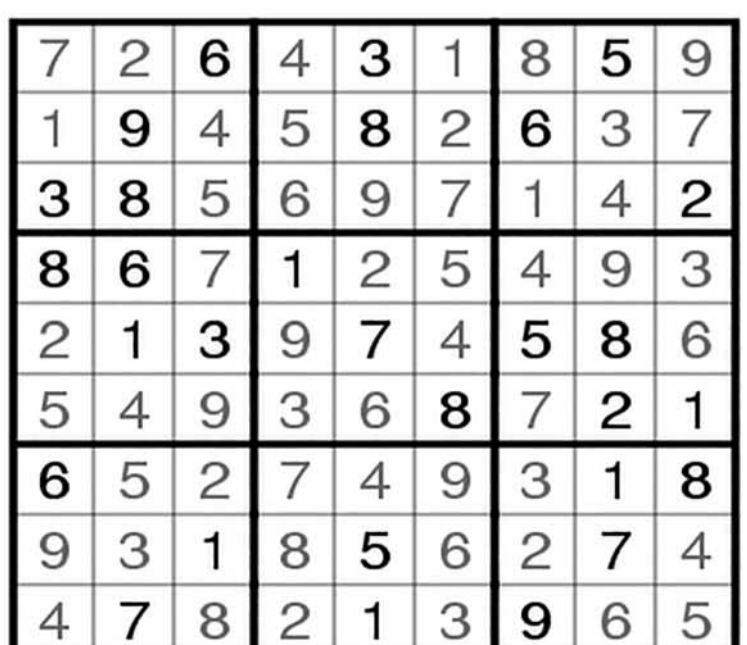
Yesterday's Solution



Daily Sudoku



Yesterday's Solution



# Lifestyle

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2020



Revelers wearing a mask and a period costume take part in the Venice Carnival. — AFP

## UNCHAINED MELODY: TRADITIONAL MUSIC REVIVED AS SECURITY IMPROVES

For years the distinctive twang of Pashtun music was drowned out by rattling gunfire and deafening explosions as musicians in Pakistan's northwest were targeted by militants. But, as security improves, a centuries-old tribal tradition is staging a come-

back. Performances that once took place in secret are returning. Shops selling instruments are open and thriving again, while local broadcasters frequently feature rising Pashto pop singers in their programming. And new, up and coming bands like Peshawar's Khumariyaan have reached rare, nationwide acclaim after appearing on the popular Coke Studios broadcast, where they fused traditional sounds with modern tastes-spreading Pashtun music far from its native homeland.

immemorial," says Farman Ali Shah, a village elder and Pashto poet in Warsak village near Pakistan's tribal areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Pashtun music is characterized by the rabab, a Central Asian stringed instrument, played to the beat from tablas drums, with songs salted with florid lyrics describing the pain of unrequited love or calls for political revolution. "For centuries we were a liberal society," explains rabab player and member of the National Assembly Haider Ali Khan from Pakistan's Swat Valley. "We love our religion but at the same time we love our traditional music."

Yet the slow creep of extremism had been threatening that tradition for decades. Beginning in the 1970s more hardline Islamist movements started gaining influence in the Pashtun areas along the border with Afghanistan, promoting strict interpretations of the religion including dismissive takes toward music. The shift towards violent extremism intensified with the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the later Taleban regime of the 1990s.

After the US invasion of 2001 toppled the Taleban, militancy erupted across the border in Pakistan also. A Pakistani Taleban movement formed and took control of the country's tribal areas and swathes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "The extremists were killing artists and singers in the society to create fear," explains singer Gulzar Alam, who was attacked three separate times and later left Pakistan, fearing for his life. "If you remove the culture from a community, tribe, or ethnic group the community will

be eliminated."

Public performances were all but halted as waves of suicide bombers unleashed havoc. CD markets were bombed, instrument shops destroyed, and musicians were intimidated or either

village, where his family has been making rababs by hand for 25 years. Amid the chaos the art form was also maintained thanks to increasing numbers of Afghan musicians also fleeing violence in their own country who resettled in

us," says rabab player Akhtar Gul during a performance at a hujra—a traditional Pashtun community space. As music has returned to its traditional settings in the country's northwest, slick broadcasts like Coke Studio have helped introduce Pashtun acts to millions of music fans across South Asia.

Many still remain cautious in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, however, fearing the gains are tenuous at best. Some interviewed by AFP refused to criticize militants, fearing their eventual return. And while the insurgents might have been pushed back, conservative attitudes toward music continues to resonate in the area. For Abdul Latif, 24, his love of playing the rabab is largely kept secret from his family who consider such instruments to be out of sync with Islam. "This is a part of Pashtun culture but I think my family lacks awareness," he says. For musicians like Alam who were forced to flee their homes, the damage runs deeper.

"It takes a lot of time, to set the mind or brain of the artists free from fear," says Alam from Kabul where he is waiting for a response to an asylum request with the United Nations. "You can change the policy of a government with a stroke of a pen, it doesn't take much time," adds the lawmaker Khan. "But to change the mindset you've created in two or three decades it's not easy for that mindset to change." — AFP



A worker makes a traditional rabab musical instrument in a workplace on the outskirts of Peshawar.

back. Performances that once took place in secret are returning. Shops selling instruments are open and thriving again, while local broadcasters frequently feature rising Pashto pop singers in their programming. And new, up and coming bands like Peshawar's Khumariyaan have reached rare, nationwide acclaim after appearing on the popular Coke Studios broadcast, where they fused traditional sounds with modern tastes-spreading Pashtun music far from its native homeland.

"Music is the spice of life... it has been a part of our culture from time



In this picture Akhtar Gul (center left) plays a traditional rabab musical instrument in Peshawar. — AFP photos

outright targeted. Singers and musicians fled en masse, while others were gunned down. A brave few continued to invite musicians to play in private shows at hujras and weddings, albeit without large sound systems that could possibly attract militants.

"They were asking people to stop music but villagers never accepted them," says Noor Sher from Sufaid Sang

places like Peshawar, opening music schools that kept the tradition alive.

### Roots of violence

The Pakistani military began intensifying efforts to push the militants out in 2014, and security has dramatically improved in the years since. "Now the situation is good, very good. We can play anywhere, whenever people invite



A worker checks a traditional rabab musical instrument in a workplace on the outskirts of Peshawar.



Workers make traditional rabab musical instruments in a workplace on the outskirts of Peshawar.





Sons of David and Victoria Beckham, Romeo Beckham (second left) and Cruz Beckham (third left), David Beckham (center) and his daughter Harper (second right) take their seats in the front row for the catwalk show by fashion house Victoria Beckham during their Autumn/Winter 2020 collection on the third day of London Fashion Week in London. — AFP photos



Models present creations by fashion house Victoria Beckham during her catwalk show for their Autumn/Winter 2020 collection on the third day of London Fashion Week in London. — AFP photos

# Victoria Beckham's 'gentle rebellion' at London Fashion Week

Victoria Beckham made a clarion call for a "gentle rebellion" at London Fashion Week on Sunday with a sophisticated but wearable collection. "I wanted to explore how to honor tradition but challenge convention. To be subversive yet sophisticated," the designer said in her collection notes. "The collection is about staying true to ourselves and our woman, but still surprising her, and us. Twisting our codes," she added. "This is what I call my gentle rebellion". The catwalk was lit up by fluid black dresses worn with platform boots that wouldn't have looked out of place on some of her former Spice Girls, a small-checked culotte skirt brightened up by a yellow sweater and a turtle-neck sweater dress with diamonds cut out of the sleeves.

The pop star turned designer said her autumn/winter 2020/21 collection came from "thinking about the tension between refinement and rebellion". "I was inspired by different women's ideas of women-different characters, different moments and different attitudes-but with no restrictions." The models paraded on a reflective floor in

Whitehall's lavish Banquet House, adorned with imposing chandeliers and a ceiling painted by Rubens in 1636.

The former Posh Spice mingled with the audience after the show, dressed in a white silk blouse and black high-waisted trousers. Her family supported her from the front row, with ex-footballer husband David carrying daughter Harper on his lap, surrounded by sons Romeo and Cruz and the high priestess of fashion Anna Wintour. Only eldest son Brooklyn was absent. After years in New York, the former singer returned to London Fashion Week in 2018 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of her brand, her first show in the British capital. She has since gone into cosmetics with Victoria Beckham Beauty, teaming up with Sarah Creal, a former Estee Lauder executive, who she met in 2016 during a joint launch. — AFP



British fashion designer Victoria Beckham reacts after presenting creations for her Autumn/Winter 2020 collection.



Models present creations from the Roksanda collection during their 2020 Autumn / Winter collection catwalk show at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during London Fashion Week in London. — AFP photos



The "angel" Linda Pani performs as the Angel of the new Carnival on February 16, 2020 by the Bell Tower on St Mark's Square in Venice. — AFP photos



## Traditional 'flight of the angel' opens Venice Carnival

Thousands of people, many dressed for a traditional masked ball, crowded into Saint Mark's Square on Sunday to witness "the flight of the angel", the opening event of the annual Venice Carnival. Each first Sunday of the carnival, a young woman chosen as "Marie" has the honor of performing the stunt, gliding through the air on a harness attached to a cable from the 99-metre (325-foot)

bell-tower of Saint Mark's Basilica to a stage below. As she soars overhead, the angel tosses confetti at the onlookers below. "This is pure energy, I feel the energy rise from my feet as if I'm floating on air," this year's angel Linda Pani told AFP-TV. "It was extraordinary. I felt the wind, the sea, the ground and the fire in me," she added, describing the experience as "perhaps the happiest three minutes of

my life". The centuries-old Venice Carnival, rooted in Christian festivities ahead of the fasting period of Lent, attracts crowds of foreign and Italian tourists to its masked balls and theatrical performances. The carnival, which lasts until February 25, was created in Venice in 1162, the day after a military victory.—AFP



Revellers wearing masks and a period costumes pose by Caffè Florian on St Mark's square during the Venice Carnival. — AFP photos

## Pneumonia forces John to cut short Auckland gig

Elton John has tearfully apologized to fans after cutting short a concert in New Zealand due to illness, with the British superstar saying he was suffering from "walking pneumonia". The 72-year-old, who is in the midst of a grueling world tour, struggled to sing while seated at a grand piano during a performance at Mount Smart Stadium on Sunday night. After being checked by a medic with a stethoscope, he battled on through two more songs before calling a halt to proceedings barely halfway through his set list.



This videograb taken from a concert video obtained from the Twitter account of Tim McCready shows Elton John tearfully apologizes to fans after cutting short a concert in Auckland due to illness, with the British superstar saying he was suffering from "walking pneumonia" yesterday. — AFP

"I can't sing, I've just completely lost my voice," he told concert-goers in a croaky rasp. "I've got to go. I'm so sorry." Elton John's illness comes as health authorities worldwide are on high alert for signs of the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 70,000 and killed 1,770 in mainland China. New Zealand has no reported cases of the virus.

Video footage showed Elton John, dressed in a powder-blue suit and wearing his trademark oversized glasses, standing at the piano and shrugging his shoulders at the crowd in a gesture of helplessness. He then shuffled off the stage with his head bowed, helped by members of his road crew as the crowd cheered their support. "I was diagnosed with walking pneumonia earlier today, but I was determined to give you the best show humanly possible," he later tweeted. "I played and sang my heart out, until my voice could sing no more. I'm disappointed, deeply upset and sorry. I gave it all I had."

### 'Incredible' commitment

Walking pneumonia is an informal term for atypical pneumonia, which causes mild infections of the respiratory system, according to the US Centers for Disease Control. It said symptoms include tiredness, sore throat, fever and coughing, and the illness can sometimes lead to full pneumonia, a serious lung infection. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said she briefly met the singer before Sunday's concert and "you could tell he wasn't feeling well". "Given he had what they call walking pneumonia, the fact that he spent roughly two hours on stage giving such a huge performance was incredible and very generous," she told reporters, praising his commitment to fans.

Elton John is in New Zealand as part of his "Farewell Yellow Brick Road" world tour, which began in 2018 and is scheduled to end in late 2020 in London. Featuring hundreds of concerts across the globe, it is billed as the last chance to see the star before he retires. The septuagenarian has followed a punishing schedule in New Zealand, not only performing concerts but also slotting in a side trip to sing at the Academy Awards in Los Angeles.

At the Oscars, he took home the award for best original song for "(I'm Gonna) Love Me Again" from the musical biopic about his life, "Rocketman". Elton John has two more shows scheduled in Auckland before heading to Australia for a further seven gigs. The tour's Australasian promoter, Chugg Entertainment, said one of the Auckland shows had been moved from Tuesday to Wednesday so the star could get additional rest following medical advice. — AFP

## RWANDAN DISSIDENT SINGER FOUND DEAD IN CUSTODY

A popular Rwandan singer whose music was banned by the ruling regime "committed suicide" in custody, police announced yesterday, three days after he was caught trying to flee the country. Kizito Mihigo, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide whose songs angered the government of strongman President Paul Kagame, was found dead in a police cell in the capital Kigali around 5am (0200 GMT). Mihigo, who was sentenced to 10 years' jail in 2015 for conspiracy against the government but later released on pardon, was captured trying to cross the border in Rwanda's south.

Police spokesperson John Bosco Kabera said he was visited by family

members and his lawyer during his detention. "Investigations have begun to ascertain why he committed suicide," he said. Mihigo fell foul of the ruling RPF in 2013 after composing songs that questioned the government's tight control of the legacy of the 1994 tragedy. His music, once popular by ruling elites, was swiftly banned. Two years later he was accused of terrorism and raising support for an opposition political movement and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

His lawyers said prosecutors had little evidence to jail him. He was released on presidential pardon in September 2018. Mihigo is not the first figure to die in mysterious circumstances under

police custody in Rwanda. Last year, a former director-general in Kagame's office was found dead in a military jail after being sentenced to 10 years for corruption. In 2015, Kagame's personal doctor, Emmanuel Gasakure, was shot dead in custody by police.

Kagame, who has been in power since 1994, has been accused of ruling with an iron fist, clamping down on all forms of dissent and jailing or exiling opposition politicians. Human Rights Watch, among other rights watchdogs, has accused Kagame's regime summary executions, unlawful arrest and detention and torture in custody. — AFP



Kizito Mihigo

## 'Sonic' booms to top of N America box office

Defying expectations, Paramount's new adventure comedy "Sonic the Hedgehog" took in \$57 million this weekend to leap to the top of the North American box office, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. That figure, based on a Friday-through-Sunday estimate, is expected to grow to \$68 million when Monday's Presidents Day holiday in the US is included, proving an exception to the rule that films based on video games rarely excel at the box office. An early trailer for the film had bombed, Variety reported, prompting the studio to redesign the title character. The result: a Sonic boom.

Far back in second place was last week's leader, Warner Bros superhero film "Birds of Prey," at \$17.1 million for the three-day weekend (\$19.5 million for four days). Margot Robbie stars as former Joker girlfriend Harley Quinn. In third was another new release, Sony's horror film "Fantasy Island," at \$12.4 million (\$14 million). Michael Pena and Maggie Q star in the remake of a 1970s TV show, which has drawn some vicious reviews ("a tide of numbing stupidity," said CNN). Another new film, Universal's romantic drama "The Photograph," opened in fourth place, at \$12.3 million (\$14 million). It stars Lakeith Stanfield and Issa Rae. And in fifth, after weeks at or near the top, was Sony's action comedy "Bad Boys for Life," with Will Smith and



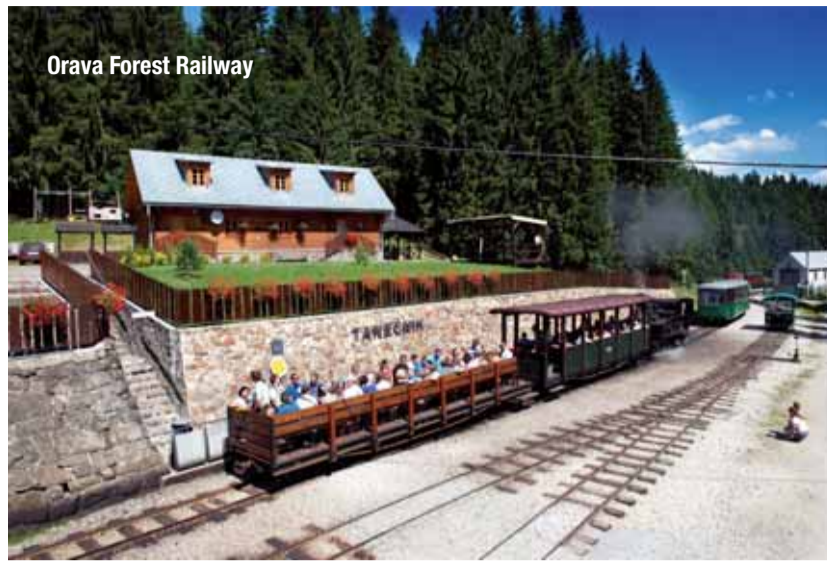
Martin Lawrence as wise-cracking detectives. It took in an estimated \$11.3 million (\$12.8 million). Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "1917" (\$8.1 million for three days; \$9.4 million for four)
- "Jumanji: The Next Level" (\$5.7 million; \$7 million)
- "Parasite" (\$5.5 million; \$6.7 million)
- "Dolittle" (\$5.1 million; \$6.3 million)
- "Downhill" (\$4.7 million; \$5.2 million)—AFP

(From left) Actors Natasha Rothwell, Ben Schwartz, Jim Carrey, Tika Sumpter and Lee Majdoub attend a special screening of "Sonic the Hedgehog" at the Regency Village Theatre in Westwood, California. — AFP



Orava Castle



Orava Forest Railway



Orava Village Museum

## Summer in Orava, Slovak Republic

The region of Orava lies in the north-western part of Slovakia, on the border with the Poland. The border crossing in environs of the village Oravska Polhora is also the northernmost point of Slovakia. The axis of the region is the Orava river.

Region possesses almost everything a tourist may wish. The mountain ranges Mala Fatra, Chocské vrchy and above all Západné Tatry - Roháčce are the paradise for hikers, cyclists and visitors. Lovers of hiking like to climb the Roháčce Mountain and to the passes over the west Tatra ridge. Walks in environs of Oravice or ascents to the Babia hora or Velký Choc peaks are also among the favorites.

property of royals and rich squires. The Thurzós turned the castle into a today's look. Their renovation of the building made the castle become one of very important edifices of Renaissance period. In 1800 the castle burnt down and was badly damaged. The last owner Jan Pálffy had been rebuilding the castle until he died. He focused on collecting activity - he was buying the objects presented in European auctions. He bequeathed a valuable collection based on natural surrounding with rich set of art and history objects. The last and most complex renovation of the castle took place as late as in 1953 -1968.

### Orava Forest Railway

*Oravský Podzámok - area: Kubínska Hôľa - region: Orava, Type of interest: National monuments*

The unique technical monument of Orava Forest Railway is one of the very few narrow-gauge switchback railways preserved to this day.

Its original purpose was to transport timber from inaccessible mountainous terrain, however, now it is one of the most popular tourist attractions of the Orava region. The sightseeing trains of Orava Forest Railway depart from Tanecník Station, near the village of Oravska Lesná. The station is connected with the village by a 6 km asphalt side-road. At the station, free parking is provided. The train depot, train ticket office, souvenir shop, exhibition documenting the evolution of the railway, children playground or peacock aviary are also located at the station.

After the ticket purchase, passengers take a seat on a motorized draisine pulled by a motor locomotive. The train then starts a 15 - 20 minute ride to the peak station at the Beskyd Saddle, located 3 km from the Tanecník Station. Here, 935 meters above the sea level, the train takes a break and the passengers can enjoy the magnificent view of Orava nature from a scenic tower. Goral Wooden Cottage hosting an exhibition dedicated to the Goral culture of Orava is also there to visit. Then, the train heads back to the valley. Duration of the whole trip is 1 hour 10 minutes.

### Sightseeing cruises on Orava dam, Orava ship

*Namesťovo - area: Orava reservoir, Orava Beskids, Slanická Osada - region: Orava, Type of interest: Sightseeing Cruises*



Meander Thermal Park Oravice

Enjoy a unique cruise on the Orava Dam on comfortable boat that has a capacity of 162 persons. Embarkation on Ship Orava is in port No. 1 near Hotel Goral. During the voyage you will enjoy beautiful views of the Western Tatras and Babia Hora and recognize Slanica Island of Art, where the boat stops a makes a 25 minutes break. On the boat there is a buffet with refreshments possibilities and toilets.

Boat tour is ideal for school trips and as an enrichment of programs for corporate events, as well as trips for pensioners. It is possible to pre-order meals, snack or folk music. The cruise lasts 1.5 hours including a 25 minute break to Slanica Island of Art. Cruises take place from May until the end of October.

### AQUARELAX Dolny Kubin

*Dolný Kubín - area: Kubínska Hôľa - region: Orava Type of interest: Aquaparks & Thermal swimming pools*

Waterpark - AquaRelax Dolny Kubin is located in the center of Dolny Kubin in Orava region on the north of Slovakia. Near the water park there are stadiums (football and winter), a playground with artificial grass, a ski resort Kubínska hôľa.

The dominant feature of the resort, Water World comes with water slides, whirlpools, massage showers and other water attractions. On a glazed patio there is prepared plenty of sun deck chairs. The swimming pool area includes a large multi-functional swimming pool, children's pool with wheelchair access. For adrenaline there are 2 slides that are 40 and 71 meters or double slide with a length of 12.7 meters. The waterpark Dolny Kubin features also Children's Paradise Fun Park with inflatable attractions, playgrounds and slides.

### Meander Thermal Park Oravice

*Oravice - area: Roháčce, Thermal bath Oravice - region: Orava Type of interest: Aquaparks & Thermal swimming pools*

Meander Oravice Thermal Park is situated in the north of Slovakia in the Orava region on the north-western outskirts of the Western Tatras. It is located 6 km from the center of the village Vitanova and 13 km from the Polish border.

Water Park, where you can enjoy swimming pools with natural thermal water is open all year. Highly mineralized water rises from a depth of 1,611 meters. Vacationers can anytime of the year till late

hours dive in sulphurous-calcium-magnesium water with high iron content. From swimming pools as well as from all over the swimming pool, it is a beautiful view of the most beautiful peaks of the Western Tatras - Roháčce mountain ranges. Sports and relaxation pool offers a place for sports-



AQUARELAX Dolny Kubin

minded visitors who can swim here, while the second part of the pool with water attractions is reserved for relaxing. Artificial waves in thermal pool are great water attraction in this thermal resort. Other water attractions of the relaxation part include the massage jets, massage benches and water mushroom. The length of the swimming pool has a length of 25 meters.

You can find here also a children's pool with water mushroom and two children's slides. Especially in bad weather you surely appreciate the connection between several outdoor pools with the inner ones. There are also bubble pools in the inner or cooling pool. Café, bistro, bar and plenty of sun loungers are also part of the thermal park area. By entry you will get a chip bracelet, which records how much consumption and which serves to open the locker. You pay on departure.

### Orava Village Museum

*Zuberec - area: Roháčce, Western Tatras - region: Orava Type of interest: Open air museums and folk architecture*

Orava Village Museum in Zuberec located in beautiful natural surroundings of Roháčce Mountains tries to illustrate a living of people in Orava region in the past. Visitors can see more than 50 houses and several other buildings of folk architecture. Houses are decorated and there are kept pets here and in the summer typical crops are grown here, too.

The museum is divided into five parts, which the form of settlements and villages are presented in. Towering above the whole village, the wooden Gothic church from the early 15th century is a real gem of the open-air museum. Orava Village Museum is open to visitors year round. During the tourist season (summer and winter) various interesting programs are held in its area.



Orava dam

Winter months in Orava are equally charming. Down-hill skiing in Zuberec and its environs including Kubínska hôľa or cross-country ski tracks through the Skorusínske vrchy and Oravska Magura mountains provide an unforgettable experience to skiers of Slovakia and from abroad. Orava also has architectural monuments in every commune. The most valuable of them is the Castle of Orava towering above the eponymous river.

Samples of old popular architecture can be found in villages of Orava. They are also concentrates in the monument reserve of popular architecture in Podbiel and Open-Air Museum in Zuberec. The most important samples of old sacral architecture are wooden churches in Týrdosin, Lestiny and Istebné. The best place for recreation next to water is the dam Oravska priehrada.

### Orava Castle

*Oravský Podzámok - area: Kubínska Hôľa - region: Orava, Type of interest: Castles, chateaus, National monuments*

Large and well-preserved castle is towering on a steep limestone hill right by the village at 112 meters over the level of the river Orava, about 10 kilometers from Dolny Kubin. The castle is a national culture heritage.

Orava Castle, before the center of Orava area, was founded in the 13th century on the place of older settlement. The oldest historical notes of it come back to the year before 1235 when it had been the king's property. Orava Castle together with the surrounded Orava lands were alternately



Xin Xin, a female giant panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*) born in captivity in Mexico, rests at the Chapultepec zoo in Mexico City. — AFP photos



Shuan Shuan born in captivity in Mexico, drinks water at the Chapultepec zoo.

## Mexico's giant pandas are Chinese in name only

Xin Xin and Shuan Shuan are the main attractions at the Chapultepec zoo in Mexico City but what makes them truly unique, zoo officials say, is that they're the only giant pandas in the world not owned by China. They were born in captivity in Mexico and although they have Chinese names, "they belong to Mexico," Rafael Tinajero, a manager at the zoo, told AFP. Many young pandas born abroad in captivity are later repatriated to China, where the species originates.

But Xin Xin and Shuan Shuan, with their plump bodies and tender expressions, will be staying put. They are the last in the line of a panda couple-Ying Ying and Pe Pe loaned to Mexico by the Chinese government in 1975. Since 1980, China has operated a different policy in which it only lends pandas for a short time and in return for a payment towards wild panda conservation efforts. The panda is considered a

vulnerable species.

As Ying Ying and Pe Pe arrived in Mexico before China changed its policy, Xin Xin and Shuan Shuan will stay in Mexico. "With that, Mexico became the first country outside of China to have had a successful natural reproduction of pandas outside their natural habitat, in captivity conditions," said Tinajero. He said eight more pandas were born in Mexico between 1980 and 1990 but only four of those survived. Giant pandas typically live until about 20 in the wild and 30 in captivity. They average around 100-115 kilograms (220-250 pounds) and adults stand between 1.2 to 1.9 meters (4-6 feet) tall. Males can weigh as much as 160 kilograms. — AFP

Shuan Shuan holds a stick at the Chapultepec zoo.







DAYTONA BEACH, Florida: US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump ride in the Presidential limousine as they take a pace lap ahead of the start of the Daytona 500 Nascar race at Daytona International Speedway on Sunday. — AFP

## Trump takes 'The Beast' for lap around Daytona

DAYTONA BEACH, Florida: US President Donald Trump took "The Beast" - his heavily armored Cadillac limousine - for a lumbering lap of honor around the Daytona racetrack on Sunday in front of tens of thousands of cheering fans. Trump, who is gearing up for a re-election battle in November, was the ceremonial starter of the NASCAR Daytona 500 race, issu-

ing the traditional order, "Gentlemen, start your engines!"

The president's motorcade then led the field of 40 race cars on a parade lap of the revered course - a first for a US president, according to NASCAR officials. Trump thanked the "tens of thousands of patriots" gathered at the Daytona International Speedway in Florida, describing the race

as "pure American glory". "No matter who wins," he told the crowd, "what matters most is God, family and country". "Rubber will burn, fans will scream and the great American race will begin," he said in remarks met with chants of "USA, USA!"

Travelling from his Mar-a-Lago weekend resort, Trump arrived at the racetrack on Air Force One, accompanied by

his wife Melania, son Donald Trump Jr and son-in-law Jared Kushner. The plane did a low flyover of the track, which has a capacity of about 100,000 spectators. Some fans in the crowd held up signs supporting Trump and chanted, "Four more years!"

Florida is a key state in the election, and Trump has already been campaigning

hard to persuade voters to return him to office in the November vote. "The Beast" is the popular name for the US president's specially-designed car. The current model is reported to weigh about 10 tons and have bomb-proof windows 13 cm thick. Trump plans a fundraising swing and political rallies in Western states this week. — AFP

## Height matters in US politics, and...

Continued from Page 1

Obama, George W Bush, his father, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, to name a few. Indeed, Americans are so caught up with the height of their leaders that during one of the 2016 Republican presidential debates, Google has said the most frequent online search was not about a policy issue. It was about how tall Jeb Bush was (answer: 6'3").

This predilection for taller leaders - more stature suggesting more strength, especially in times of strife, says Murray - is hardly a uniquely American thing. To wit, Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe of Japan and Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel are both taller than the average man in their countries. While he is not an elected leader, so is President Xi Jinping of China, who stands 5'11". France's Charles de Gaulle was a towering 6'5". Jacques Chirac was 6'2". Of course, Nicolas Sarkozy was 5'5".

But in general, experts say tall folk have an advantage in politics - and other walks of life as well. "There is overwhelming evidence that tall people have a much better chance to reach higher positions in organizations" in any country, said Abraham Buunk, a Dutch academic who co-authored a 2013 study in Leadership Quarterly entitled "Tall claims? Sense and nonsense about the importance of height of US presidents". "The advantage of taller candidates is potentially explained by perceptions associated with height: taller presidents are rated by experts as 'greater,' and having more leadership and communications skills," the study said.

The world's tallest men on average are the Dutch at six feet, according to the scientific journal eLife. Buunk said he and three colleagues took note, and eventually studied American presidents, when a Canadian graduate student colleague who had always thought he was tall came to the Netherlands and "felt rather average". "We decided to examine the psychological effects of height, starting with jealousy," Buunk wrote in an email to AFP.

In the United States, in presidential elections held through 2012, the taller of the two major-party candidates won 58 percent of the time. Murray says this is largely because elections tend to lure taller people as candidates. "It's not like we all get in a room and point to the people who are taller," he told AFP. "Tall males are much more likely to think themselves qualified to be a leader and are therefore much more likely to put themselves forward as a leader."

In this campaign, two women are running for the Democratic nomination - Elizabeth Warren is about 5'8", the same as rival Pete Buttigieg. Amy Klobuchar is several inches shorter - in a debate in December, she quipped that James Madison had been "a pretty good size for a president - he was five-foot-four". In 2016, Trump's Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton stood at about 5'5". During one of their presidential debates that year, Trump stood behind Clinton at one point as she spoke - seen as camera-hogging clowning by some, and outright bullying by others.

Murray argued that in America, at the national level at least, height is a built-in problem for women because it prevents them from looking "physically formidable" for voters seeking a leader they deem to be strong. Of course, as much as Trump tries to depict himself as taller than his opponents and says he is 6'3", it does not always work. Just look at photos from the 2016 Republican debates - Jeb Bush is clearly taller. — AFP

## Indian FM defends citizenship law as he promotes EU ties

BRUSSELS: India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar yesterday defended his country's controversial new citizenship law and crackdown in Kashmir, as he came to Brussels to promote what he hopes will be closer strategic ties to the European Union. Delhi's top diplomat was the guest of honour as EU foreign ministers met in Brussels with an eye to renewing relations and boosting trade with the south Asian giant.

EU president Ursula von der Leyen's new Commission wants to give Brussels a more "geopolitical role" and as part of that hopes to host a March summit with powerful Indian leader Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "India and the European Union share a lot of things," said Europe's high representative for foreign policy Josep Borrell, citing climate change, the digital revolution and rise of China as shared challenges.

Jaishankar, standing by Borrell, noted that the new government in India and the new commission in Brussels are "both quite fresh" and that they hoped to take relations to a "new level". He said he hoped the lunch talks would confirm the "strategic partnership". Taken together, the EU member states are Delhi's biggest trade partner, with India's imports and exports to and from the bloc each representing about 45 billion euros a year (\$49 billion).

But - while Europe has inked trade deals with big

Asian players Japan, Vietnam and Singapore - the pair have no formal agreement, and India approaches such agreements carefully. "You don't necessarily need trade deals to do trade," Jaishankar told AFP, stressing that India's economy is driven by domestic demand. "Trade deals are useful, I mean I'm not at all denying that, but I think they are not necessarily as compelling as sometimes all of us tend to tend to think."

European business wants to win more access to markets in a country with 1.4 billion people, and Jaishankar was clear that Delhi would like closer cooperation with Europe on security and strategic policy. But some in Europe are worried about what they see as India's populist shift under Modi's right-wing government. Lawmakers in the European Parliament have drafted a resolution condemning India's Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 as "discriminatory in nature and dangerously divisive".

But the non-binding resolution has yet to be passed and Jaishankar insisted the law had been misunderstood. The CAA laws eases citizenship rules for religious minorities such as Hindus and Christians from Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Protests have erupted in India, and concerns have been raised abroad, led by those who fear the Hindu nationalist government is discriminating against Muslims and putting secularism in danger.

But Jaishankar said Delhi's critics have misunderstood the government's policy and been taken in by the politics of a "very passionate" democratic society. He compared the CAA rules to immigration and refugee resettlement policies across Europe, pointing out that many EU countries also use national or cultural criteria. — AFP

## UAE issues license for first Arab...

Continued from Page 1

of electricity, around 25 percent of the nation's needs. The remaining three reactors are almost ready.

As well as generating competitively priced electricity, the UAE also hopes the nuclear plant will elevate its status as a key regional player, building on its success in establishing itself as a center for tourism, banking and services. "This is part of the UAE's drive to diversify its energy economy, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and project its image as a regional leader in science and technology," one Gulf analyst told AFP. Other headline initiatives include a homegrown space program, which saw the first Emirati astronaut sent into space last year, and plans to launch a probe to Mars.

The Barakah plant is situated on the Emirates coast, separated from Iran by the troubled Gulf waters. It is just 50 km from the border of Saudi Arabia, and is closer to the Qatari capital Doha than it is to Abu Dhabi. Amid a confrontation between Iran and the United States over Tehran's nuclear ambitions, the UAE has said it will not be developing a uranium enrichment program or nuclear reprocessing technologies.

But relations between Iran and the UAE, a staunch

US ally, have been strained as Washington pursues a "maximum pressure" policy against Tehran and accuses it of attacking oil tankers in Gulf waters. Energy giant Saudi Aramco was the target of a missile and drone attack in September that knocked out half of its production. The strike was claimed by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels but Washington accused Tehran of carrying it out.

"The 2019 attack on Aramco highlighted the vulnerability of the Gulf's energy infrastructure to external attacks," said the Gulf analyst, who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the issue. "The heightened pitch of regional tensions between Iran on the one hand, and the US and its allies on the other, increases the vulnerability of new energy infrastructure to the possibility of such attacks."

Asked what authorities have done to protect the plant from attack, Kaabi said that such concerns were factored in during the development of the project which was 12 years in the making. "That not only includes the design of the reactor in terms of safety, but also security, including measures associated with emergency, measures associated with readiness during normal operation and during accidents or incidents," he told AFP. Asked whether the plant had the potential to worsen relations with regional rivals like Iran and Qatar - which has said the plant poses a "flagrant threat to regional peace and the environment" - he defended the UAE's track record on transparency. "I tell my critics if you have questions, you can ask me." — AFP

## Israeli aircraft flies over Sudan...

Continued from Page 1

countries were only the tip of the diplomatic iceberg. "How much is above the surface in an iceberg? It's about 10 percent, he said. "What you're seeing is about 10 percent. Vast changes are coming." There are only a handful of "Muslim or Arab countries around the world that we

don't have deepened ties with," the prime minister added. "Sometimes it comes out in the open."

Gulf Arab countries have made a number of recent moves hinting at warmer ties with the Jewish state, prompted largely by a shared enmity towards Iran. Netanyahu visited Oman in 2018 and he frequently says the boycott of his country is ending, despite the absence of a peace deal with the Palestinians. Egypt and Jordan are so far the only Arab states to have full diplomatic relations with Israel. Netanyahu was speaking two weeks ahead of a March general election, the third in 12 months. He has twice failed to form a government after inconclusive polls. — Agencies

## Snubbed by Gulf, Lebanon PM Diab...

Continued from Page 1

Lebanese President Michel Aoun's office said he received an invitation to Tehran during his meeting with Iran's parliament speaker Ali Larijani yesterday. Larijani said in a televised conference that his country stood ready to help Lebanon. Mohanad Hage Ali, a fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center, said the visit may not help bolster the new Lebanese government's image as inde-

pendent. "It's not very helpful at this stage as Lebanon seeks foreign aid and a bailout and the help of Gulf Arab states. This is the not message you want to send," he said.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said in a speech on Sunday that the cabinet was not "Hezbollah's government" and that opponents who described it that way were damaging Lebanon's ties to foreign states and making it harder to combat the crisis. A team of IMF experts will begin consultations with Lebanon's government in Beirut on Thursday, a source familiar with the matter said. The heavily indebted state formally requested the Fund's technical help last week. On the parallel market - now the main source of hard currency - the price of US dollars hovered around 2,400 Lebanese pounds yesterday, 60 percent beyond the official peg of 1,507.5 in place since 1997. — Reuters



Sports

# It's official: Scott wins Genesis Invitational, Woods stumbles

## Tournament host Tiger Woods finishes last

LOS ANGELES: Adam Scott fired a one-under-par 70 on Sunday to win the Genesis Invitational, and this time the Australian's victory at Riviera Country Club is official. On a challenging day that saw world number one Rory McIlroy card a two-over-par 73 and tournament host Tiger Woods stumble to a six-over 77, Scott countered two bogeys and a double-bogey with five birdies to build an 11-under total of 273.

He finished two strokes in front of South Korea's Kang Sung (69) and Americans Scott Brown (68) and Matt Kuchar (72). "It's incredibly satisfying to win a tournament of this stature on a golf course of this stature - even better to come out on top and have your game really tested. It was not easy," Scott said. He said the key with Riviera playing firm and fast was to "take away the big mistakes" and while he didn't manage to do that completely, he did it better than most.

Scott's big miscue came at the par-four fifth, where his flop shot from behind the green rolled back to his feet and he wound up with a double-bogey. McIlroy, who started the day tied for the lead with Scott and Kuchar, fared even worse at the fifth, where he also needed two flop shots to reach the green but then took three putts for a triple-bogey.

While Scott bounced right back with an 18-foot birdie putt at the sixth, McIlroy made a bogey and never really recovered. "Definitely the toughest day of the week," said McIlroy, who regained the world number one ranking last Monday for the first time since 2015. "The wind was up, hole locations were sort of tricky spots, the course was firming up again. Everyone was finding it tough out there."

Scott gave himself a bit of breathing room with a 12-foot birdie at the 13th, but for him the shot of the day was a flop shot at 15, where he limited the damage to a

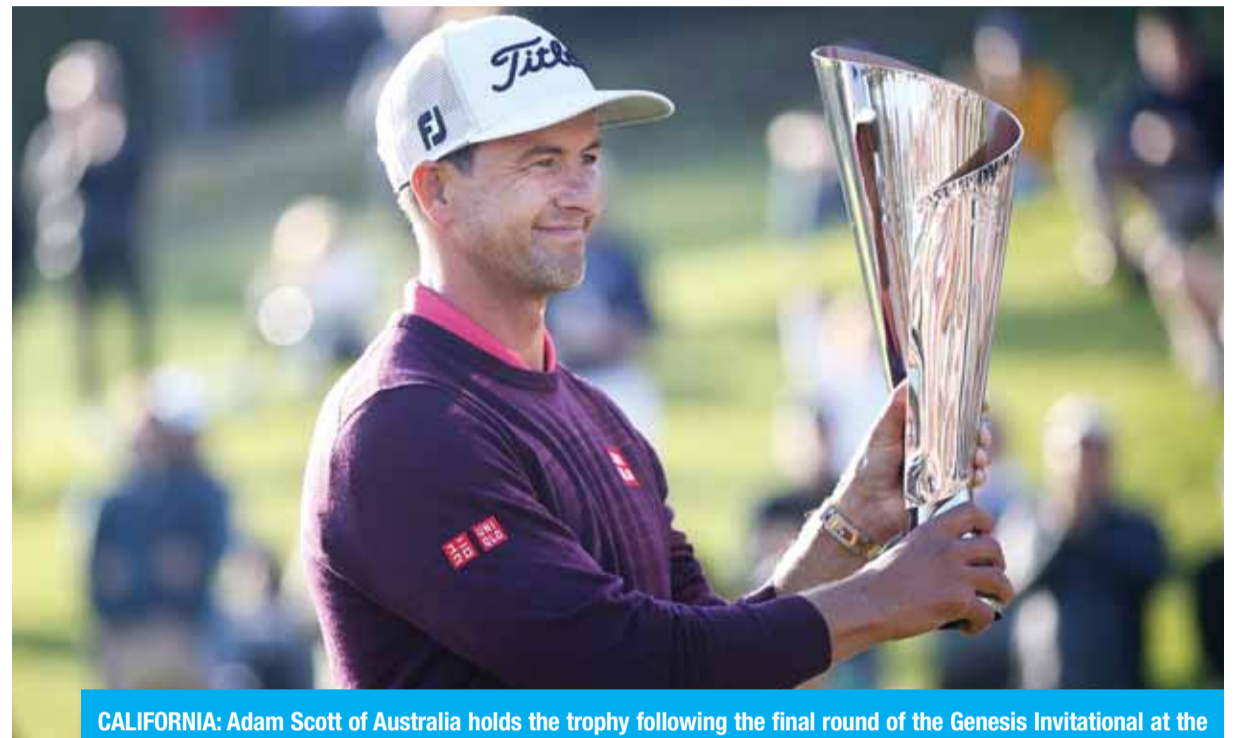
bogey after his approach was plugged in a greenside bunker and he blasted out through the green. "I was in a horrible position then," Scott said. "I stood there and I wanted to maybe bump it into the fringe, but realistically it was going to be 45 feet past probably."

"I thought, well, you can maybe win the tournament if you hit a great flop shot here, so I thought I might as well just go for it," Scott rolled in an 11-foot birdie putt at 17 to push his lead back to two strokes, and he closed with a par to hoist the trophy at Riviera for a second time. He came out on top in a playoff in 2005, but since the rain-soaked event was shortened to 36 holes he wasn't credited with a US PGA Tour victory. But this "W" goes in the books as the 2013 Masters champion's 14th US tour title.

### 'Important step'

That goes along with 14 international victories - most recently at the Australian PGA Championship in December, where Scott ended a near four-year title drought. "This is an important step for whatever this next few years is in my career," the 39-year-old said. "It can definitely be used for momentum." McIlroy said that apart from his lapse on the fifth he played "pretty well."

"Played the other holes in one-under," noted the Northern Ireland star, who headlined a group of five players sharing fifth place on eight-under 276, where he was joined by Japan's Hideki Matsuyama and Americans Bryson DeChambeau, Max Homa and Joel Dahmen. Woods's day could hardly have gone worse. Already 15 off the pace to start the day, the 15-time major champion dropped five shots in his last six holes as he stumbled home with a six-over-par 77. Overall Woods had seven bogeys and a double-bogey with one birdie and an eagle on the way to an 11-over par total of 295 - 68th



CALIFORNIA: Adam Scott of Australia holds the trophy following the final round of the Genesis Invitational at the Riviera Country Club on February 16, 2020 in Pacific Palisades. — AFP

and last of the 68 players to make the cut.

"I did not do much well today," said Woods, whose lone birdie of the day at 17 came when he holed out from a bunker - after failing to get out of the same bunker on his first attempt. "Good news, I hit every ball forward, not backwards - a couple sideways."

Woods went into the week gunning for a record-setting 83rd US PGA Tour title, having matched Sam Snead's record of 82 at the Zozo Championship in October. But he came up empty for the 13th time on the course where he played his first PGA Tour event as a 16-year-old. — AFP

## Motorsport athletes converge on Kuwait for Red Bull Car Park Drift



KUWAIT: Drift competition Red Bull Car Park Drift steers into Kuwait on March 6, 2020. Returning and new motorsport athletes will compete in a new venue, at the unique Kuwait Global Steel Services factory grounds. Following the success of the previous edition of Red Bull Car Park Drift in Kuwait last year, the highly technical and ingenious sport of drift course racing returns, poised to make a bigger impact.

The competition takes place in the nearly 30,000 square meter Kuwait Global Steel Services factory, which includes plenty of space to accommodate athletes, visitors and the press. This will be the first time the global drift event will be held at the venue. Athletes are excited to see how it measures up to other locations around the world.

Red Bull Car Park Drift is organized by Basel Salem AlSabah Motor Racing

Club and is held in partnership with by Dunlop, Al-Babtain Group and Acqua Eva. Drivers are judged on a 400-point system that meticulously tests their skill, style, approach, car appearance and more. From the moment they enter the arena to the time they exit after completing the course, every touch of the pedal and turn of the wheel will be scrutinized. Perfection is highly prized in the sport.

The 2020 drift season will be held in multiple cities during the year, where it will culminate in the Series Final, taking place on November 6 in Cairo, Egypt. The winner will be crowned the King of Drift 2020. Drift course racing is currently the global leader across all motorsports by growth, and its appearance on the international scale only continues to intrigue more audiences around the world since its inception in Japan.

## India's 'Usain Bolt' buffalo runner turns down sprint trial

NEW DELHI: A buffalo jockey in India has refused to take part in a track and field trial after his record-setting performance in a traditional footrace drew comparisons with Olympic sprint legend Usain Bolt. Srinivas Gowda and his buffaloes ran 142.5 meters in 13.62 seconds, setting a record in the annual race known as Kambala in the southern state of Karnataka.

With a time that equates to running 100m in 9.55 seconds, compared to the retired Bolt's world record of 9.58sec, social media buzz erupted over the chis-

elled construction worker. But with the Tokyo Olympics looming in July, Gowda politely declined an invitation from India's sports minister to try out at the Sports Authority of India in Bangalore. "I will not be attending trials at Sports Authority of India. I want to achieve more in Kambala," Gowda, 28, told Indian media. "Kambala and track events are different and those who have done well in one cannot replicate in the other."

"Many who have achieved in track events have tried Kambala and have not been successful. In Kambala we run on heels whereas in track it is on toes." Kambala is an annual race where racers splash 142m through paddy fields holding a rope attached to two buffaloes, who run ahead of them. Many users have noted that the runners are pulled along by the buffaloes, who are lashed together. "Never in my dream did I think that I would be so famous. The credit should go to my buffaloes," said Gowda. "I could achieve this only because they cooperated with me." — AFP



AIKALA: Srinivas Gowda, 28, hailing from the Dakshina Kannada district runs alongside his buffaloes during 'Kambala', the traditional buffalo racing event, held at Aikala village in Dakshina Kannada district about 30 kms from Mangalore. — AFP

## Du Plessis resigns as South Africa skipper

JOHANNESBURG: Faf du Plessis announced yesterday that he was stepping down as South Africa's cricket captain with immediate effect. Du Plessis, 35, said he needed to take "a step back" from the captaincy in order to help the emergence of the next generation of leaders under Quinton de Kock. De Kock led the team in recent one-day and Twenty20 internationals against England while Du Plessis was being rested. It was announced last month that De Kock would be South Africa's long-term one-day captain but in yesterday's statement, Du Plessis said he was also relinquishing the Test and T20 captaincy.

The announcement clears the way for De Kock to lead South Africa at the T20 World Cup in Australia in October and November and possibly to lead the Test team in a two-match series in the West Indies in July and August. In a statement issued by Cricket South Africa, Du Plessis said he wanted to concentrate on contributing to the team as a batsman and senior player. Du Plessis captained South Africa in 112 matches across all formats, including 36 Tests.

He said his time away from cricket since the end of the Test series against England last month had given him "a lot of perspective". Du Plessis added, "It has been a rewarding, sometimes tough and other times a lonely road, but I would not replace the experience for anything, because it has made me the man that I am proud to be today." He said the decision to step down was one of the toughest decisions he had made but he said he was committed to supporting De Kock, coach Mark Boucher and the rest of his team-mates.

### Vital role

"After the 2019 ICC World Cup, I made the decision to continue in my role as captain while the team went through a rebuilding phase following the retirement of some key senior players and a complete overhaul of the coaching staff that we had worked with until then," he said. "It was important to me that I stayed to help the team find its feet and plot a new way forward while assisting in identifying the next generation of leaders during a time of turbulence in SA cricket."

The last season of my captaincy has been the most challenging to date as I had a lot of off-field issues that I devoted my energy towards," Du Plessis took over as limited overs captain in 2012 and became Test captain in 2016. He built up a reputation as one of the country's outstanding leaders with his achievements including home-and-away series wins against Australia in both Tests and one-day internationals.

But South Africa lost eight of their most recent nine Tests under his leadership and had a poor World Cup. This period coincided with upheavals in administration and the firing of coach Ottis Gibson and most of his backroom staff, as well as the retirement of key players. "I have strived to lead the team with dignity and authenticity during exhilarating highs and devastating lows," said Du Plessis. "In a perfect world I would have loved to lead the team in the Tests for the rest of the season as well as the T20 World Cup, but sometimes the most important attribute of a leader is to be selfless." — AFP

## Sports

# Team LeBron outguns Team Giannis in NBA All-Star Game

## Kawhi Leonard steal the show; Johnson takes the centre stage

LOS ANGELES: Kawhi Leonard stole the show on the floor and Hall of Famer Magic Johnson took centre stage in an emotional pre-game ceremony on a night the NBA paid tribute to the late Kobe Bryant. Chicago's favorite son Anthony Davis sank one of two free throws to cap a thrilling fourth quarter and lift Team LeBron to a 157-155 win over Team Giannis in Sunday's 2020 NBA All-Star Game.

Leonard finished with 30 points and seven rebounds and was awarded the new Kobe Bryant MVP award. The trophy was named after the former Los Angeles Laker, who perished along with his daughter Gigi and seven others in a horrific helicopter crash three weeks ago. "I want to thank Kobe for everything he has done for me, all the long talks and workouts. Thank you," said Leonard, who grew up in Riverside, California east of Los Angeles. Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 25 points and 11 rebounds to lead Team Giannis who kept the game close right up until the nail-biting finish.

"The guys were taking charges and running back playing defense," said Leonard of the highly competitive All-Star Game which contrasted sharply with Friday's benign Rising Stars game that deteriorated into a slam-dunking contest. With the score 156-155, and

new format dictating that the winner needed to be the first to get to 157 points, Davis went to the line for two shots after being fouled by Team Giannis' Kyle Lowry. "I told my teammates I was going to go to miss the first one and put more pressure on myself to knock down the second one," said Davis, who grew up in Chicago.

That's exactly what he did to put a perfect ending on the night which began with another Laker icon Johnson making an emotional speech honoring Bryant in front of a crowd of 20,900 at the United Center in Chicago. "We'll never see another basketball player quite like Kobe," said Johnson, who also paid tribute to Bryant on Sunday to David Stern, the late NBA commissioner. "Scoring 81 points in one game. Scoring 60 points in his last game. And then winning five NBA championships."

James made his 16th all-star start breaking a tie with Bryant for the most all-time. Bryant holds the record for most all-star MVP awards with four. "His legacy is living on every single day with us," said James of Bryant. The league also honored Bryant by having Team Giannis wear his No 24 and Team LeBron wear his basketball-playing daughter's No 2. Team LeBron earned \$400,000 in prize money which they donated to the Chicagoland youth charity Chicago Scholars.— AFP



CHICAGO: Joel Embiid #24 of Team Giannis gets tangled up with Kawhi Leonard #2 and Anthony Davis #2 of Team LeBron in the fourth quarter during the 69th NBA All-Star Game at the United Center on February 16, 2020. — AFP

## 'Kobe, Kobe, Kobe'; crowd pays tribute to fallen star

CHICAGO: Team LeBron beat Team Giannis by two points at the 69th NBA All-Star game on Sunday at a packed United Center that fell silent for eight seconds before tip-off as about 21,000 fans joined hands to pay their respects to global sports icon Kobe Bryant. The silence was broken by a string of thunderous "Kobe, Kobe, Kobe," chants that rocked the stadium as the crowd honored Bryant, who wore the No. 8 and No. 24 during a 20-year career with the Los Angeles Lakers that was highlighted by five National Basketball Association championships.

The stirring pre-game tribute began with Laker great Magic Johnson rousing the crowd and paying homage to Bryant, killed along with his 13-year-old daughter Gianna and seven victims in a helicopter crash in Calabasas, California, on Jan. 26. "We will never see another basketball player quite like Kobe," Johnson said, highlighting his work with the Los Angeles community along with the love he had for his family. "This is a tough time for the whole NBA family."

Johnson also paid tribute to former NBA Commissioner David Stern, who oversaw explosive growth in the popularity of the game during his 30-year tenure. Stern died on Jan 1. Before tip-off, the singer and actor Jennifer Hudson, who is a Chicago native, sang with a montage of photos of Bryant and his daughter in the background. The game was a culmination of a weekend filled with tributes to the former Los Angeles Lakers star who was an 18-time All-Star and won the All-Star game's MVP award four times.

On Friday, Bryant, who is fourth all-time in league scoring, was named a finalist to the Basketball Hall of Fame. On Saturday, the league's commissioner, Adam Silver, announced that the league's All-Star Game Most Valuable Player Award has been permanently named for Bryant. Bryant made his NBA All-Star Game debut in 1998 at age 19 - the youngest player to ever play in an All-Star Game. His 18 All-Star selections are the second-most in NBA history, behind Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, at 19.

Players in Sunday's All-Star game wore No 2 and No 24 on their jerseys to honor Kobe and Gianna Bryant, while the game's format paid homage to Bryant. The team with the most points after three quarters needed to score 24 points to win, while the trailing team had to score 24 plus the number of points it was down. Team Giannis held a nine-point lead over Team LeBron after three quarters, but the LeBron James-led side had the last laugh, outscoring Team Giannis 33-22 in the final period to clinch a 157-155 victory.— Reuters

## Archibald nets OT winner for Oilers

RALEIGH: Josh Archibald capped a two-goal performance by scoring 3:57 into overtime to give the Edmonton Oilers a 4-3 victory against the Carolina Hurricanes on Sunday in Raleigh, N.C. Archibald's second goal of the game and ninth of the season was assisted by Leon Draisaitl. It came on the team's only shot on goal in the extra session after Carolina had the first four in overtime. Archibald recorded a multi-goal performance for the first time this season.

Draisaitl and Kailer Yamamoto also scored for the Oilers, who completed a three-game road trip by winning on back-to-back days after Saturday's 4-1 triumph at Florida. Edmonton's overtime record improved to 5-6, while the team won a game that extended beyond regulation for the first time since a 4-3 shootout victory over Arizona on Nov 24. Sebastian Aho provided two goals and an assist for Carolina. Trevor van Riemsdyk had the other goal just 12 seconds into the contest while fellow defenseman Jacob Slavin supplied two assists.

### Devils 4, Blue Jackets 3 (SO)

Jesper Bratt scored in the seventh round of the shootout for host New Jersey, which capped a hectic day by coming back from a two-goal deficit to outlast Columbus in Newark, N.J. The Devils, who entered Sunday with the fourth-fewest points in the NHL, traded captain Andy Greene to the New York Islanders a couple of hours before faceoff and dealt center Blake Coleman to the Tampa Bay Lightning during the game. Joey Anderson, Nicholas Merkley and Palmieri all scored in the second period for the Devils, while goalie Mackenzie Blackwood made a career-high 52 saves. The 55 shots against were the most surrendered by New Jersey since the St. Louis Blues racked up 57 shots in a 6-5 overtime win on March 10, 1984.

### Penguins 5, Red Wings 1

Patric Hornqvist scored two goals in the first two periods and added an assist as Pittsburgh eased past visiting Detroit. Captain Sidney Crosby, Sam Lafferty and defenseman Kris Letang also scored for Pittsburgh and Andrew Agozzino added an assist. Matt Murray made 27 saves for the Penguins in their third win over Detroit this season. Valteri Filppula scored the lone goal for Detroit, which went winless on its four-game road trip.

### Bruins 3, Rangers 1

Jaroslav Halak made 25 saves and visiting Boston recorded a victory over New York. Charlie McAvoy scored late in the first period and Charlie Coyle scored a short-handed goal late in the second as the Bruins improved to 13-3-1 in their last 17 games and moved three points ahead of the Tampa Bay Lightning for the most points in the league. The Bruins also beat the Rangers for the fourth consecutive time and won their third straight overall.

### Senators 4, Stars 3 (OT)

Ottawa's Artem Anisimov scored on a breakaway 3:48 into overtime and the host Senators beat Dallas in the second night of back-to-backs for both teams. Linemate Brady Tkachuk—who assisted on the winner-notched a three-point night with a tally and two assists. Jean-Gabriel Pageau had a goal and a helper, and Tyler Ennis scored for the Senators, who won for just the second time in 10 games against Central Division teams (2-7-1). Dallas defenseman John Klingberg and Stephen Johns notched markers, Joe Pavelski potted a goal, and Tyler Seguin and Miro Heiskanen each assisted twice for the Stars, who lost for the first time in five games (4-0-1) and were prevented from securing a three-game road sweep in Eastern Canada (though they did extend their road point streak to seven at 5-0-2).

### Sabres 5, Maple Leafs 2

Buffalo struck for three goals in a span of 1:31 during the third period to end a tie and earn a victory over visiting Toronto. Jack Eichel, Kyle Okposo and Jimmy Vesey scored in quick succession after Toronto's Zach Hyman had tied the game at 2 early in the third period. Johan Larsson, who also had an assist, and Conor Sheary scored the other goals for the Sabres, who have won three in a row. Colin Miller and Rasmus Ristolainen each added two assists. Yegor Korshkov also scored for the

### Jets 3, Blackhawks 2

Defenseman Nathan Beaulieu scored his first goal of

the season early in the third period to lift host Winnipeg past Chicago. Mason Appleton joined Beaulieu with a goal and an assist, Jack Roslovic also tallied and Connor Hellebuyck turned aside 31 shots as the Jets improved to 5-2-1 in their last eight games. Patrick Kane scored his team-leading 27th goal. Ryan Carpenter also tallied and Corey Crawford finished with 35 saves for the Blackhawks, who have dropped six of their last seven games (1-4-2).

### Ducks 5, Canucks 1

Adam Henrique scored two goals for visiting Anaheim in a win against Vancouver. Derek Grant had a goal and an assist, Sam Steel and Brendan Guhle also scored, and John Gibson made 37 saves for the Ducks, who improved to 4-0-2 in their past six road games. Elias Pettersson scored a power-play goal, and Thatcher Demko made 23 saves for the Canucks, who were unable to retake first place in the Pacific Division after the Edmonton Oilers won on Saturday and Sunday to move one point in front.

### Predators 2, Blues 1

Kyle Turris scored the game-winning goal late in the third period as Nashville defeated visiting St. Louis. Craig Smith also scored for the Predators, who won their third straight game overall while completing their four-game season series sweep of the Central Division-leading Blues. Nashville goaltender Pekka Rinne made 38 saves. Tyler Bozak scored for the Blues, who lost their fifth consecutive game, and Jordan Binnington stopped 22 of 24 shots in goal.— Reuters



## GAZOO Racing achieves double podium finish in Monte-Carlo

KUWAIT: The GAZOO Racing (GR) World Rally Team (WRT) achieved a double podium finish at Rallye Monte-Carlo recently, during the first event with its all-new driver line-up. Sebastien Ogier and Elfyn Evans finished second and third respectively during the opening event of the 2020 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) following strong performances on their Toyota Yaris WRC debuts. Quickly coming up to speed in their new cars, Ogier and Evans traded the lead with each other throughout the second and third days.

Evans led into the fourth and final day's four stages in the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC with an advantage of 4.9 seconds over his team-mate, who was at the wheel of the No 17 Toyota Yaris WRC. Ogier edged Evans for

second overall on the rally-ending Power Stage, where he missed out on the fastest time by just 0.012 seconds. His second place with co-driver Julien Ingrassia in the No. 17 Toyota Yaris WRC represents a strong beginning to his bid for a seventh world title this season.

Meanwhile, Evans, who was joined by co-driver Scott Martin in the No 33 Toyota Yaris WRC, achieved his best-ever Rallye Monte-Carlo finish. Akio Toyoda, Team Chairman, commented: "For GAZOO Racing, this is a new season that starts with eight new drivers and co-drivers. I am happy to see this new team begin with two cars finishing on the podium; this is a great start to the season. I really appreciated the team preparing for this season in such a short period of time.

Thank you everyone! This year's team is a team where all drivers can win. Let's fight hard together to target the top of the podium and keep working together to make the Yaris stronger. Thank you in advance for our fans to support us this season." Sebastien Ogier, Driver of the No 17 Toyota Yaris WRC, said: "I feel good honestly, it's a positive result. We missed it by just a little bit, but 22 points is very good for the championship. I really enjoyed driving the Toyota Yaris WRC and I feel it's potential. I'm sure with a little bit more time, we'll make great things together."

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and

the Nurburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GAZOO Racing (GR), to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand.

Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.



**25** Du Plessis resigns as South Africa skipper

**26** Team LeBron outguns Team Giannis in NBA All-Star Game

**27** Quickfire strikes put Marseille in sight of Champions League



## Celta put brakes on Real Madrid

Real Madrid's winning streak end with 2-2 draw



MADRID: Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior (up) challenges Celta Vigo's Spanish goalkeeper Ruben Blanco Veiga during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and RC Celta de Vigo at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on February 16, 2020. — AFP

MADRID: Real Madrid's winning streak ended when they conceded a late goal to draw 2-2 at home to Celta Vigo and finish the weekend with their lead over Barcelona down to one point. Real manager Zinedine Zidane was philosophical. "There's nothing to explain, it's just the way things are, it's football," he said. "I'm not worried about it, but I'm disappointed, as always when you drop two points at home."

Barcelona beat third place Getafe on Saturday to open a 10-point gap on the chasing pack. Sevilla could have climbed to third on Sunday but were held, 2-2, at home by rock-bottom Espanyol. Real had won five straight in La Liga to accelerate past Barcelona. On Sunday they welcomed back Eden Hazard, who had been out since November. Coach Zinedine Zidane also recalled his other 100 million euro player Gareth Bale to complete an all-star attack

with Karim Benzema. Yet Celta leapt into the lead after seven minutes. A pass from Iago Aspas sent Fedor Smolov galloping clear up the middle and he shot low past Thibaut Courtois. "There were mistakes, especially for the first goal," said Zidane. "We were not well positioned, it happens, and it'll happen to us again." Celta had only climbed out of the relegation places the weekend before and looked anxious and overawed on the ball.

Real dominated the rest of the first half and their starry attacking lineup produced pacy, intricate and imaginative attacking interchanges but a combination of good defending and bad finishing kept Real out for the rest of the first half. Real again dominated the start of the first half. Sergio Ramos, already playing as an extra striker, slammed the ball into the net but had been standing offside. In the 52nd minute, Marcelo, not for

the first time, found space on the left. His low cross deflected to Toni Kroos following the attack. The German drilled in the equaliser. It was the sixth straight season Kroos had scored against Celta.

In the 65th minute, goalkeeper Ruben Blanco pulled down the impressive Hazard. Ramos slammed the penalty into the bottom corner of the net. "We're glad he's back," said Zidane who took the Belgian off in the 73rd minute. "We know what he can do for us. He didn't go further than we planned after three months out," Zidane said. "He was involved in a lot of attacking action." Celta responded by rediscovering their attacking nerve.

With four minutes left, a sharp pass from Denis Suarez, who had come on in the 71st minute, caught the Real back four rigid on the edge of their own area. Santi Mina, who had been on for just two minutes, raced onto

the ball and drilled a shot past Courtois. "An extraordinary pass," said Zidane. Real play Levante in the league next Sunday before entertaining Manchester City in the Champions League. "Now we have to prepare for our next game, because after that it's going to get harder and harder." Real Madrid also used the match Sunday to send a message to China.

### Message for China

The players came on before the match wearing shirts with the Chinese message "China, come on!" During the game the advertising hoardings flashed up the English message "Wuhan! Come on! We support you!" "Real Madrid wishes to express its full support for all of the people affected by the coronavirus," the club tweeted in English.

Yao Fei, Charge d'Affaires in China's Madrid embassy, responded with a tweet of

thanks in Spanish. "A million thanks to Real Madrid for their valuable support for China in the fight against the coronavirus! Victory will be ours!" The point ensured Celta stayed just outside the relegations places ahead of Mallorca, who beat Alaves on Saturday, on goal difference. The pair are two points clear of Leganes, who drew with Betis on Sunday and Espanyol who drew at Sevilla.

Sevilla missed a chance to exploit Getafe's loss to Barcelona and fourth-placed Atletico Madrid's 2-2 draw at Valencia on Friday. Lucas Ocampos headed Sevilla in front after 14 minutes before Adrian Embarba levelled the scores with a free-kick. China winger Wu Lei put the away side ahead five minutes after the break. After Victor Sanchez was sent off Suso exploited Sevilla's man advantage to score his first goal for the club since arriving on loan from AC Milan last month.—AFP

## Munich air crash hero and goalkeeping great Harry Gregg dies

LONDON: Harry Gregg - hailed as a hero for saving lives in the air crash which killed eight of Manchester United's "Busby Babes" in Munich - has died at the age of 87. Gregg, who was United's goalkeeper, rescued a mother and her baby daughter, team-mates Bobby Charlton and Jackie Blanchflower and manager Matt Busby from the wreckage of the plane on February 6, 1958.

He was back playing for Manchester United just 13 days later against Sheffield Wednesday. Gregg became the world's most expensive goalkeeper when he joined United in December 1957 for £23,500 and went on to be voted the best at the following year's World Cup in Sweden. He was capped 25 times by Northern Ireland and played 247 times for United from 1957-66.

"It is with great sorrow that we inform of the death of Manchester United and Northern Ireland legend Harry Gregg, OBE," the Harry Gregg Foundation announced on its Facebook page Monday. "Harry

passed away peacefully in hospital surrounded by his loving family. The Gregg family would like to thank the medical staff at Causeway Hospital for their wonderful dedication to Harry over his last few weeks. "To everyone who has called, visited or sent well wishes we thank you for the love and respect shown to Harry and the family."

Charlton, who is the last survivor from the United group, paid a handsome tribute. "He will always be remembered as a heroic figure," said Charlton. "A shining light both on and off the pitch." United posted a tribute on their website. "It is with deepest sadness that we have learned of the passing of former player Harry Gregg OBE," said the club. Legendary United manager Alex Ferguson, who remarked in the past Gregg was his hero, said he was deeply saddened. "Harry was a man of great character and a true legend at our club," said Ferguson. "I loved his company and the many pieces of advice he gave me."

### 'It was about goodness'

Gregg was humble about his bravery in Munich. "I would be telling lies if I said that I thought about it all the time. In fact I would go insane," he said in 2018 before a service marking 60 years since the disaster. "I know the media would like to talk about what happened on a runway. I don't blame people for that, but if all I was ever part of, or all I ever achieved was to do with what happened in Germany,

in Munich, if that was what my life was all about, it didn't come to very much."

It was left to others such as fellow Northern Ireland great George Best - who cleaned Gregg's boots - to sum up his courage. "Bravery is one thing but what Harry did was about more than bravery," Best wrote in the foreword to Gregg's autobiography in 2002. "It was about goodness." Carlisle, one of four clubs he managed after he hung up his boots in 1967, also tweeted a tribute.

"He was the Hero of Munich - returning to the plane repeatedly to help others in what he described as a 'spur of the moment' action," the fourth-tier club tweeted. "Thoughts with the family and friends of former manager Harry Gregg this morning." The disaster, after a refueling stop, killed eight of the young side dubbed "the Busby Babes" who had won successive league titles. The crash left Busby fighting for his life.

The ill-fated aircraft was bringing the team back via Munich from Belgrade after they had reached the European Cup semi-finals. The plane crashed on its third take-off attempt in terrible weather conditions killing 23 people, including three of the club's backroom staff, two crew, eight journalists and two others. The club recovered to become the first English team to lift the European Cup 10 years later on a deeply emotional night at Wembley. With Gregg's passing, Charlton is the only member of the United group who were on the plane who is still alive.—AFP



LONDON: In this photo taken on February 7, 1959, Manchester United's Northern Ireland goalkeeper Harry Gregg (left) punches the ball away from the head