



**5** 600 workers employed in Kuwait stranded in China due to virus



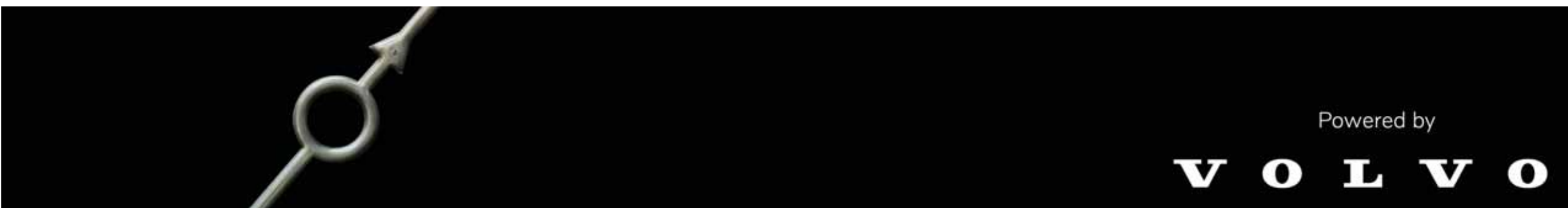
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# Fists fly as guards called in during Assembly session

Ghanem charges conspiracy; opposition blames speaker • Amnesty bills fail to pass

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MPs yesterday were involved in fistfights, traded jibes and insults and exchanged heated arguments during a highly-charged session that at one point turned into total chaos when guards quarreled with spectators in the jam-packed gallery. Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem accused leading opposition MP Mohammad Al-Mutair of plotting to disrupt and sabotage the session in order to make people hate democracy.

The opposition responded by blaming Ghanem of being totally responsible for what happened and accused him of committing a series of constitutional and legal blunders, saying they will not remain silent. Yesterday's developments raised political tension in the

country with unconfirmed reports that opposition lawmakers could resign en masse or the Assembly could be dissolved and snap election called. The opposition MPs however said they will be debating their options in the coming days.

The altercation took place while debating a controversial draft law calling to pardon a group of former opposition MPs and activists who were handed heavy jail terms for entering the Assembly building during an anti-corruption protest in Nov 2011. The legal and legislative committee was asked by the Assembly to prepare a report within one month on the draft law, but it added two other bills calling to also pardon Kuwaiti Shiite members of an Iran-linked cell who are in jail.

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KUWAIT: MPs are involved in a brawl during a session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Iraqis wanted to topple the system; taboos fell instead

BAGHDAD: Mocking clerics, falling in love at rallies and mending a broken society: Even if Iraq's young protesters have failed to overthrow entrenched politicians, they have scored by shattering decades-old taboos. Since October, the country of 40 million has been rocked by a historically large grassroots movement with big goals: Ending corruption, unaccountable sectarian parties and overreach from neighboring Iran.

Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi resigned in December, only to be replaced by ex-minister Mohammad Allawi, slammed by protesters as too close to the ruling elite. But what they have so far been unable to win politically, demonstrators have made up for with social change. "We scored one goal by bringing down the government, but socially we achieved much more," said Ali Khaybit, 28.



BASRA: An Iraqi woman raises a placard as she takes part in an anti-government demonstration in this southern city on Feb 13, 2020. The placard reads in Arabic: "You are the revolution and you are the taboo". — AFP

His best friend just proposed to a girl he met marching in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, the anti-government movement's epicenter. Like other squares across Iraq's mainly-Shiite south, Tahrir has become a social experiment, a free space where conservative norms have been toppled.

Continued on Page 24

## Palestinians channel protests through Fajr

NABLUS: Before sunrise, thousands of Palestinians streamed towards the mosque in Nablus's Victory Square, swelling the usual crowds of morning worshippers to launch a new front in their protests against Israel and the United States. The scene has been repeated elsewhere in the West Bank, where people have begun turning out for early prayers in unprecedented numbers, forsaking the usual protest sites where they risk arrest and channeling their anger into a mass expressions of faith.

"This is the most peaceful way to get the message out," said restaurant owner Saif Abu Baker, as the Nablus crowds spilled out of the mosque into surrounding alleyways and courtyards. Political slogans including "For the sake of God, we have risen up" echoed through Nablus's Old City after the calls from the muezzin and the murmured recitations of the

faithful. "I would hope that it is a new form of channeling the way the message is being sent out there," said Abu Baker. "Because we have tried protesting and it did not work because we don't have enough power. It's the safer way for everyone."

Much of the crowd's message at Friday's Fajr (dawn) prayers - the day when most people turn out - was a rejection of the perceived pro-Israel bias of US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan. There have only been small regular street rallies since that plan was launched last week. Few have responded to calls by President Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority for 'Days of Rage'.

Instead many have begun heeding calls on Facebook and other social media sites to attend what is becoming known as the 'Great Fajr Campaign' - described as a show of solidarity against Trump and what they see as Israeli threats to Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem and Hebron. Those two cities have also seen larger turnouts in the past few weeks. The first calls for a surge in attendance were from Fatah, Abbas's nationalist political faction that dominates

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## Local

# Amir receives Crown Prince, Sheikh Nasser, Ahmadi Governor



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a memorial shield from Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with NBK Chairman Nasser Al-Sayer and CEO Issam Al-Saqer.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a memorial shield from Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

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

Governor Sheikh Fawaz Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who presented to His Highness a memorial shield on Kuwait's National Days. Governor Sheikh Fawaz also gifted similar shields to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah in separate meetings yesterday.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad, as well as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Nasser Al-Sayer and NBK CEO Issam Al-Saqer, where they extended an invitation to His Highness to attend the opening ceremony of NBK's new building. —KUNA

## Zain 'Best Mobile Operator', 'Best ISP' in Kuwait during 2019

KUWAIT: For the eighth time, Zain - the leading digital service provider in Kuwait - was ranked first in the 'Best Mobile Operator' and 'Best Internet Service Provider' categories in Kuwait for the year 2019 by Service Hero, the Arab World's only 100 percent consumer powered customer satisfaction index. The awards ceremony, supported by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), was held in Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC) with the attendance of private sector leaders from across various fields.

The awards ceremony, which commemorated Service Hero's 10th anniversary, also witnessed a panel discussion titled 'Foundation for a Culture of Excellence' that featured Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan, KFAS Director General Dr Adnan Shihab Eldin, and Service Hero President Faten Abu Ghazaleh.

Zain ranked first in the telecommunications sector within two categories for achieving the highest customer satisfaction scores by providing the best quality service standards in the Kuwaiti market. The awards came after an in-depth evaluation by Service Hero's independent advisory council, which recognized Zain's leadership in offering the best innovative digital services, as well as its relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation with the aim of achieving superior digital lifestyle transformation for its customer base, considered the biggest in Kuwait.

During the panel discussion, Zain Kuwait's CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan said: "first, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to Service Hero for their efficient role in highlighting and recognizing service provider excellence in the Kuwaiti private sector. Their vision goes in line with our vision at Zain, through which we continuously strive to achieve excellence in serving our customer base, the biggest in Kuwait."

Roudhan added: "achieving excellence requires consistency, which makes it a challenge that many companies face. Being a technology leader, we at Zain have to adapt to the constant evolution of this fast-paced sector. This is both challenging and a privilege for us at the same time."

Roudhan continued: "traditional and physical channels, most importantly stores, are still important and require constant investments and enhancements to elevate the procedures through which we directly interact with our customers. We also have a number of growing digital

channels, which give us bigger challenges and need more education and investments to sustain them and make them effective."

Roudhan explained: "when we speak about customer service excellence and what Service Hero does, we usually talk about two faces of the same coin; the first being customer experience excellence through scientific research and data analytics, and the second being how this excellence impacts industries and service providers like Zain."

Roudhan added: "when we started measuring our customer satisfaction levels long ago, we started with traditional tools such as management meetings, surveys, case studies, and so on. Today, we rely on completely different ways to achieve this through our main channels, such as phone calls and SMSs, as well as our online channels like the Zain App. Through our app, we can simply send push notifications to our customers and put their feedback at the core of our decision-making process."

Roudhan continued: "today we also have the luxury of advanced tech tools, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deep Analytics, where we are able to process huge amounts of data to measure customer feedback, know how satisfied they are with our services, and find out what we need to improve the most. For example, today we can target a single customer's feedback instead of relying on feedback from an entire segment of 50,000 customers like we used to do five years ago. This adds a human touch, which greatly and positively affects our customer



Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan during the panel discussion.

experience process, whether from the employee's side or the customer's side."

Roudhan concluded: "the private sector relies on innovation to achieve sustainable growth, and that is why we regard innovation as an essential tool for achieving excellence in all business areas, especially customer service. This year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of our innovative Zain Great Idea (ZGI) tech startup accelerator program, which started out as a simple CSR initiative, and have grown in the past few years into an innovation-centered engine that is now essential to achieving our sustainable goals."

Zain received the 'Best Mobile

Operator' and 'Best Internet Service Provider' awards for achieving high rates of customer satisfaction. The recognition from Service Hero for the eighth time demonstrates Zain's commitment in providing its customers with the highest levels of service, further reinforcing its efforts in maintaining the values of its brand. The company is motivated to continue its pledge in providing innovative services to meet the needs of its customers as well as to facilitate their personal, professional, and business needs.

Service Hero appoints an Independent Advisory Council comprised of academic institutions as well as leading business professionals. As a neutral panel of

experts, the Council's function is to supervise the assessment and ensure fair and empirical results that adhere to all procedures and norms.

Service Hero was established by a team of professionals keen on identifying companies that are service leaders in their market. This team is backed by an advisory council that is academic and independent, which assures results that are impartial, objective and accurately reflect people's preference. Service Hero's main goal is to measure the satisfaction level in the market by real consumers in order to help and empower companies to improve their service levels.



Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan, Service Hero President Faten Abu Ghazaleh and Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti with Zain's prizes.



Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti receives Zain's prizes.



## Local

# Kuwait, Iran Foreign Ministers discussed regional situation during meeting: Jarallah

## Kuwaiti senior official touts 'distinguished ties' with Canada



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah (center) joins in cutting the cake during the Canadian Embassy's ceremony on the National Flag of Canada Day.



A general view of people in attendance.— KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif touched upon the situations in the region and the ties between the two countries during a meeting they had recently on the sidelines of Munich Security Conference, a senior Kuwaiti official said. "There is continued communications with Iran and visits by Iranian officials to Kuwait," Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah told reporters on Monday. He noted that it is normal that the two ministers hold meetings, describing their talks as "positive and constructive." "We think that these meetings are useful and will be in the interest of the region's interest and the efforts seeking calm, in addition to the bilateral ties," he stressed.

### Gulf crisis

Meanwhile, Jarallah reiterated Kuwait's continued mediation to solve the Gulf crisis, saying "we will not lose hope in the continuation of this media-

tion." On Kuwait's communication with China on coronavirus, he said Kuwait has expressed its solidarity with China towards this big healthy catastrophe. He stated that the Kuwaiti Cabinet has previously announced medical assistance to China, saying "we will continue offering support and aid to friends in China to face this big healthy disaster."

Regarding the US peace plan on the Palestinian cause, he said Kuwait has voiced its stance towards this issue. "We highly support and appreciate the US efforts. The plan is related to a cause of a nation who have been suffering more than 70 years," he said. He stressed the necessity of ending this suffering, saying "this will be achieved through a solution based on the international legitimacy and the relevant UN resolutions, the Arab peace initiative and the two-state solution to establish a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital."

### Distinguished relations

Jarallah was speaking on the side-

lines of participating in the Canadian Embassy's ceremony on the National Flag of Canada Day. The senior Kuwaiti diplomat commended as deep-rooted and distinguished his country's relations with Canada, saying that "we look forward to boosting the ties with friends in Canada."

"We share our friends' national occasion. The ties between the two countries are distinguished, and there is continuous communication and common interests between them," he said. The recent visit by

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to Kuwait stressed the developed ties between the two sides. Trudeau held talks with senior officials on the ties between the two friendly countries, Jarallah noted. He said that there are Kuwaiti investments in Canada estimated at more than \$10 billion, indicating that 500 Kuwaiti nationals are studying there.

He pointed out there are many opportunities for Kuwait to invest in Canada that are an addition to the bilateral relations. He

pointed to the notable petroleum cooperation between Kuwait and Canada, which is a broad field for communication and coordination between the two sides, in addition to energy in general. "We believe that investment opportunities and the development of relations between the two countries are favorable and promising at the same time," he said. He expressed appreciation to the Canadian supportive role to the State of Kuwait's right during the 1990/91 Iraqi Invasion. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Coordinator for the UN Humanitarian Affairs in Somalia Dr Adam Abdel Mawla. — KUNA



Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with Niger's Ambassador to Kuwait Abdo Abu Baker.

## Kuwait FM receives call from French counterpart

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday a phone call from French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian. They tackled bilateral ties, and expressed their keenness on boosting relations between both nations, to better serve the joint interests of both countries and people. They also discussed the latest developments in the regional and international arenas.

In other news, Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah met yesterday with Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Coordinator for the UN Humanitarian Affairs in Somalia Dr Adam Abdel Mawla. During the meeting, both sides reviewed ongoing preparations for the upcoming conference to support education in Somalia, due to held in Kuwait later this year, and the UN contribution and preparation for the first-

of-its-kind conference. The meeting was attended by Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocol Assistants Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran, Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi, Assistant foreign minister for affairs of the deputy minister's bureau, Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar.

Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Conference on Education Support in Somalia Dr Ghanem Al-Najjar, and Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator to the State of Kuwait Dr Tariq Al-Sheikh attended the meeting as well. Also yesterday, Jarallah met with Niger's Ambassador to Kuwait Abdo Abu Baker. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations and the latest regional and international developments. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar attended the meeting. — KUNA

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## Local

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Fog covers the base of Kuwait Towers In Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Qatari Foreign Ministry official praises women's role in Kuwait

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BRUSSELS: Lolwah Rashid Al-Kahter, Assistant Foreign Minister and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, speaks during an event organized at the Brussels Press Club yesterday. — KUNA

BRUSSELS: A top Qatari official lauded the role of women in Kuwait, in particular in civil society. "In the wider Gulf region in some countries, the status of women especially in the civil movement for example in Kuwait is really excellent," Lolwah Rashid Al-Kahter, Assistant Foreign Minister and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar told an event organized at the Brussels Press Club yesterday. "Women in NGOs and civil society are doing a great job in Kuwait," she said. "Arab women are great women. They are number one why there is resilience in several countries like

Syria, Yemen and Iraq," she stressed. In Qatar also, since 1995, there has been a movement for more rights for women in the modernization process, noted Kahter. Speaking on the topic of 'Middle Eastern Conflicts and the European Experience,' Kahter said that the European Union could serve as a model for the Arab-Islamic world to progress and unite. "Brexit happened in peace. This is one of our main messages, how to learn from the EU," she said. The Qatari official stressed that promoting education is the key element for progress and development in the Middle East region. — KUNA

## 'Made in Qatar 2020' launches today; Ooredoo sponsor

KUWAIT: 'Made in Qatar 2020' exhibition will launch today with Ooredoo Kuwait, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait as the telecom sponsor. The exhibition will be held in Kuwait starting from today until February 22. The 3rd edition of this exhibition to be organized outside the State of Qatar will be held on an area of 10,000 square meters at the Kuwait International Fairground with the participation of over 220 companies and factories from Qatar.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Ooredoo Kuwait Senior Director of Corporate Communications Mijbil Alayoub stated that "this important and unique exhibition represents a special event that showcases the close and brotherly relationship between Qatar and Kuwait and we are pleased to participate in one of the largest events in the Gulf region. This platform brings together innovations and high technologies of Qatari companies and factories under one umbrella in the state of Kuwait." Alayoub further added that the exhibition offers a great opportunity for the Kuwaiti community and young businessmen and entrepreneurs to meet with Qatari manufacturers, businessmen and investors to learn more about Qatar's various industries. "'Made in Qatar 2020'



Mijbil Alayoub

provides an optimal platform for both parties to review establishing new alliances and partnerships that help enhance Qatari industries, particularly those that depend on modern technologies," he said. Stressing the company's role in corporate social responsibility, Alayoub stated that, "this important sponsorship comes in tandem with our social responsibility strategy, which in turn is based on our core values of caring, connecting and challenging."

Organized by the Qatar Chamber in cooperation with the Ministry of Energy and Industry, the 'Made in Qatar' exhibition is the largest industrial expo in the country. Since its inception in 2009, the event is held under the kind auspices of Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and supported by a bevy of leading industrial companies and factories, banks and institutions supporting industry in the country. It represents a major industrial platform that brings together local companies and factories under one umbrella. It also offers a brilliant opportunity for manufacturers, businessmen and investors to discover the locally-manufactured products and the demands of the Qatari market. The main purpose of the exhibition is to support and promote the Qatari products in the pursuit of achieving the self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on imported items.



## Local

# 600 workers employed in Kuwait stranded in China due to virus

## Ambassador admits delays an trade shipments from China

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Around 600 Chinese workers are currently stranded in China as the result of a ban imposed by Kuwait on Chinese citizens as a precautionary measure to protect Kuwait against the deadly coronavirus epidemic. The workers, according to Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang, were all engaged in the most important government projects in Kuwait.

"We are saddened by the situation, but our workers are awaiting positive developments. Experts in China are all working hand-in-hand to find a real solution to the deadly virus. They have been testing, and there are some positive developments so far. We are cooperating to slow down the transmission of the virus," said Li. He also admitted the negative impact of the ban on trade, as some products have not been able to arrive on time and there are reported delays. "It is a race against time and a race against the spread of the virus," he added. According to the latest data, China has now 72,530 confirmed cases, 1,870 deaths and 12,682 recoveries.

Since the outbreak at the end of December last

year, the Chinese government, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, has rapidly established a national mechanism, mobilized human and material resources from all parts of China and took the most comprehensive, strict and effective measures to combat the virus.

"The Chinese government has given top priority to ensure the safety and health of our people. We have taken decisive measures to contain the spread of the virus, save the infected patients and reduce the fatality rate," Li said. He noted that Chinese scientists have successfully separated the strain of the virus and identified the diagnostic reagent in only seven days, and shared the genetic sequence of the virus in a timely manner with the World Health Organization.

The envoy said the Chinese government cares about the safety of foreign citizens residing in China. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China has established a mechanism to coordinate on matters related to foreigners, and has briefed foreign ambassadors to China about the epidemiological situation twice and provided them with information related to the epidemic in different languages. Foreign affairs offices of local governments across China have been in contact

with diplomats, students and other foreign nationals who are in China as well, and their moderate concerns and needs have been addressed in a timely manner.

To date, a total of 27 confirmed cases of foreigners in China have been reported, including three recovered cases, two deaths and 22 cases under quarantine. "Meanwhile, we are touched and inspired by many foreigners in China since they have signed up and asked to work as volunteers to fight the epidemic," said Li.

Li said that a virus of this proportion requires joint action to confront it. "So far, more than 160 country leaders and representatives of international organizations have expressed their condolences and support to China," he said, adding that HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to Xi stressing his full confidence that China is able to eradicate the epidemic soon.

Likewise, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-



**KUWAIT:** Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang speaks during a press conference yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Sabah sent similar cables to express their support for China. To date, more than 40 countries have provided material and financial assistance to the affected areas in China. "We are grateful for all the support from these countries," Li concluded.

## Embassies to delay national celebrations over virus fears

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Dr Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah submitted a report during a Cabinet meeting on the latest developments of coronavirus, amid the spread of the epidemic and the rising number of the deaths and the cases infected with the disease. He also offered statistics on the countries in which the disease is spreading, saying that the cases infected with the disease hit a four-fold rate during the last two weeks. The minister stressed that Kuwait is free of the coronavirus until now, thanks to Allah Almighty. During its weekly meeting on Monday chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Cabinet lauded the efforts made by the ministry and all concerned bodies, affirming the follow-up on the implementation of the emergency plan to prevent the virus from entering the country. The ministry also is fol-

lowing up implementing the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations on keeping people away from gatherings and limiting the congregations.

As a result, the Cabinet instructed the Foreign Ministry to inform all of the country's diplomatic missions abroad to delay the celebrations of the National Days this year. Concerning the local preventive measures, the Cabinet directed the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to ban exporting the preventive and medical substances relating to combating the virus. The Cabinet directed the Civil Service Commission to set regulations to curb the travel of employees on official missions, except for necessity. It stressed the importance of avoiding any gatherings by both citizens and residents, mainly during the 'National Days' celebrations to avoid all risks arising from the spread of this disease and preserve the safety of citizens and residents.

### Traffic law

The Cabinet discussed the recommendations by the legal affairs committee on a draft resolution on amending some provisions of the Law No 74/1983 on combating drugs and a bill on amending some provisions of the decree No 67/1976 on traffic, which aims to amend most penalties mentioned in Chapter 5. And within the framework of the

## Two remanded in custody in Mutlaa fatal accident

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Two men held over a sand collapse incident in Mutlaa that left a number of fatalities recently were remanded in custody for 10 days yesterday pending investigations in the case. The two suspects, Chinese and Egyptian, face manslaughter charges in the case that forced the Public Authority for Housing Welfare to suspend operations at the Mutlaa city mega housing project until legal procedures are complete. The authority said in a statement that it will take all the necessary measures to reveal the causes of the incident and take the necessary action regarding it.

Kuwaiti Cabinet members were briefed on

Monday by Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Rana Al-Fares on the possible measures to be adopted against those who probe to be responsible for accident. Dr Fares provided a detailed explanation, based on preliminary probes, of the causes of the tragedy which took place on February 12. The minister also apprised the weekly Cabinet meeting, held at Seif Palace, of the precautionary measures to ensure the safety of workers at all sites of construction. During the meeting, presided over by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, ministers expressed regret over the tragic accident, offered condolences for the families of the victims and wished the wounded a quick recovery. After the end of the search and rescue operation at the site, six deaths and three injuries had been confirmed.

Separately, Acting Director of the Public Authority for Manpower Mubarak Al-Azmi received a delegation from the Nepalese ministry of foreign affairs yesterday. Azmi expressed his condolences on the recent demise of a number of Nepalese construction workers at Mutlaa residential city project's site, and wished a speedy recovery for the injured.



**KUWAIT:** Dhaman's primary healthcare center in Hawally. — KUNA

## Expats to pay KD 2.5 per visit for medical services: Dhaman

**KUWAIT:** Dhaman Hospitals Company CEO Dr Mohammed Al-Qenae said two Dhaman centers have been completed in Hawally and Farwaniya and are ready to receive patients. Qenae also urged everyone to visit the centers and experience firsthand the quality services they provide, adding that the company is keen on offering its medical services at reasonable prices and that Dhaman will soon start receiving patients covered by various insurance companies.

Speaking in an interview with Kuwait local daily Al-Rai, Qenae stressed that meetings and coordination with the Ministry of Health (MoH) are in progress to finalize the health insurance system, move forward to the second phase of implementing it and start receiving expats insured by KD 130 annual fee approved by the government to be paid by employers. "The new health insurance system will save a lot for beneficiaries, as they will only have to pay a KD 2.5 fee per visit including all consultancy, medical test and radiology fees, referral to hospitals, surgeries and any additional tests," Qenae explained.

Qenae stressed that 35 percent of the construction of Ahmadi and Jahra centers has been completed and is scheduled to be completed by 2021. In addition, he explained that recent Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) statistics show that Daman is expected to serve around two million people with an expected 3 percent annual increase. He added Jahra and Ahmadi hospitals will have a bed capacity of 600 beds and that the company will be ready to increase it if needed, especially in view of the recent medical advancements which mean that patients do not need to

be hospitalized for long after surgeries.

Responding to a question about medical staff working with Dhaman, Qenae stressed that all doctors, nurses and other medical staff are recruited after passing special tests and interviews and having their degrees accredited by the ministry of higher education. Speaking about the benefits Kuwaiti citizens will get from the new Dhaman system, Qenae said Dhaman is a strategic partner of MoH in providing public services to a segment of beneficiaries, which will ease the burden on MoH facilities and thus reflect on the level of healthcare services Kuwaitis get there in the form of cutting short waiting times. "The government has also offered 50 percent of the company's shares to citizens, which is another direct benefit for them to be added to the improved services they will get," Qenae concluded.

### News in brief

#### Company made millions from visa trafficking

**KUWAIT:** Authorities have busted another company that collected KD 20 million from 10,000 workers, who were abandoned after they arrived in Kuwait. A complaint against the major company was received by police, accusing the company of trading in residencies and bringing in Bangladeshis on government contracts in exchange of KD 2,000 per iqama and KD 500 for sponsorship. Preliminary investigations revealed that the executive director of the company has Bangladeshi mandoubbs, in addition to brokers who are professionals in residency trade and take commissions, although the lion's share goes to company owners, who have collected huge amounts of money over the past two years. — Al-Qabas

#### Undertaking for expat teachers

**KUWAIT:** An educational source said no contract will be signed with any expat teacher without an undertaking that proves the authenticity of their academic qualification and experience certificate, and legal action will be taken in case the documents are not correct. The sources said the certificates equivalency law is still inactive, so the ministry will appoint teachers on local and foreign contracts according to the previous mechanism and will take the undertaking from them. — Al-Rai

#### Soldier dead in accident

**KUWAIT:** A soldier was killed in an accident that happened when his vehicle hit a camel while he was driving on his way to his workplace at a camp north of the country yesterday, according to preliminary investigations. The victim's body was transferred to the coroner after paramedics pronounced him dead on the scene. Further investigations are in progress. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

#### Chalet fire

**KUWAIT:** Firemen from the Nuwaiseeb and Zoor fire stations put out a fire reported in a chalet in Sabah Al-Ahmad Sea City yesterday. No injuries were reported in the incident. Meanwhile, an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

## 'Diabetes causes sexual impotence'

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

**KUWAIT:** Head of the urology unit at Jaber military hospital Dr Mohammed Al-Ghanem warned that the reasons of sexual disorders (impotence) from which many men worldwide suffer may be physical or psychological. Ghanem explained that physical reasons include chronic diabetes, which affects nerves and vessels supplying reproductive organs with blood, irregular blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, inactivity and severe spinal cord injuries.

Ghanem said psychological reasons include stress and family problems, and advised everybody not to overthink and avoid stress as much as possible. Ghanem added treatments depend on the cases, giving an example that patients with no health restrictions or clots may be prescribed sexual tonics, and if this does not work, they will be tested by ultrasound to check if they suffers from any blood vessel leaks or weak blood flow.

"Diabetic patients have to control the diabetes level first and regularly exercise before taking any tonics," Ghanem said, noting that the final option is to use prosthetic devices or pumps, which provide 98 percent success rate and only two percent failure due to inflammation, high levels of blood sugar or the body's rejection of alien objects.

### Maids arrested

The department of cybercrime at the cyber investigations directorate yesterday responded to a social media video showing two Asian maids mocking an elderly woman while serving her coffee in bed, and immediately ordered identifying the woman and her maids to hold them legally accountable. Security sources added that detectives managed to identify the maids and arrest and refer them to relevant authorities pending further measures.

### Weight-loss medicine

Health sources yesterday said the weight-loss medicine Belviq-XR (lorcaserin) on sale in Kuwait has not been registered with the Ministry of Health (MoH), adding that the US FDA had demanded removing it from shelves on grounds that clinical studies had detected a rise in cancer amongst its users.

### Road grid

Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Rana Al-Fares signed a consultancy agreement to design and supervise the construction and maintenance of a road grid in Kabd with a total value of KD 891,000.





Ashraf Ghani secures  
2nd term as president

## Boy Scouts of America files bankruptcy in wake of abuse lawsuits

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BEIJING: Residents emerge from a disinfection channel set up as a protective measure against the COVID-19 at the entrance to their compound in Tongzhou, east of Beijing yesterday. — AFP

# China virus death toll nears 1,900

## Coronavirus cases hits 542 on cruise ship off Japan

**BEIJING:** The death toll from the new coronavirus outbreak rose again yesterday but Chinese and international health officials sought to calm global nerves, citing a study showing most cases are mild and warning against excessive measures to contain the epidemic. Nearly 1,900 people have now died and more than 72,000 others infected by the virus in China, with hundreds more cases in some 25 countries.

The situation remains dire at the epicenter, with the director of a hospital in the central city of Wuhan becoming the seventh medical worker to succumb to the COVID-19 illness. But Chinese officials released a study showing most patients have mild cases of the illness, and World Health Organization officials said the mortality rate was relatively low.

The epidemic has triggered panic-buying in Singapore and Hong Kong, concerns about cruise-ship travel and the postponement of trade fairs, sports competitions and cultural events in China and abroad. The outbreak is threatening to put a dent in the global economy, with China paralyzed by vast quarantine measures and major firms such as iPhone maker Apple and mining giant BHP warning it could damage bottom lines.

Several countries have banned travelers from China

and major airlines have suspended flights. Authorities have placed about 56 million people in hard-hit central Hubei and its capital Wuhan under an unprecedented lockdown. Other cities far from the epicenter have restricted the movements of residents, with a 14-day self-quarantine for people returning to Beijing. President Xi Jinping, in a phone call with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said China's measures were achieving "visible progress", according to state media.

### 'Less deadly' than SARS

The official death toll in China hit 1,868 yesterday after another 98 people died - most in Hubei and Wuhan, where the virus emerged in December. Liu Zhiming, the director of Wuchang Hospital in Wuhan, became its latest victim, sparking an outpouring of grief online. Earlier this month, the death of Wuhan doctor Li Wenliang - who had been punished by authorities for sounding the alarm about the virus in late December - triggered anger and calls for political reforms on social media. Official figures, meanwhile, showed there were nearly 1,900 new COVID-19 cases. New infections have been falling in the rest of the country for the past two weeks.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus cautioned that it was too early to tell if the decline would continue. A study among 72,000 confirmed, suspected and clinically diagnosed cases showed that 81 percent of patients had only mild infections. Those most at risk were the elderly, and people with underlying medical conditions. The study released by China's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention also showed the death rate stood at 2.3 percent, falling below one percent for people in their 30s and 40s.

Zhong Nanshan, a prominent expert with China's National Health Commission, told reporters that 85 percent of patients can improve "if they have good life support, treatment conditions, and nutrients". The research was cited by WHO officials, who said the COVID-19 illness was "less deadly" than its cousins, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

But it is higher than the mortality rate for the seasonal flu, at around 0.1 percent in the United States. Michael Ryan, head of WHO's health emergencies program, said the outbreak was "very serious" and could grow, but stressed that outside Hubei the epidemic was "affecting a very, very tiny, tiny proportion of people".

There have been some 900 cases around the world, with five deaths in France, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

### Cruise concerns

Another 88 people tested positive for the virus on the quarantined Diamond Prince cruise ship off Yokohama in Japan, raising the number of infections to 542. The US repatriated more than 300 American passengers on Monday and Britain became the latest country to offer its citizens a way off the boat after similar plans by Canada, Australia, Hong Kong and South Korea. Attention was also turning to the Westerdam, a cruise ship in Cambodia, where many of the 2,200 people aboard passengers were allowed to disembark after all initially received a clean bill of health.

An 83-year-old American woman was later diagnosed with the virus in Malaysia, raising concerns that other passengers might have been infected before flying to other countries. The WHO rejected the suggestion that all cruises should be halted after hundreds of passengers were infected on one vessel off Japan. "Measures should be taken proportional to the situation. Blanket measures may not help," the WHO's Tedros said. —AFP

## Chinatowns feel the brunt of virus panic

**MELBOURNE:** Normally bustling century-old Chinatowns from Melbourne to San Francisco have fallen quiet and businesses are struggling to survive as fears over the deadly novel coronavirus outbreak ripple around the world. "Scaremongering is rampant" complains Max Huang, owner of the Juicy Bao restaurant in Melbourne's historic Chinese district. "Customers won't come in if they can avoid it." Huang's eatery sits among dozens of restaurants making up Australia's oldest Chinatown enclave, dating back to the influx of fortune-seekers during an 1850s gold rush.

Although the epicenter of the COVID-19 epidemic is more than a ten-hour-flight way, and Australia has seen just a handful of cases, the stigma of a disease that has claimed more than 1,800 lives is pervasive. Streets are notably quieter, face-masks are a commonplace and even a Lunar New Year dragon dance failed to bring in the usual crowds. Businesses report their earnings have dropped by more than half and they have been forced to cut staff hours dramatically, a situation echoed in Chinatowns across the world.

At the usually buzzing Empire Seafood Restaurant in Vancouver's Richmond suburb, getting a table is now a breeze. "Usually we'd have a large line-up time of approximately five-ten tables, but today there is no line up at all," assistant gen-



MELBOURNE: Staff clear a table at a Chinese restaurant in Melbourne's Chinatown. —AFP

eral manager Ivan Yeung said. "Some people have already cancelled their parties and banquets. Many restaurants are seeing the same thing. Hopefully, this gets back to normal really soon."

### Disappearing tourists

A ban on travelers from China has hit many neighborhoods particularly hard. "Usually we have Chinese tourists coming at this time, but now it's like zero," said Tony Siu, manager of the popular Cantonese restaurant R&G Lounge in San Francisco. "They often get the sea bass or the salt and pepper crab, that are our famous dishes."

In Australia, the travel ban has been compounded by almost 100,000 Chinese students being unable to fly Down Under to start the academic year. "Our main customers are from China... (so) it's very difficult," said Su Yin, whose pancake store

sits downstairs from a Melbourne college with a large Chinese student base.

Hoping to reassure would-be customers, some businesses have tacked up notices saying they disinfect their interiors regularly to prevent disease. Others have gone a step further installing hand sanitizer for guests and giving staff face masks and rubber gloves. But such measures appear to have had limited success. Rebecca Lyu, a Chinese student living in London, has a hard time convincing friends to join her to eat or shop.

"Some of my friends refused to go eat at restaurants in Chinatown because they are worried about the virus," she said. Many believe xenophobia has worsened the situation further. Fred Lo's souvenir store in San Francisco is usually frequented by tourists from Europe and South America. — AFP

## Bare-faced robbery: Thieves steal 6,000 hygiene masks

**TOKYO:** Thieves in Japan have made off with some 6,000 surgical masks from a hospital, with the country facing a mass shortage and a huge price hike online due to the coronavirus. Four boxes containing the face masks disappeared from a locked storage facility at the Japanese Red Cross hospital in the western port city of Kobe, a hospital official said yesterday. "We still have a large number of masks - enough to continue our daily operations at the hospital, but this is so deplorable," the official said. Police have launched an investigation as they suspect the thieves intend to resell the masks.

Masks have sold out at many drug and discount stores across the nation as the number of infections have increased in Japan - one of the most affected countries after China where the death toll from the virus has hit 1,800. Public anxiety has been also fuelled by headlines of hundreds of people infected with the virus on board a ship quarantined off Japan. The theft came after knife-wielding men jumped a delivery driver and stole hundreds of toilet rolls on Monday in Hong Kong, where the coronavirus outbreak has fuelled a run on face masks, hand sanitiser and toilet paper.

Japanese flea market app Mercari called on its users to trade masks "within socially accepted limits" after a box of 65 masks was priced at more than 50,000 yen (\$456) at its online marketplace. The Japanese government has "strongly requested" mask makers to boost output. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters last week. There has been a shortage of masks at drug stores in the hygiene-conscious nation where face masks have been part of everyday streetwear for decades. — AFP





# Hilton unveils its newest hotel in Kuwait

Hilton Garden Inn Kuwait offers convenient access to The Avenues, one of the biggest shopping and leisure destinations in Middle East



On February 17 the official inauguration of Hilton Garden Inn Kuwait took place, during a ceremony in the presence of distinguished chairman Mr Mohammed Abdulaziz Alshaya, board members from Mabane and Hilton representatives. The new hotel, which is the first Hilton Garden Inn to open in Kuwait, offers a prime location adjoining The Avenues, one of the biggest shopping and leisure destinations in Kuwait and the GCC, making it a destination of choice for travelers.

It is only 15 minutes away from Kuwait International Airport - and its location along Fifth Ring Road makes for easy trips into Kuwait City. The hotel features: - Direct walking connection to The Avenues through an indoor corridor. - 385 spacious guestrooms, including suites with connecting rooms. - Fitness center and outdoor swimming pools with a Jacuzzi. - All day dining restaurant Together & Co with an outdoor terrace offering a varied breakfast buffet combining international and local specialties, Juice Bar offering a range of juices, soft drinks and mocktails, and 24/7 room service.

In addition, The Shop offers a wide selection of beverages and snacks as well as all kinds of products to fulfill travelers needs. - Flexible meeting space equipped with advanced integrated audio-visual equipment, accommodating up to 240 delegates. - 24/7 business center, complimentary Wi-Fi, and printing facilities. Waleed Al Sharian, CEO of Mabane, said: Our plans consist of opening numerous hotels in Kuwait and the region partnering with distinguished

brands in the world of hospitality. Our approach comes from our belief that our projects are not only shopping malls, but integrated destinations that caters to the families needs in the region and meet the requirements of each individual. Our Hilton Garden Inn property is successful not only due to its attractive location, but it's thoughtful design which is consistent with the needs of our guests.

Hilton Garden Inn Kuwait has been proudly welcoming business and leisure guests alike since December 2019 and today, we are delighted to officially inaugurate the hotel, said Inigo Aruti, general manager of the hotel. Our experienced team made up of over 20 nationalities look forward to continue welcoming guests and exceeding their expectations.

Hilton Garden Inn Kuwait is part of Hilton Honors, the award-winning guest-loyalty program for Hilton's 18 distinct hotel brands. Members who book directly have access to instant benefits, including a flexible payment slider that allows members to choose nearly any combination of Points and money to book a stay, an exclusive member discount, free standard Wi-Fi and the Hilton Honors mobile app. Book direct at Hilton.com, through the Hilton Honors app or through other official Hilton channels for more perks and a price match guarantee

Hilton Garden Inn Kuwait is located at The Avenues - Kuwait, Al Rai Area- Mutlaq Abbas Munawer Road, PO Box:

55, Al Andalous 9300, State of Kuwait. For more information, or to make a reservation, travelers may visit [www.hgikuwait.hgi.com](http://www.hgikuwait.hgi.com) or call +965 2226 2000. The property is owned and managed by Mabane. For more information on Hilton Garden Inn, please visit <http://newsroom.hilton.com/hgi>.

#### About Mabane

Mabane Company KPSC, a Kuwaiti shareholding company has been listed under the real estate sector on the Kuwait Stock Exchange since 1999. It is the largest real estate company in Kuwait in terms of market value and one which created a change in the tourism and retail sectors. It expanded its investment in the Arabian Gulf Countries such as Kingdom of Bahrain, UAE, Al Riyadh and Khobar in KSA. Mabane aims to adopt the best international standards in providing quality services that help attract investors from both the region and the world. It operates under three main business sectors: real estate; investment; and construction.

#### About Hilton Garden Inn

The award-winning Hilton Garden Inn brand provides business and leisure guests upscale, affordable accommodations and unexpected amenities for an experience that is Simply on Another Level. The Hilton Garden Inn Promise affirms the brand's goal to make each guests stay better and brighter. Guaranteed. Team Members at more than 860 hotels in 49 countries and territories around the world ensure today's busy travelers have a bright and satis-

fying experience, starting with the first hello.

As a recognized F&B leader, Hilton Garden Inn serves locally sourced food and beverage at its full-service restaurants and bars, featuring cooked-to-order dishes, hand-crafted cocktails, and on-trend small plates. Hilton Honors members who book directly through preferred Hilton channels have access to instant benefits. For more information about Hilton Garden Inn, visit [www.hgi.com](http://www.hgi.com) or [newsroom.hilton.com/hgi](http://newsroom.hilton.com/hgi), and connect on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.

#### About Hilton

Hilton (NYSE: HLT) is a leading global hospitality company with a portfolio of 18 world-class brands comprising more than 6,100 properties with more than 971,000 rooms, in 119 countries and territories. Dedicated to fulfilling its mission to be the world's most hospitable company, Hilton welcomed more than 3 billion guests in its 100-year history, earned a top spot on the 2019 World's Best Workplaces list, and was named the 2019 Global Industry Leader on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices.

Through the award-winning guest loyalty program Hilton Honors, more than 103 million members who book directly with Hilton can earn Points for hotel stays and experiences money can't buy, plus enjoy instant benefits, including digital check-in with room selection, Digital Key, and Connected Room. Visit [newsroom.hilton.com](http://newsroom.hilton.com) for more information, and connect with Hilton on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.



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## International

# Boy Scouts files bankruptcy in wake of sexual abuse lawsuits

## Boy Scouts of America accused of covering up generations of abuse

**WASHINGTON:** The Boy Scouts of America filed for bankruptcy yesterday in what it said was an effort to safeguard compensation payouts for sexual abuse victims. The organization has been accused of covering up generations of abuse inflicted on thousands of its young members and failing to do enough to root out pedophiles using the youth movement to prey on minors over its 110-year history.

Bankruptcy proceedings will help the Boy Scouts to “equitably compensate” victims through the establishment of a victims’ compensation trust and allow the organization to continue at a local level, a statement from the group said. “The BSA cares deeply about all victims of abuse and sincerely apologizes to anyone who was harmed during their time in Scouting,” chief executive Roger Mosby said in the statement.

The organization estimates liabilities of up to \$1 billion, according to court filings lodged yesterday. The national Boy Scouts council and its affiliated local councils together hold nearly \$5 billion in assets including land-holdings, according to a Wall Street Journal report last month. Local councils hold around two-thirds of the organization’s assets, which the Journal said could be shielded from creditors under the bankruptcy plan, limiting the group’s overall exposure to sexual abuse lawsuits.

More than 12,000 members of the Boy Scouts had been sexually abused in the organization since 1944, victims’ lawyer Jeff Anderson said last year. He also said files maintained by the Boy Scouts listed more than 7,800 alleged perpetrators of sexual abuse. The existence of that documentation-known as the “perversion files” and

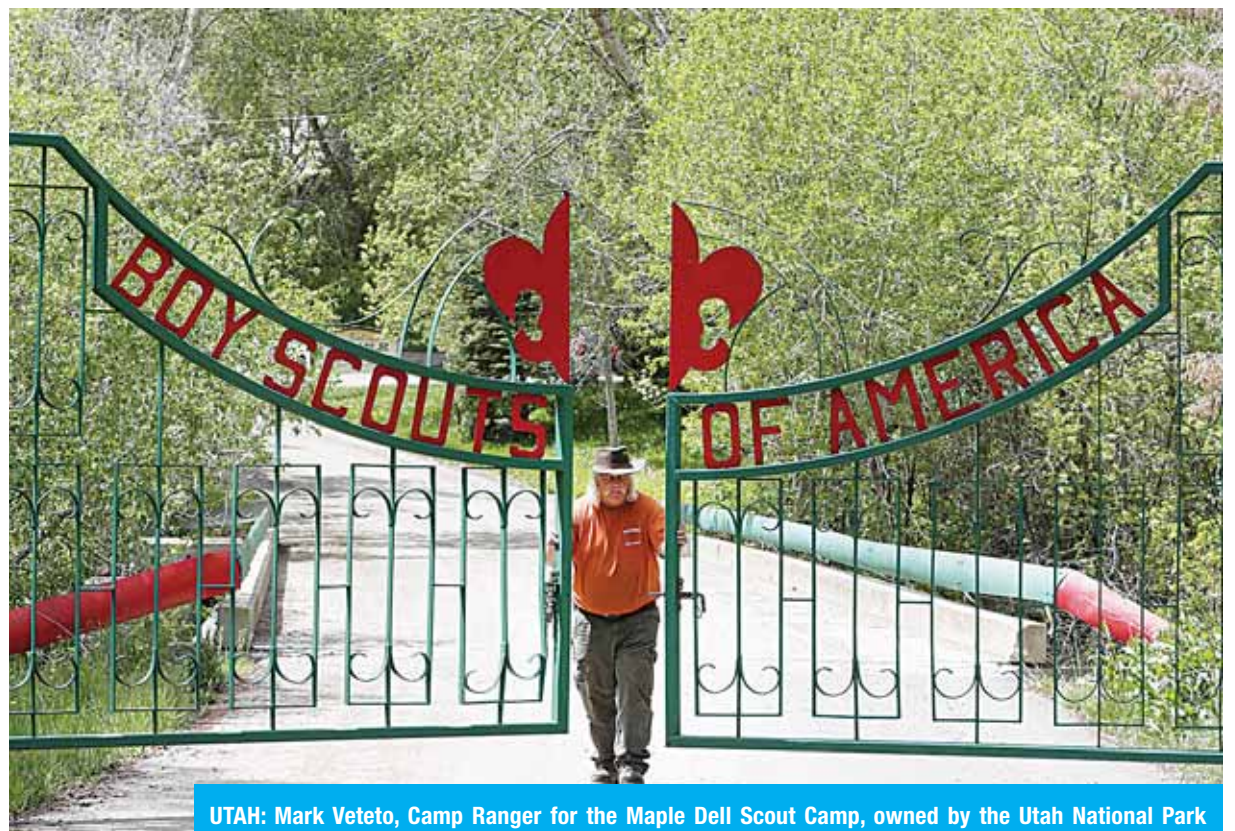
listing scoutmasters or troop leaders accused of sexual abuse-was first revealed in a 2012 court case.

At the time the organization admitted its response to the scandal had been “plainly insufficient, inappropriate or wrong”, and said it had overhauled its procedures to protect members. “The BSA today has some of the strongest, expert-informed youth protection policies found in any youth-serving organization, including mandatory youth protection training and background checks for all volunteers and staff,” the organization said yesterday.

### Growing number of lawsuits

Founded in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America currently has around 2.2 million members between the ages of five and 21. Lawsuits against the group have multiplied in recent years, thanks in part to state legislative changes that have increased the statute of limitations for cases of sexual abuse against minors. The bankruptcy plan was first mooted in 2018, the Journal reported, as the organization struggled with declining members and rising costs.

Abused in Scouting, a network of law firms representing victims, said the bankruptcy proceedings could spell the end of the Boy Scouts. “It’s going to be a mess. If it takes a long period of time, it’s an open question whether the Boy Scouts will have any resources to keep operating while the bankruptcy is pending,” attorney Tim Kosnoff said in a statement for the lawyers’ network earlier in February. The Boy Scouts had attempted to stay solvent by raising membership fees and mortgaging properties, Abused in Scouting said. —AFP



UTAH: Mark Veteto, Camp Ranger for the Maple Dell Scout Camp, owned by the Utah National Park Council of the Boy Scouts of America, closes the front gate for the day outside Payson, Utah. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Gunman kills ex-wife

**BANGKOK:** A man killed his ex-wife and wounded another person at a shopping centre in Bangkok yesterday, police said, 10 days after a mass shooting at another mall in Thailand’s northeast. The gunman then fled the Century The Movie Plaza, near the Thai capital’s Victory Monument and is still on the run, Thai police said. “One person died and another was injured,” police Colonel Kissana Pattanacharoen said. Police said in a statement they knew the suspect’s identity and were working to apprehend him. The gunman entered a beauty clinic at the mall where his ex-wife worked and opened fire, killing her and wounding a bystander, Kissana said. The nine-storey mall, best known for its top-floor cinema, was continuing to operate and only the area where the shooting took place was cordoned off. The plaza is connected to the Victory Monument skytrain station, a transit hub that was crowded with commuters in the late afternoon rush hour. —Reuters

#### Turkey arrests nearly 700

**ISTANBUL:** Turkish prosecutors yesterday ordered the arrest of nearly 700 people, including military and justice ministry personnel, state media said, intensifying moves against a network accused of orchestrating a 2016 coup attempt. Authorities have carried out a sustained crackdown on alleged followers of US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen since the failed bid in July 2016, in which about 250 people were killed. Police still routinely carry out raids targeting suspects. The latest operations marked an escalation by police against alleged supporters of Gulen, a one-time ally of President Tayyip Erdogan who subsequently became his arch foe. Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, has denied any involvement in the attempted coup. In the latest moves, prosecutors ordered the arrest of 157 people, including 101 serving officers, in an investigation of the Turkish Armed Forces, state-owned Anadolu news agency said. —Reuters

#### Refugees seek political voice

**SEOUL:** A group of North Korean refugees launched a political party in South Korea yesterday, aiming to give a voice to the 33,500 defectors living in the South and oppose conciliation with Pyongyang. “We were always considered minorities and aliens,” said Kim Joo-il, secretary-general of the new South-North Unification Party at its launch at a hall in South Korea’s capital Seoul. “North Korean defectors are now the future of unification.” The decision to set up a formal political party was a sign that defectors are seeking a more direct political role ahead of a parliamentary election in April. Many are strongly critical of President Moon Jae-in’s administration, which they accuse of sidelining defectors and ignoring human rights in a bid to repair relations with North Korea. Attendees at the launch event discussed cases that have become rallying cries for defectors, who say the South Korean government provides them too little support. —Reuters

#### Doctors rally around Assange

**LONDON:** More than 100 doctors on Monday called on Britain to end Julian Assange’s “torture” in prison pending his extradition on espionage charges to the United States. The 48-year-old Australian is facing 18 counts in the United States - 17 of them under the Espionage Act - that could see him jailed for 175 years. Washington’s extradition request will start being heard next Monday at Woolwich Crown Court. Assange is being held at the neighboring high-security Belmarsh Prison. A group of 117 physicians and psychologists from 18 nations wrote in a letter to The Lancet medical journal that Assange was being subjected to “torture” in prison. “We condemn the torture of Assange. We condemn the denial of his fundamental right to appropriate healthcare,” they wrote in the scientific magazine. —AFP

## UN welcomes help in enforcing Libya arms embargo

**GENEVA:** The United Nations yesterday welcomed a new EU naval operation to enforce an arms embargo on Libya as the warring sides in the conflict met for military talks in Geneva. EU foreign ministers agreed Monday to a naval mission that will be authorized to intervene to stop weapons shipments into the North African state.

“Whoever can help in monitoring the arms embargo is welcome in whatever part of Libya,” UN Libya envoy Ghassan Salame told reporters. “What is needed is that member states of the UN come to the rescue ... in monitoring the violations of the arms embargo, otherwise it will not end,” he said.

Salame said the embargo was being violated by air, land and sea, pointing to Libya’s large and porous border. The UN envoy yesterday began hosting a second

round of talks in Geneva to attempt to turn a shaky truce between the UN-recognized government in Tripoli and eastern-based military commander Khalifa Haftar into a lasting ceasefire. States including Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt support Haftar, while the UN-recognized government led by Fayeze al-Sarraj is backed by Turkey and Qatar.

Five senior officers from the Government of National Accord (GNA) and five appointed by Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) were taking part in the talks - part of broader efforts to end the conflict in the country. Salame said he was meeting with the two sides separately but did not rule out possible joint talks at a later date. A first round of the talks ended with no result earlier this month but Salame said there was “more hope” this time, mainly because of the approval of a UN Security Council resolution calling for a “lasting ceasefire”.

World leaders had agreed at a Berlin summit last month to end all meddling in the conflict and stop the flow of weapons, but little has changed on the ground since then. Salame said the truce was “very fragile” but nobody has so far reneged on the principle of accepting the truce. He said agreeing a ceasefire was “not a precondition” for talks planned to start in Geneva on



TRIPOLI: Libyans wave the national flag as they commemorate the ninth anniversary of the uprising against former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, in the capital Tripoli on February 17, 2020. —AFP

February 26 on finding a political solution to the long-running conflict. —AFP

## How cat videos could cause a ‘climate change nightmare’

**TBILISI:** A stone’s throw from a power station on the barren outskirts of Tbilisi, Georgia’s capital, a grey warehouse surrounded by metal containers hums to the sound of money. Inside, hundreds of computer servers work continuously to solve complicated mathematical equations generating the digital currency Bitcoin - burning enough electricity to power tens of thousands of homes in the process. “Any high-performance computing ... is energy intensive,” explained Joe Capes of global blockchain company The Bitfury Group, which operates the facility in Tbilisi.

Cryptocurrencies are one of several new technologies, like artificial intelligence and 5G networks, that climate experts worry could derail efforts to tackle global warming

## Smog, stoves choke Central Asian cities

**BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan:** Snow-capped peaks used to be clearly visible from the streets of Almaty and Bishkek, two of the largest cities in Central Asia that both lie in plains surrounded by mountains. But now a heavy cloud of dark smog often blots out the view as air pollution regularly soars to levels comparable to those in New Delhi and Lahore, even though Almaty and Bishkek have fewer people and industries than their Indian and Pakistani counterparts.

In the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, a city of one million, and Kazakhstan’s second city of Almaty, which is twice as large, the onset of winter prompts a surge in pollution as people burn coal and other dirty fuels in stoves to heat their homes. One of those monitoring the situation is Kyrgyz environmental activist Kunduz Adylbekova, who experiences the problem firsthand. In the area of small private houses where she lives on the outskirts of Bishkek, the air quality is particularly bad. “The air here has a kind of heavy feel,” said Adylbekova, a program manager at Archa Initiative non-profit.

Many locals use highly polluting stoves to heat their homes and boil water because they are not hooked up to mains gas. Large numbers of ageing cars and trucks exacerbate the

by consuming ever-growing amounts of power. Data centers processing and storing data from online activities, such as sending emails and streaming videos, already account for about 1% of global electricity use, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). That’s about the same amount of electricity that Australia consumes in a year.

But as societies become more digitalized, computing is expected to account for up to 8% of the world’s total power demand by 2030, according to some estimates, raising fears this could lead to the burning of more fossil fuels. “If we don’t take into account the carbon footprint, we are going to have a climate change nightmare coming from information technology,” said Babak Falsafi, a professor of computer and communication science at the Federal Polytechnic School of Lausanne.

### Efficient data

One solution is to improve the efficiency of data centers, which is something operators are naturally prone to do since electricity accounts for a large share of their running costs, according to data experts. “As a rule of thumb, a megawatt

situation. In this district, readings of PM 2.5 - a measure of fine particles in the air - regularly reach levels that the United States Environmental Protection Agency defines as hazardous to human health. Sometimes readings are four times higher than the EPA minimum “hazardous” level, Adylbekova said, with locals suffering the ill-effects. “Residents are often ill, some suffer from lung problems.”

### ‘We feel and see it’

The bowl-shaped topography of both cities helps trap pollution. Even worse, both have coal-fired power stations that date back to the Soviet era. But other factors have led to a massive increase in the smog problem over the last two decades. In Almaty, where gleaming skyscrapers reflect the country’s oil wealth, many cite the huge growth in the number of cars since the breakup of the USSR. Zhalgas Jakiyayev, a marketing specialist who works in the business district, said the growing pollution is “already having an effect on our health.”

“We don’t just feel it - we can see it,” he added, pointing to the leaden smog cloud that hangs over the city. “We need to switch to gas heating instead of using solid fuels. There needs to be more emphasis on spaces for pedestrians,” Jakiyayev said. Smog also afflicts the capitals of former Soviet republics to the south, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

### Declare an emergency!

While environmental groups have long sounded the alarm, now that people can easily access real-time air quality measurements online, pollution has become a talking point,



ALMATY: Two young women use their smartphones as they visit a viewpoint as smog covers Almaty on Feb 10, 2020. —AFP

particularly on social media. Governments have been slower to acknowledge the problem, however. This month, an online petition demanding that Almaty’s authorities declare the poor air quality as an emergency gained 17,000 signatures on the first day.

The city administration responded by saying that it is looking into ways to modernize the main coal-burning power station to make it less polluting. However it said no decision on the upgrade will be made until the end of the year and ignored calls for an independent assessment of the plant. Power stations account for just over a quarter of

total emissions, the city administration said, while exhaust fumes from vehicles make up some 50 percent.

In Kyrgyzstan, authorities rely on Russian energy giant Gazprom to expand its gas pipeline network into new areas of the capital in order to wean house-owners off domestic stoves. But activist Adylbekova said her family had to pay around \$500 to hook up to the network last November. That is too much for many residents, she said. So they continue to burn coal to heat their home and the sour smell of coal smoke lingers in the nostrils. —AFP



## International

# ‘From bad to worse’ - dashed hopes may deter many Iranians from polls

## Tired of crises, Iranians reluctant to vote

**DUBAI:** Confrontation with America, economic hardship and an airline tragedy have battered Iranians' confidence in their leaders, posing a potential problem for the authorities in a parliamentary election this week. As the Feb 21 vote nears, Iranians are in a gloomy mood, exhausted by a succession of crises that have helped to shred the hopes for a better life they harbored only four years ago.

That does not bode well for leaders seeking a big turnout at the ballot box: In their view, crowded polling stations would signal to arch-foe Washington that Iran is unbowed by sanctions and the killing of a prominent general in a US strike. Allies of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have ensured hardliners dominate the field - meaning that, whatever the turnout, security hawks seeking a more confrontational approach with Washington may tighten their control of the legislature.

But a meagre showing would still rattle Iran's leaders and embolden critics both in the country and outside who argue the Islamic Republic needs to change domestic and foreign policy. "I'm a person who has voted before. My hope was that things would get a little better when I voted in the past. Now, all the red lines have been crossed," said a doctor in Tehran whose clinic is struggling to source specialized medicine.

"This time, I have no hope and I will definitely not vote," she said by phone, asking not to be identified discussing political matters. Four years ago, things looked very different. Rouhani and his allies won big gains in parliamentary elections, and many hoped a nuclear deal agreed with world powers in 2015 would pull Iran out of political isolation and boost the economy.

### 'We haven't seen any progress'

Those aspirations crumbled after President Donald Trump quit the pact in 2018 and reimposed sanctions in an effort to put stricter limits on Iran's nuclear work, curb its ballistic missile program and end its involvement in regional proxy wars. "The main root of everything is the economy," Ali, a mobile phone shop employee in the central city of Isfahan, said by telephone, asking not to reveal his surname. "If an individual doesn't have the money to take

home bread to his wife and family then he'll stop praying and even lose his beliefs," said Ali, who works more hours since his boss kept the store open in traditional afternoon resting periods in the hope customers could wander in. Ali does not plan to vote next week. "I voted for several years and it didn't make any difference. We haven't seen any progress to say we want this or that candidate to come forward," he said. The authorities have been under pressure since last year when protests over a fuel price hike were met with the bloodiest crackdown since the 1979 Islamic revolution, killing hundreds.

A US drone strike that felled top commander Qassem Soleimani in January in Iraq rallied Iranians around a common cause. But the show of support was quickly replaced by angry protests over efforts to cover up the accidental shooting down of a Ukrainian airliner that killed all 176 aboard. The elite Revolutionary Guards apologized for the calamity, but that did not appease thousands protesting in several cities. "This year, things are going from bad to worse," said a Tehran resident and homemaker, who does not plan to vote and also asked not to be named.

"After the plane crash, the government has lost a lot of their supporters," said the resident, who added that the establishment needed the election to show the world "how many supporters they have" after the string of crises. Even before the latest troubles, sanctions that cut Iran's crude oil exports by more than 80 percent were placing a painful squeeze on living standards. The rial has slumped, trading on the free market at about 140,000 against the dollar against its official rate of 42,000, according to foreign exchange website Bonbast.com

### Voting for 'hard revenge'

The currency plunge has disrupted Iran's foreign trade and boosted inflation, which the IMF expects at 31% this year. In the eastern city of Birjand, Hamed said he has no time for elections as he frets about his business filming and photographing weddings, with only one in 10 customers asking for albums after the cost of photo paper rose six-fold since 2018.

"We're focused on prices and having to call customers



**TEHRAN:** Iranian women attend a campaign meeting of candidate Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, a former military officer and mayor of Tehran, in the Iranian capital yesterday ahead of this week's parliamentary elections. — AFP

and asking them to pay," Hamed told Reuters by phone, also declining to give his surname due to sensitivities. "We have nothing to do with politicians and politics." Analysts expect a lower turnout than the 62% in the 2016 parliamentary elections, with smaller, more conservative cities where families pressure kin to vote seeing a larger showing.

But Khamenei, Iran's highest authority, has tried to drum up nationalistic sentiment to secure a strong

turnout. "It's possible that someone doesn't like me but if they like Iran they must come to the ballot box," he said in a speech. Supporters echoed the call on social media. "A better election can also be another #hard\_revenge," a Twitter user named Teiaaraa posted two weeks ago, referring to a phrase used by state media for the Iranian strikes on Iraq bases that left over 100 U.S. soldiers with traumatic brain injuries. — Reuters

## 'Tiger widows' shunned as bad luck in rural Bangladesh

**SHYAMNAGAR:** Abandoned by her sons, shunned by her neighbors and branded a witch, Mosammat Rashida's crime? Her husband was killed by a Bengal tiger. Women like her are ostracized in many rural villages in Bangladesh, where they are viewed as the cause of their partner's misfortune. "My sons have told me that I am an unlucky witch," she told AFP in her flimsy plank home, in the honey-hunters' village of Gabura at the edge of the Sundarbans-a 10,000-square-kilometre mangrove forest that straddles Bangladesh and India.

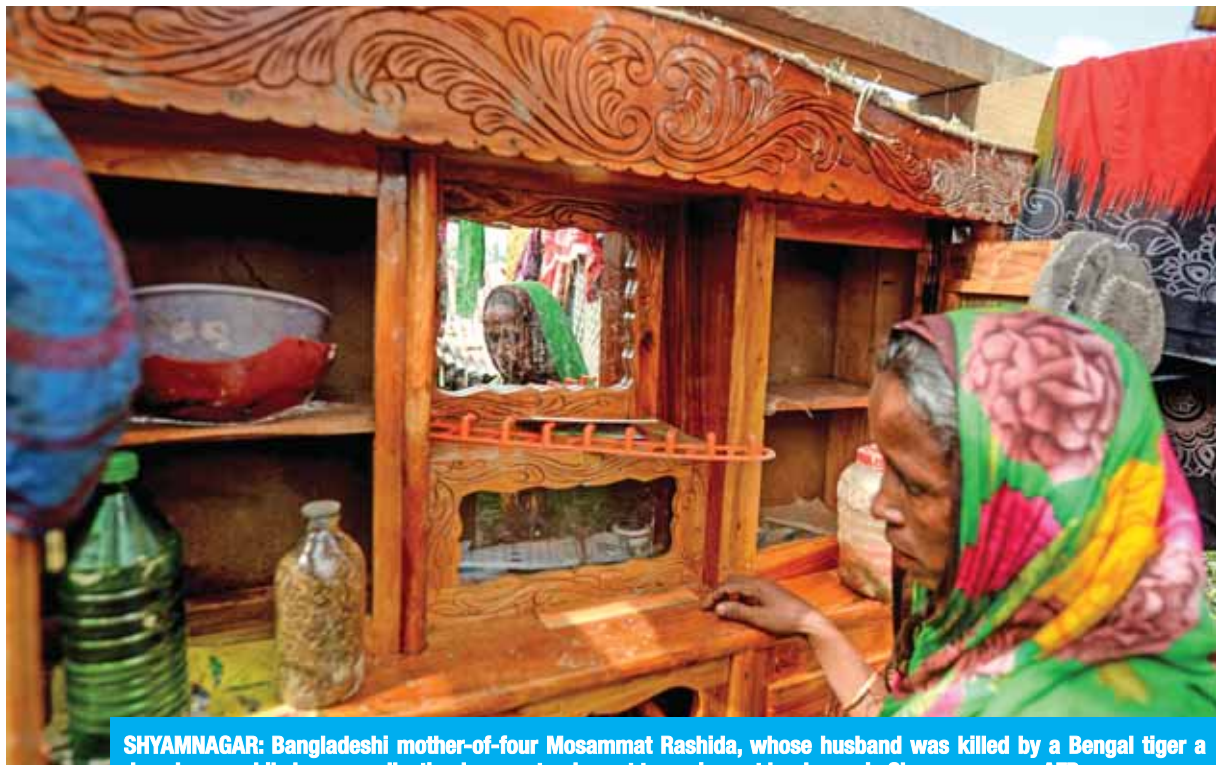
Her husband died while out collecting honey in the jungles there. "Honey-hunters prefer to collect honey mostly in the southwestern Sundarbans, where most of the man-eaters (tigers) live," leading Bengal tiger expert at Jahangirnagar University, Monirul Khan, told AFP. Tigers are an endangered species but climate change and human development is reducing their wild habitat, often forcing them towards villages in search of food. Wildlife charities estimate there are some 100 tigers in the Bangladesh side of the Sundarbans.

At least 519 men died from tiger attacks in 50 villages in one district-home to half a million people-between 2001 and 2011, according to Ledars Bangladesh, a charity helping widows reintegrate back in the villages. Their deaths are a double blow for the women left behind. Already grieving the loss of their partner, overnight they become 'tiger widows'-pariahs in their homes and villages at a time when they most need support. They are often left with little means to support themselves or their families.

### 'Bring bad luck'

Rashida is heartbroken but unsurprised that her adult sons, aged 24 and 27, abandoned her and their two young siblings. "They are part of this society after all," the 45-year-old said, as she wiped tears from her eyes. Her tiny shack has no roof-it was blown off by a deadly cyclone-but there have been no offers of help from neighbors or officials, who she claims helped others in the village but shunned her.

Instead she uses an old tarpaulin to keep the elements out. Next door, Mohammad Hossain was fixing his broken tin roof, and confessed he had been instructed by his wife



**SHYAMNAGAR:** Bangladeshi mother-of-four Mosammat Rashida, whose husband was killed by a Bengal tiger a decade ago while he was collecting honey, stands next to a mirror at her house in Shyamnagar. — AFP

not to talk to Rashida. "It would mar my family's well-being and could bring bad luck," the 31-year-old honey-hunter said. Officials denied omitting Rashida from the help they provided after the cyclone. But the head of Ledars Bangladesh, Mohon Kumar Mondal, said the mistreatment of "tiger widows" was widespread in highly conservative communities, which often held "centuries old" prejudices. "They (charities) are working to restore the widows' dignities. The main challenge is to change people's beliefs," he explained. "The change is very slow. Still, I'd say there has been progress," he added, noting that younger, more educated villagers were less fearful of the widows.

### 'Staying alive'

Rijia Khatun, who said she has learnt to cope with being ostracized by her fellow villagers after her honey-hunter husband's death 15 years ago, has been secretly supported by her nephew and his family. "My sons were young. But nobody helped me. I felt bad at first as they

kept blaming me for my husband's death. I didn't know what was my fault," she recalled, adding: "But now I've learnt to live with this adversity." Her nephew Yaad Ali, who has witnessed several attacks including his uncle's, explained that while he wanted to help, he could not do so publicly. "We had to do it (help Khatun) with confidentiality or else the village society would have ostracized us as well," he confessed. Honey hunting has traditionally been seen as a more accessible vocation for villagers who can't afford the equipment or boats needed to undertake the region's other main profession-fishing.

But fears of being killed by the predators-and the consequences for the wives they leave behind-has meant more and more men are opting for a different trade. Harun ur Rashid, whose father was killed by a tiger, said he was now a fisherman, despite coming from generations of honey-hunters. The 21-year-old said: "My mother doesn't want me to end up like my father. And I want to stay alive and take care of her because she has suffered a lot and endured enough abuses after my father's death." — AFP

## India's Trump superfans gear up for his arrival

**KONNEY:** Bussa Krishna first began worshipping Donald Trump four years ago when the US president appeared to him in a dream. Since then, after a run of good fortune, the Indian real estate broker has transformed his modest home into a shrine to the US leader, who is due in India on Monday for a two-day visit. "My love for him has transformed into reverence. That has given me immense happiness. Hence instead of praying to other gods, I started praying to him," Krishna told Reuters.

Krishna, who lives alone in a village in the southern state of Telangana, has erected a life-size statue to Trump in his yard, while his walls are scrawled with the leader's name - to the annoyance of his extended family. "I am facing difficulties because of my relatives," Krishna said. "They tell me that I am disgracing

them in society, I told them that just like you believe and worship Shiva, I believe and worship Trump. Neither of us can stop the other from doing so." Krishna is not the only Indian who reveres Trump. In New Delhi, members of the Hindu Sena, a right-wing fringe group, have begun rehearsing a welcome song in his honor.

Its members say Trump shares their hatred of Islamic extremism, and it has drawn attention for boisterous celebrations of his birthday, including pretending to feed cake to photos of his face. "We like Donald Trump because he openly spoke about India's feelings," Hindu Sena leader Vishnu Gupta told Reuters. "...He openly said that he would eliminate Islamic terrorism from its roots, that is why I am his fan."

Trump, who like Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a reputation as an unabashed populist who shows his enemies no mercy, is making his first visit to India. Trump's itinerary starts on Feb. 24 in the western city of Ahmedabad, where he will visit the former home of independence hero Mahatma and address an estimated 125,000 people at a rally. He is due in the capital the following day. — Reuters



**JANGAON, India:** Farmer Bussa Krishna, 33, offers prayers to a statue of US President Donald Trump at his residence in Jangaon district some 120 km from Hyderabad on Monday, ahead of the visit of US President Donald Trump to India. — AFP

## Ashraf Ghani secures 2nd term as president

**KABUL:** Ashraf Ghani has secured a second term as president of Afghanistan, according to final results of the September 28, 2019 poll released yesterday by the country's election commission. "The election commission... declares Mr Ashraf Ghani, who has won 50.64

percent of the votes, as the president of Afghanistan," election commission chief Hava Alam Nuristani told a press conference in Kabul. "May God help him in serving the people of Afghanistan... I also pray that peace comes to our country," she added.

The results had been delayed for nearly five months after allegations of vote-rigging from Ghani's main rival, Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, forced a recount. The delay left Afghanistan facing a political crisis just as the US seeks a deal with the Taliban which would allow it to withdraw troops in return for various security guarantees and a promise that the militants would hold peace talks with the Afghan government.

If all goes well, then Ghani is likely to be the man sitting across from the Taleban at the negotiating table in a bid to chart Afghanistan's future. Earlier this week, Abdullah's team said they would not accept fraudulent results. Current vice-president Abdul Rashid Dostum, a powerful Uzbek former warlord and Abdullah's ally, has also threatened to form a parallel government if fraudulent election results are announced.

Abdullah lost to Ghani in 2014 in a divisive election that saw the US intervene to broker an awkward power-sharing deal between the two rivals. Nearly one million of the initial 2.7 million votes were purged owing to irregularities, meaning the election saw by far the lowest turnout of any Afghan poll. Ultimately, only 1.8 million votes were counted - a tiny number given Afghanistan's estimated population of 35 million and 9.6 million registered voters. — AFP



Ashraf Ghani

## Bushfire crisis hit 75% of Australians: Survey

**SYDNEY:** Three in four Australians - almost 18 million people - were affected by the country's deadly bushfire crisis, according to a survey released yesterday that also pointed to plummeting support for the government and for coal projects. The Australian National University study showed the vast human scale of the five-month crisis, which killed more than 30 people and destroyed thousands of homes.

"Nearly every Australian has been touched by these fires and many of us will be living with the effects for years and years to come," said lead social researcher Nicholas Biddle said. The poll of 3,000 people indicated that 14 percent of the adult population was directly affected - with their homes lost or damaged, or families forced to evacuate. Those nearly three million people were eclipsed by a further 15 million Australians who had indirect exposure, including being affected by bushfire smoke or having holiday plans hit.

The scale of the impact shocked researchers and will be cause for concern in Canberra, where the government has struggled to shake public perception that it botched the crisis response and cares little for addressing climate change. — AFP



## Analysis

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Machine lubricants  
leave bad taste for  
producers, buyers

The palm oil industry, long-accused of large scale deforestation, is bracing for another hit to its business: Machinery lubricants seeping into the world's most consumed edible oil during processing. European food companies, including Nestle, have in recent months asked top palm oil producers in Indonesia and Malaysia to lower the amount of mineral oil hydrocarbons found in palm oil, industry officials told Reuters.

The solution is to use food-grade lubricants in machines that turn palm fruit into the oil used to make everything from infant formula to chocolate. But such lubricants can cost 8-10 times more than their petroleum-based or synthetic counterparts and could hurt profit margins, the officials say. Reuters is the first to spell out this latest concern, which follows discussions in Europe to regulate the levels of other contaminants found in edible oils such as palm.

"They (European food makers) say hydrocarbons are found in our oils because of the way we process the fruits," said Nageeb Abdul Wahab, chief executive of the growers' group Malaysian Palm Oil Association. "It is easily addressed, but costly. The lubricant we use sometimes comes into contact with our product. To address this issue, we have to use food grade lubricant, but the available options are very, very expensive."

Such contaminants are found across several food products, including vegetable oils, such as soy and sunflower, and can enter food through packaging materials, additives or during storage. Some are carcinogenic, and the European Food Safety Authority flagged them as a potential health concern in 2012. The European Union has already passed a law to phase out palm oil from renewable fuel by 2030, because of concerns about deforestation concerns.

But there are no European regulations on mineral oil hydrocarbons in food. Some palm oil buyers, however, have established their own limits, industry sources said. Nestle, a big buyer of palm oil, said it was actively monitoring its supply chain. "We are reinforcing our controls by working with suppliers on acceptable levels of Mineral Oil Saturated Hydrocarbons (MOSH) and Mineral Oil Aromatic Hydrocarbons (MOAH) in agricultural raw materials," Nestle told Reuters in an emailed statement, referring to the different types of hydrocarbons.

"Although there are currently no regulatory requirements in place, our objective is to ensure levels of MOSH and MOAH are as low as feasibly possible in the ingredients that we source." An exporter of palm oil to the food industry said only European buyers had asked for a reduction in traces of the contaminant in palm oil. "The industry has started to request suppliers change to food-grade lubricant at all the critical contact points for the FFB (fresh fruit bunch) processing," said an official from the exporting company, declining to be identified as he was not authorized to talk to media. Some Malaysian producers have already started to make the change, he said.

## Checkmate?

Industry officials say food safety concerns would be a heavy blow for palm producers, as food is the main market for the commodity, accounting for nearly 70 percent of its global use. "Anything related to food can checkmate the industry," the palm association's Nageeb said. Already the industry is trying to adjust refining processes to cut the amount of glycidyl esters (GE) and 3-monochloropropane diol (3-MCPD) contaminants found in refined fats and oils, including palm oil.

The EU in 2017 introduced safety levels for GE and is set to introduce new limits on 3-MCPD soon. These and other recent EU regulations have led to accusations from Indonesia and Malaysia that the bloc is unfairly targeting palm oil to protect its own oilseed industries. Nevertheless, industry regulator the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) is considering setting its own mineral oil hydrocarbon limit nationally, and is working with the health ministry and palm firms, sources said.

The health ministry directed questions to the MPOB, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Indonesian producer Musim Mas said it has already switched to food-grade lubricants and made other changes in the processing of palm oil to address buyer concerns about the contaminants. "Customers' concerns regarding hydrocarbon-based lubricants contaminating food sources are an increasing requirement for 2020," a spokeswoman said. — Reuters

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A file photo taken on April 19, 2019 shows Algerian protesters carrying placards as they take part in an anti-government demonstration in the capital Algiers. — AFP

## Algeria anti-system protests mark first anniversary

On Feb 22, 2019, sudden and unprecedented protests swept Algeria. A year on, despite bringing down a president, the "Hirak" protest movement faces mounting challenges. Massive anti-government protests held every Friday quickly gathered momentum: Six weeks in, president Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned after 20 years in power. But Algeria's military was quick to reassert control and by the time presidential elections were held in December, a former Bouteflika ally succeeded him in a vote deeply opposed by protesters and shunned by most voters.

"With the presidential election, we passed into act two, with all the specter of improbability, uncertainty and instability" that entails, Karima Direche, an historian of contemporary North Africa, told AFP. "It matches what Algerians have been saying for a year: 'Everything is moving and nothing is changing.'" While a year of weekly protests has not yet brought down "the system" that they challenged, the Hirak movement has profoundly changed Algeria's political landscape.

## 'Increased awareness'

Bouteflika's resignation and the imprisonment of corrupt businessmen and politicians are "tangible results, even if the main demand of regime change and systemic reform is far from having been achieved", said Dalia Ghanem, a researcher with the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut. But Hirak's biggest success, she said, was "the increased awareness of Algerians and their desire to

reconnect with politics... without fear of another civil war".

A brutal war between the Algerian army and Islamist rebels killed some 200,000 people in the 1990s. The trauma of the conflict was exploited under Bouteflika to discourage dissent, and until Feb 22 had rendered large protests on the streets unimaginable. Ahead of the first protests, Algeria's political system had remained focused on presidential polls that were widely expected to return Bouteflika to power - despite the 82-year-old being largely incapacitated since a stroke in 2013.

Cut off from the public, the regime sensed growing anger but underestimated it. Young Algerians - disproportionately affected by massive unemployment in a country where the majority is under 30 - were fed up with being represented by a wheelchair-bound octogenarian whose rare public appearances elicited mockery online. Simmering anger peaked when, during a meeting of the president's party, a portrait of Bouteflika was addressed by party apparatchiks in the absence of the ailing leader.

Calls to protest on Feb 22 began multiplying across social media. Few expected the movement to take hold though, especially in Algiers, where since 2001 public rallies had been banned. But then on the first Friday, overwhelmed police stood aside as tens of thousands of peaceful demonstrators poured out onto the streets.

## What now?

In a country without a real opposition party or union, for the first time "the street appeared as a protest force",

said Karima Direche, an historian at the French National Centre for Scientific Research. According to Jean-Pierre Filiu, professor of Middle East studies at Sciences Po University in Paris, the Hirak has for the past year taken centre stage in "both the nation's history and public space". And by keeping the protests peaceful, "the movement has changed the rules of the game in Algerian politics, which was previously marked by violence and a lack of transparency".

The Hirak has also shown the profound transformation of Algerian society: led by an educated and hyperconnected youth, and in particular women, who are now determined to be heard. Algeria's new president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, aged 74, "will have to deal with that. He won't be able to rule like those before him", said Direche. A year on, the protests are smaller than in spring 2019, but the movement remains strong.

The Hirak wants to influence the changes promised by the new president but is struggling to structure itself and agree on a future strategy. "As the movement celebrates its first anniversary, I want to ask 'What's next?'" said Ghanem. "What do you want? What are you demanding and how will you obtain concrete results?" Several civil society groups born of the Hirak movement are to hold a conference in Algiers on Sunday marking the anniversary in a bid to unify their ranks as a political force. Participants from across Algeria and abroad will examine a "February 22 Proclamation" summing up the demands and slogans of the protest movement, organizers said. — AFP

On Greek mainland,  
locals stonewall  
migrant relocations

"We will not accept a single illegal colonizer," reads a banner in the small village of Makrygiolos. The village is one of many areas in mainland Greece where the government is locked in a tug of war with local communities over the housing of migrants. Just months after the new conservative administration took over promising to get tough on migration, deadlock is rapidly emerging over where to accommodate tens of thousands of asylum-seekers currently languishing in overcrowded, unsanitary camps on five islands facing Turkey.

There are over 38,000 people in the camps on Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos despite an official capacity of 6,200. Island officials and residents have told the government that after five years on the front lines of the European migration crisis, they are no longer prepared to accept thousands of asylum-seekers in their midst. But while the administration of Prime Minister

Kyriakos Mitsotakis tries to alleviate the problem by relocating thousands of migrants to other parts of Greece, many communities on the mainland are also stonewalling the move. "We are determined to defend our homeland. We will do anything to keep them out," says Tasos Yiakoumis, a lawyer taking part in an anti-migrant protest in Makrygiolos, a coastal village 450 km north of Athens. Some 300 people have gathered to protest against plans to house 200 asylum-seekers in a disused former home for the mentally ill.

## 'This shall not pass'

"We know their plan, they want to Islamicize the entire western world. This shall not pass," Yiakoumis shouts at the crowd through a microphone. Another speaker claims that "refugees steal children" and that "most people coming to Greece have criminal records and are hunted in their home countries." Other residents in the village of 1,000 say that the crime rate will increase in the village, which mainly lives on tourism. "This is a tourist area. Which tourist would want to vacation next to a (migrant shelter)?" asks local mayor Anastasios Manolas, a former career army officer.

Similar protests have taken place in other parts of northern Greece in recent months, with locals banding together to keep out buses bearing asylum-seekers from the islands. Last week, parents in a kindergarten in the

village of Vrasna refused to share the building with a small number of refugee children, who were forced to seek schooling elsewhere.

Meanwhile, critics note that the conservatives only have themselves to blame by repeatedly describing asylum-seekers in negative terms. In November, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said refugees and economic migrants are "besieging" Europe. The new conservative government which came to power in July has announced that the island camps on Lesbos, Samos and Chios are to shut down this year. They are to be replaced with new, smaller facilities that are to be operational by mid-2020.

But the islanders say they will only accept small facilities where asylum-seekers are to be screened, and then either moved to the mainland, or sent back to Turkey outright. The ongoing deadlock, five years after the height of the migration crisis, has caused exasperation among both island residents and asylum-seekers in the camps, where violence is rife. After extended talks with officials on the islands led nowhere, the government last week caused further anger by announcing that land could be requisitioned for a three-year period to build the new facilities. The islanders responded by taking their protest to Athens on Friday. On Monday, Mitarachi said the government would give island officials a week to suggest alternative locations for the new camps. — AFP

Turkish mom fights  
to free cadet son  
from life sentence

Wearing a colorful headscarf and long coat to guard against a bitter Ankara frost, Turkish mother Melek Cetinkaya would not usually catch the attention of the police. But when she dons a vest calling for justice for her imprisoned son Furkan Cetinkaya, it is only minutes before two female police officers silently grab her and bundle her into a white van. Since her protests began last September, the 43-year-old mother of three has been detained nearly 30 times.

Cetinkaya is undeterred because she is fighting for her son, an air force cadet who was just 19 years old when he was jailed for participating in the failed coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in July 2016. In 2018, he was sentenced to life in prison. Hundreds of cadets have suffered the same fate, facing decades in prison for their role in something which their families say they had no way of comprehending.

"How can these children have carried out a coup?" Melek Cetinkaya asked at the protest last week, as she urged passersby "to learn about the injustices, illegalities and unfair legal process" her son and others experienced. "Please ensure the cadets' voices are heard," she shouted

moments before she was detained. A child nearby asked, "What's going on?" but his father quickly hushed him and walked away. After the coup attempt, tens of thousands of people were arrested and nearly 150,000 public sector workers were sacked or suspended as part of a crackdown on groups linked to the coup and other government opponents. A total of 355 cadets have been given life sentences over alleged involvement in the coup, opposition MP Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu said, even without any "concrete evidence" - and most would have been simply obeying their superiors. "The sentences are completely unjust. They are treated without mercy and being scapegoated," said Gergerlioglu, of the leftist Peoples' Democratic Party.

## 'Seeking justice'

It was two days after the coup when Cetinkaya learned her son had been arrested. Her initial hope that the system would bring justice faded as the trial progressed. "When the appeals court approved (the verdict), I came to believe there was no justice in this country and I started seeking justice on the streets," she told AFP. She insists her son is innocent and that no one in the family had links to US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen, whom the government accuses of ordering the coup attempt.

Furkan was in a training camp in Yalova, northwestern Turkey, when he and dozens of others were told by their commanders they had to return to Istanbul because a terrorist attack had occurred. They returned in the night to find the city in chaos, with reports of tanks on the streets and soldiers storming public buildings. Unaware of the bigger picture, the cadets say they ended up on the streets



A picture taken on Feb 8, 2020 shows Melek Cetinkaya holding a photo of her son, who has been in prison for over three years, during an interview with AFP at her home in Ankara. — AFP

chanting the national anthem, with no idea that they would later be accused of supporting a coup.

Furkan's lawyer says he and his fellow cadets were not involved in any of the clashes between pro-coup soldiers and vigilante civilians that broke out later in the night. The judge nonetheless jailed the teenagers for life for "attempting to abolish the constitutional order". Andrew Gardner, of Amnesty International, says the purged judiciary lacks the independence or capacity to assess who is innocent or guilty. Their final hope is the court of cassation, the top appeals court, which has overturned some coup-related convictions. — AFP



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2020

# Business

**12** NBK wins 'Best Retail Bank in Customer Services in Kuwait'



**13** Furious shareholders blast Nissan bosses



**14** Boubyan Bank wins two awards from Service Hero, maintains top position



## Commercial Bank of Kuwait announces operating profit before provisions of KD 108.5m for 2019

**KUWAIT:** Commercial Bank of Kuwait announced an operating profit, before provisions, of KD 108.5 million for the year 2019 (2018: KD 106.0 million). In line with the bank's prudent policy of proactive recognition of problems, the operating profit was mainly allocated to specific provisions against certain loans where the management has some concerns. The specific provision was used to transfer those loans to the memorandum account.

The resultant net profit attributable to the shareholders of the bank is zero for the year 2019 (2018: KD 63.8 million), as at the end of the year, total provisions held with the bank amounted to KD 127.3 million. The bank will continue to pursue its right to recover loans transferred to the memorandum account by taking appropriate measures required in this regard.

The operating profit before provision was higher by KD 2.4 million (2.3 percent) compared to last year. The bank witnessed healthy growth in the key areas of business and revenue. Total assets increased by 9.0 percent to

reach KD 4.9 billion. Operating income grew by 5.1 percent, interest income by 3.6 percent and fee income by 4.2 percent.

Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Al-Sabah, the bank's Chairman, commented that the bank continues to focus on asset quality, digitalization, operational efficiency and customer service. The prudent policy of maintaining a portfolio of quality assets and early recognition of any expected delinquency will continue to protect the interests of all stakeholders. This policy is extremely important to meet the challenges of the volatile economic and geopolitical situation in the region.

Sheikh Ahmad added that the bank's capital adequacy ratio at the end of December 2019 stood at 18.1 percent, leverage ratio at 11.0 percent, net stable funding ratio 113.5 percent and liquidity coverage ratio 171.0 percent comfortably exceeds the regulatory requirement set by the Central Bank of Kuwait. He emphasized that the bank's strong financial indicators are due to its consistent policy of cleaning its loan portfolio by writing off irregular loans, while taking all the necessary steps



Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Al-Sabah

to protect the interests of the bank. The NPL ratio at zero is a clear demonstration of this strategy.

Sheikh Ahmad further added that digitalization initiatives continue at a rapid pace across the bank, along with introduction of innovative products and delivery channels and optimization of operational efficiency to create a pleasant and seamless customer experience.

Investment in technology and human capital will continue to meet the challenges currently faced by the banking industry.

New initiatives were taken during the fourth quarter of the year with features like, but not limited to, electronic dividends subscription via CBK Mobile, display foreign currency transaction and its KD equivalent for accounts and prepaid cards and enhanced notifications via CBK mobile by enabling/disabling all accounts/cards alerts in a single OTP request.

Moreover, in a continuous effort towards nationalisation, the bank initiated the Al-Tijari Graduate Program that's exclusive to Kuwaiti graduates, re-enforcing the bank's commitment to enable and invest in national graduates, with industry-leading remuneration packages and benefits. The Kuwaitization ratio reached 74.0 percent by December 2019.

Sheikh Ahmad emphasized that supporting green projects is the key to meet the bank's social responsibility goals towards the community. Some of such initiatives include the bank leading a consortium of six banks and

signing a \$650 million 26-year project loan to finance the construction and operation of the Umm Al-Haiman wastewater plant. This is a critical infrastructure project that will set the new worldwide benchmark for sustainable water treatment and reuse. The bank will continue to fund such projects of national and environmental importance.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed with Zain to get the latest cloud solutions, data centre services, and the most advanced security solutions to drive the bank's digital transformation efforts. Storing digital assets securely and efficiently is becoming a key differentiator and it is important to have robust systems in place to store, access, retrieve and restore data without straining the environment.

Sheikh Ahmad took the opportunity to thank the bank's shareholders, valued customers, staff and regulatory authorities, emphasizing and reassuring that the bank's management will continue to implement all the required policies for safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders.

## Huawei and KCST sign MoU to establish an ICT academy

Empowering students with ICT skills to succeed in different fields



Managements of Huawei and KCST pose for a group picture

**KUWAIT:** Huawei Technologies Kuwait, a leading global information and communication technology solutions provider, recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST) to expand and equip the next generation of ICT leaders with the necessary skills to succeed in different fields. The ICT Academy provides students with hands-on training in the latest Huawei technologies and aspiring ICT professionals with comprehensive study materials.

Offering access to advanced ICT practices and industry trends, the students will undergo training in

technological developments such as Big Data, cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and pervasive technologies, granting them a full range of ICT career certifications.

Through the course, students will gain the necessary expertise to better serve and fill the gaps within the society and fuel growth of key sectors and industries. Huawei has partnered with several companies and universities to build a healthy ICT talent ecosystem with enhanced digital capabilities so the society can benefit from seamless connectivity, improved infrastructure and

way of life to ensure a brighter economic future.

Professor Khalid Al-Begain, President of Kuwait College of Science and Technology said, "This memo supports the university's strategy in developing the students' capabilities so that they have the ability to contribute to building the national economy."

Speaking at the event, CEO of Huawei Technologies Kuwait, Rico Lin said, "Our goal remains to expand the capacity of ICT knowledge and provide certifications that will enable the students to grow and pursue professional careers as ICT leaders of tomorrow. The academy

is a crucial platform that elevates talent and furnishes them with the application skills essential in today's rapidly evolving world. The recent MoU with Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST) falls in line with Huawei's broader commitment to the country's mission to fuel national ICT competitiveness and contribute to local communities. We are glad to have KCST as our newest strategic partner in helping build a generation of forward-thinking local ICT professionals and making the vision of transforming Kuwait into a digitized country possible as part of the Kuwait Vision 2035."



Signing of the memorandum of understanding





# NBK wins ‘Best Retail Bank in Customer Services in Kuwait’

## Award for ninth year in a row during Service Hero Awards for 2019

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) was awarded the “Best Retail Bank in Customer Services in Kuwait” for the ninth year in a row during the Service Hero Awards for the year 2019.

The award was presented to NBK during the ceremony held by Service Hero and attended by NBK’s Consumer Banking Group which were: Head of Branches Ghadeer Al-Awadhi, Senior Manager in Branch Management Hamad Alwera, Executive Manager of Call Center Tamer Allam, Senior Manager in Customer Experience Eman Hussain, and Manager of Contact Center Mohammed Mansour, in addition to officials from leading companies operating in various service industries in Kuwait.

Service Hero is a customer satisfaction index that collects the voice of customers on service standards and creates a list of service providers ranked by category. The index partners with the American Customer Satisfaction Index, is a member of ESOMAR and is backed by an independent advisory council to ensure all results are impartial, objective and accurately reflect the voice of the customer.

The award for “Best Retail Bank in Customer Services in Kuwait” is fully based on customers’ assessment of banks in Kuwait. Service dimensions evaluated include reliability, speed, product quality, value, location, staff quality, call center and website.

The Index also rates overall satisfaction, loyalty and comparison to an ideal.

Commenting on the new award earned by NBK, Ghadeer Al-Awadhi, Head of Branches, National Bank of Kuwait said: “We aim to reach the highest level of customer satisfaction by ensuring we provide unique and advanced banking services and products that meet the aspirations of our customers. This is why we are constantly connecting with our customers to learn more about their specific needs. We also conduct multiple studies and surveys on all our products and services before their launch to ensure that they satisfy the needs of our customers while implementing the most advanced standards available globally.”

Al-Awadhi added: “Our strategy for digital transformation has significantly contributed to the increase in customer satisfaction, and specifically in our digital products and services. Customer satisfaction from our NBK Mobile Banking App alone increased to 95 percent in 2019 following the series of enhancements and 17 new services introduced on the application throughout the year.”

“We have a clear strategy that is being implemented by a team of professionals working in an ambitious environment where coordination between departments is at its highest level for customers to provide the best services and enrich the banking experience of our cus-



tomers,” Al-Awadhi noted.

She concluded that NBK is focused on motivating its employees so in turn they can provide the best level of services to customers. The bank does not only rely on traditional training courses, but also adopts new methods of communication to enable employees to gain the

best experiences in modern and out of the ordinary methods. NBK recently introduces new advanced banking services and products that meet a high level of quality and received customers’ satisfaction. These services include the new updates to NBK Mobile Banking App and many advanced e-Payments services.

## Foreign companies struggle to resume operations in China

BEIJING: Foreign firms are struggling to resume work in virus-hit China as they face disrupted supply chains, rising inventory and quarantine rules meant to contain the deadly epidemic, the EU chamber of commerce said yesterday.

With many pharmaceutical companies globally sourcing from China, pharmacies may also face a shortage of antibiotics and other drugs if the epidemic is not resolved soon, said Joerg Wuttke, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. Firms in China have seen a slow restart to work after the Spring Festival break in late January, with residents encouraged to stay home to reduce the spread of a virus that has killed nearly 1,900 people.

“The whole process is stuttering to get back as the magnitude of the challenges is just huge,” Wuttke added. “How long this is going to last is anybody’s guess.”

Many cities have imposed travel restrictions too, with about 56 million people in the hard-hit Hubei province virtually sealed off from the rest of the country. Wuhan, a city in Hubei and the epicentre of the outbreak, is a hub for US, European and Japanese carmakers and electronics suppliers. In a more recent move, Beijing now requires people arriving in the capital to go into a 14-day self-quarantine.

This makes it tough for foreign experts to come in if production plants are down, delaying their recovery, said Wuttke. Other problems include the range of permits needed to transport goods, which vary by city, region and district.

This has become a “logistical nightmare” and problems moving goods lead to rising inventory, said Wuttke. Supply chains remain disrupted, with many firms relying on other enterprises for parts, said Paul Sives, who chairs the EU chamber’s southwest China chapter.

Not all suppliers have permission to resume production. It does not help that companies require massive amounts of masks—that they cannot easily procure—for employees before they can restart operations, he said. Manpower problems add to this situation, with some workers unable to leave their residential compounds freely.

“Drivers for many companies are still on vacation and some of them, when they come back, have to be subject to 14 days of quarantine,” said Wuttke. A survey of 109 manufacturing firms by the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai released on Monday found that almost 80 percent of respondents did not have enough staff to run a full production line. Over 40 percent of surveyed firms said a lack of staff was their biggest challenge in the next few weeks, and almost 60 percent expect demand for their goods to be lower in coming months. Over a third of surveyed firms said a clearer explanation of requirements was the most important thing government officials could do to speed up factory opening approvals. On Monday, Apple announced it would miss its March quarter revenue forecast, and that global iPhone supplies would drop due to the virus epidemic in China. — AFP

## Investors track ships, chase rumors to get edge on virus risks

NEW YORK: As investors crunch numbers to determine how the coronavirus will hit China’s economy, hedge fund manager Nathaniel Polachek has tied much of his outlook to the fate of a ship anchored near Weihai, China. The vessel carries some 750 tons of lead concentrate that Polachek, head of New York-based Commodity Asset Management, purchased in Greece to sell on the Chinese mainland.

The coronavirus outbreak has kept the ship idling off China’s coast for weeks, as movement restrictions and factory closures slow swathes of the world’s second-largest economy to a crawl.

Word that the ship has been allowed to dock in Weihai – an access point to one of China’s main industrial hubs and home to several metal refineries and smelters – would be one signal that business activity is finally picking up, Polachek said. Another encouraging sign would be an increase in air pollution levels over key Chinese manufacturing areas, which Polachek monitors daily using the Air Quality Index website.

“The best indicators are ... from the physical world,” he said. “I want to see how long it takes for materials to get off the boat, how long it takes for me to get paid for them.”

Doubts over whether there are more cases in China than are being captured by official figures have fueled a do-it-yourself approach among investors looking to determine the outbreak’s trajectory and gauge its economic impact. The tools they use range from artificial intelligence and computer modeling to simple word of mouth. Investors “don’t believe the stuff they’ve been hearing from the Chinese government,” said Leland Miller, head of China Beige Book International, which regularly surveys thousands of Chinese firms to gauge business conditions in the country.

Chinese officials have defended Beijing’s management of the epidemic and rejected the idea that China was not transparent enough in

its initial handling of the outbreak.

The latest data provided by China indicated a decline in new cases but “every scenario is still on the table” in terms of the epidemic’s evolution, the World Health Organization said Monday.

The economic toll, meanwhile, has started to pile up, with Apple Inc the latest company to warn of the impact. Many of Miller’s clients—which include hedge funds and pension funds with as much as \$100 billion under management—remain uneasy about the potentially disruptive effects of the virus on global growth, even as they continue betting on more upside in an equity rally that’s taken markets to record highs.

“Everyone realizes that they are not pricing in much risk,” he said. His firm’s next survey will contain new questions about the effects of the lockdown, such as whether the respondent has returned to work or working from home. Others are relying on their contacts inside the country. Kevin Smith, founder of Denver-based Crescat Capital and a longtime skeptic on China’s economy, increased his bets against the country’s stocks after receiving an email from one of the firm’s Chinese clients describing “paralyzing and tragic scenes” in Hubei, the outbreak’s epicenter.

“It’s not really possible for us to be any more bearish on China,” said Smith, who has been betting against China’s currency since 2014. “But we are more convinced that this is a catalyst for a downturn.”

Some methods verge on the macabre. John Lekas, CEO and senior portfolio manager at Leader Capital in Portland, Oregon, has been seeking any sort of on-the-ground information, including crematorium activity in hard hit areas, to assess the death toll. So far, any information he’s received on the subject has been unverifiable. Lekas’ more mundane methods include studying data from the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security to determine when the rate of new cases will equal the rate of recoveries, a point he believes would indicate a peak in the outbreak. Using his own calculations based on the daily figures, he predicts such a point will come in early March.

His \$450 million fund has been buying Treasuries, a popular destination for nervous investors. “We are fixed income (investors) and nervous by nature,” Lekas said. “The uncertainty makes us nervous.” — Reuters



LIANYUNGANG: A worker disinfects machines before production resumes at a factory in Lianyungang in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

### EXCHANGE RATES

#### AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

##### ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.787
Indian Rupees	4.286
Pakistani Rupees	1.979
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.680
Nepali Rupees	2.671
Singapore Dollar	220.910
Hongkong Dollar	39.355
Bangladesh Taka	3.559
Philippine Peso	6.058
Thai Bhat	9.823
Malaysian Ringgit	78.171

##### GCC COUNTRIES

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

##### ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	22.000
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.564
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.228
Tunisian Dinar	113.620
Jordanian Dinar	431.500
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.204
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.447

##### EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	305.650
Euro	333.010
Sterling Pound	399.480
Canadian dollar	231.640
Turkish lira	51.070
Swiss Franc	313.650
US Dollar Buying	298.200

#### DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate	
US Dollar	305.300
Canadian Dollar	231.175
Sterling Pound	398.240
Euro	332.255
Swiss Frank	301.945
Bahraini Dinar	811.905
UAE Dirhams	83.525
Qatari Riyals	84.765
Saudi Riyals	82.310
Jordanian Dinar	431.895
Egyptian Pound	19.540
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.679
Indian Rupees	4.273
Pakistani Rupees	1.977
Bangladesh Taka	3.562
Philippines Peso	6.044
Cyprus pound	18.160
Japanese Yen	3.780
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.678
Malaysian Ringgit	74.470
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.060

Thai Bhat	10.770
Turkish Lira	50.815
Singapore dollars	220.942

#### BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.391307	0.405207
Czech Korune	0.005280	0.014580
Danish Krone	0.040242	0.045242
Euro	0.323535	0.337235
Georgian Lari	0.105537	0.105537
Hungarian	0.000896	0.001086
Norwegian Krone	0.029000	0.034200
Romanian Leu	0.052432	0.069282
Russian Ruble	0.004808	0.004808
Slovakia	0.009157	0.019157
Swedish Krona	0.027400	0.032400
Swiss Franc	0.304413	0.315413
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.197262	0.209262
New Zealand Dollar	0.190220	0.199720
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.225394	0.234394
US Dollars	0.301550	0.306100
US Dollars Mint	0.302050	0.306100
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002885	0.003686

Chinese Yuan	0.042315	0.045815
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037263	0.040013
Indian Rupee	0.003631	0.004403
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002797	0.002877
Korean Won	0.000248	0.000263
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069927	0.075927
Nepalese Rupee	0.002606	0.002946
Pakistan Rupee	0.001333	0.002103
Philippine Peso	0.005853	0.006153
Singapore Dollar	0.214444	0.224444
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001321	0.001901
Taiwan	0.010059	0.010239
Thai Bhat	0.009465	0.010015
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.000013

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.804578	0.812664
Egyptian Pound	0.019329	0.022070
Iranian Riyal	0.000085	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000200	0.000260
Jordanian Dinar	0.426199	0.435199
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000102	0.000252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021147	0.045147
Omani Riyal	0.788756	0.796683
Qatar Riyal	0.083068	0.083906
Saudi Riyal	0.080420	0.081720
Syrian Pound	0.001296	0.001516
Tunisian Dinar	0.103330	0.111330
Turkish Lira	0.044080	0.053925
UAE Dirhams	0.082583	0.083413
Yemeni Riyal	0.000994	0.001074



## Business

# National Industries Group Holding's sixth bond issue fully subscribed

## Markaz, Ahli Capital and Gulf Bank successfully manage placement of KD 30 million bonds

KUWAIT: National Industries Group Holding K.P.S.C. "NIGH", as the Issuer, and Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", Ahli Capital Investment Company "Ahli Capital" - a subsidiary of Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), and Gulf Bank, serving as the joint lead managers, announced in a joint statement the success of completing the KD-issuance of the National Industries Group Holding Bonds with a nominal value of KD 30 million for a five-year term, which was fully subscribed.

The issuance reflects the investors' trust in the quality of the issue, the high creditworthiness of the National Industries Group, and the effectiveness of the joint distribution of all of Markaz, Ahli Capital and Gulf Bank - the joint lead managers.

The bonds were issued in two tranches, one with a fixed interest rate of 5.50 percent annually payable on a quarterly basis, and the other with a floating interest rate of 2.75 percent above the discount rate set by the Central Bank of Kuwait, annually and payable on a quarterly basis.

It is worth noting that these bonds, due in 2025, are issued in Kuwaiti dinars and enjoy a credit rating of (BBB-) from Capital Intelligence. Ahmed Hassan, CEO of the National Industries Group Holding, said: "We are pleased to issue the new bonds, which represent the sixth Capital Market Issuance by NIGH throughout its history, reflecting the high trust of the capital markets in the quality of NIGH's bond issuances. The extensive participation of investors in the most recent NIGH bond issue also confirms the attractive structure and pricing."

The National Industries Group Holding is a multi-industry conglomerate that was incorporated in 1960 and has always been a major player in the industrial-

ization and development of modern Kuwait. NIGH was behind a large number of industrial establishments in Kuwait, where it currently holds a notable portfolio of subsidiaries and associates, which include Kuwait Cement Company K.P.S.C., National Industries Company for Building Materials K.P.S.C., Noor Financial Investment Company K.P.S.C and Mabane Company K.P.S.C. NIGH became listed on Boursa Kuwait (formerly Kuwait Stock Exchange) in 1984, and currently is a constituent of the Premier Market on Boursa Kuwait.

NIGH total assets reached KD 1,200 billion as at 30 September 2019 and its paid-up capital was KD 142,784 million, whereas the company achieved net profits attributable to owners of the parent company of KD 35,806 million for the nine months ended 30 September 2019 and KD 32,271 million for the same period in 2018. More so, the Bond rating of NIGH enjoys an investment grade of "BBB-" from Capital Intelligence, which is reflective of the sound quality and diversity of NIGH's portfolio of assets, good level of liquidity, excellent debt servicing record.

Hassan added: "We cherish our strong relationship with the lead managers and subscription agents Markaz, Ahli Capital and Gulf Bank, and we seek to maintain and reinforce this relationship through the continuous cooperation between us. We entrusted the Joint Lead Managers with this role in this issue, in view of their strong market position as well as our confidence in the potentials of their distribution network."

Meanwhile, Manaf A Al-Hajeri, CEO of Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", said: "Our participation in the Bonds transaction has been met with great attention by investors in view of the excellent reputation of NIGH, the distinctive conditions for issuing the bonds,

as well as the outstanding distribution potentials of Markaz and other lead managers. Markaz assisted a number of local companies from various sectors in issuing bonds and sukuk to obtain financing required to support its businesses. Markaz structured the first BOT- Backed bonds in Kuwait, the first sukuk for a Kuwaiti real estate company and the first high-yield bonds. Our team members are qualified professionals that provide clients with innovative customized financial solutions that meet their requirements, in addition to the wide network of Markaz's clients."

Al-Hajeri added: "We have provided the opportunity to our corporate clients and high net worth individuals to subscribe in these bonds. Thus, we believe that we achieved a significant milestone for Markaz by providing an extensive set of diversified investment opportunities to our main clients. We hope in light of these positive signs that corporate efforts in both the public sector and private sector will continue to create a strong and deeply established bonds market."

Fawzy Al-Thunayan, Chairman of Ahli Capital, said: "We are delighted to be a part of this latest NIGH bond issue, and we appreciate the trust NIGH has placed in us. We believe in the development of the KD bond market as a secure method for long-term financing as an alternative to bank loans."

"The successful completion of this fully subscribed bond issuance reflects its appeal to a broad range of investors, and it is a further endorsement of general investor confidence in the high quality of NIGH's diversified portfolio, its business strategy, and its excellent credit record. It also underlines the strength and the continued overall long-term stability of Kuwait's ongoing economic diversification program. It is especially important in helping the development of

the bond market in Kuwait, and provides a long-term funding method for other entities instead of depending on borrowing from banks."

Finally, Ahmad Al-Duwaisan, General Manager of Corporate Banking at Gulf Bank, said: "We are proud to have been among the joint lead managers responsible for spearheading the issuance of the National Industries Group Holding bonds. This corporate bond transaction is an important milestone in the diversification of our product offering and services and is a testament to our excellent access to capital markets."

He added: "At Gulf Bank, we are constantly striving to elevate the banking experience for our corporate clients, who often have unique banking and investment needs that require tailored services and solutions. With our wide network of corporate clients and long experience in providing the best investment opportunities, we are proud of the results we keep achieving in terms of placement capability. The very positive reception given to this bond issue demonstrates our investors' confidence in our joint business model and strategy, and reflects the support and collaboration of our investors and partners."

The international credit rating company "Capital Intelligence" affirms the credit rating of the National Industries Group Bonds at the "BBB-" investment grade with a stable outlook. It stated in its report that NIG's large asset base comprising a significant portfolio of quoted equities, as well as its diversification across multiple sectors coupled with its sound operating performance at most subsidiary and associated companies, are factors for supporting the stabilizing of the rating. Furthermore, the rating reflects the strength of the Issuer, comfortable effective liquidity and good reputation of the company.

## Shareholders blast Nissan bosses

TOKYO: Shareholders livid about the performance of struggling Japanese car giant Nissan yesterday blasted bosses over dividends, executive pay, the stock price, and even the type of vehicle they use.

Shareholders voted to approve new chief executive Makoto Uchida in his post but he received a barrage of furious questions at an extraordinary shareholders' meeting after the most recent results showed a more than 87-percent plunge in net profit for the nine months to December.

"I've been a Nissan shareholder for close to 20 years. You need to review what you're doing. I have 3,000 Nissan shares. Uchida-san, you have 2,000 shares. I have more than you!" shouted one stockholder. "I bought it at 800 yen per share. I never thought it would fall below 700 yen. It's less than 500 yen per share now. What do you think about this? Is it better to sell them on the market? What shall I do with my Nissan shares?"

The firm failed to issue a dividend to shareholders after posting a net loss of 26.1 billion yen for the three months to December, its first third-quarter loss in more than a decade. It is still battling to restore its reputation after the stunning arrest and later escape of former boss Carlos Ghosn on financial misconduct charges that he denies. Uchida sought to placate the shareholders, pointing to a strategic review expected in



YOKOHAMA: People arrive at Nissan Motor's extraordinary shareholders meeting in Yokohama yesterday. — AFP

May that he hopes will turn around the company's fortunes.

"Shareholders, please give us time. I appreciate your patience... I want Nissan to be better. All the top management including myself are taking this situation seriously and working on it," he said. But the audience continued attack after attack, with one upbraiding the chairman of alliance partner Renault, Jean-Dominique Senard, for driving off from one meeting in a competitor's car.

"After the shareholders' meeting, you rode a (Toyota) Alphard to leave Japan or leave Yokohama. Alphard! Nissan executives were enraged. Of course. You were in a competitor's model. Why did you choose to do that, Mr Senard?" "You cannot make the alliance

successful with that kind of mindset," fumed the shareholder. A repentant Senard said there would be no repetition of the faux pas.

"As soon as I had noticed... I said that could never happen again. I apologize for that. I'm awfully sorry," he said. Executive pay was also an issue on shareholders' minds, with one out-of-pocket member making the point: "If you are going to reduce the dividend by that amount, you have to revise executive compensation."

"There are 57 executives in top management. These 57 people in the top management scheme, your compensation should be less than 10 million yen (\$91,000)." "You should immediately take this decision and send a press release immediately!" — AFP



BRUSSELS: French Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire (left) talks with Minister of Finance of Slovenia Andrej Bertoncelj, during a Ecofin Council meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels yesterday. — AFP

tary stimulus is not sufficient. The fiscal stimulus should take over if a slowdown is too pronounced," Le Maire said, summarizing the content of the joint eurozone statement.

### EU rules

The document signals a departure from past recommendations and gives more prominence to growth. EU Commission's vice-president Valdis Dombrovskis said the change of tack was due to last year's slowdown and a weak outlook for 2020 and beyond. But the statement remains very cautious and underlines that only countries with adequate savings should invest more, ruling out more spending in states with unbalanced budgets.

"If downside risks were to materialize, fiscal responses should be differentiated, aiming for a more supportive stance at the aggregate level, while ensuring full respect of the Stability and Growth Pact," the statement said, referring to the compact that underpins EU fiscal rules. Germany's Finance Minister Olaf Scholz agreed to the joint text in a move that could pave the way for Berlin to spend more next year. Scholz has already said in the past that he was ready to spend more public funds to counter downturns. But despite a sharp slowdown in the German economy last year he maintained large, but declining, budget surpluses in the first nine months of the year, Eurostat data released in January show. — Reuters

## Mercedes-Benz Cars ME appoints Krishan Bodhani as Director of Sales and Marketing

KUWAIT: Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East has appointed Krishan Bodhani as Director of Sales and Marketing, effective from January 1st, 2020. Krishan Bodhani has taken over from Andreas Bueckmann, who was responsible for Mercedes-Benz Sales and Marketing operations in the region, developing various strategies to manage the rapidly changing automotive environment within the Middle East.

Bodhani started his career with Audi and Volkswagen and held a number of senior roles across Sales, Marketing, After-Sales and Product Management. He joined Mercedes-Benz UK in 2015 as Head of smart, where he led and developed smart in the UK to achieve record sales growth in 2015 and record ever sales in 2016. Krishan was also responsible for Mercedes-Benz UK's Product Management division, where he played an integral role in the development of the company's simplification strategy.

As the head of Mercedes-Benz UK's Used Car Sales and Remarketing division, he was instrumental in contemporising the business and delivering record sales results. Krishan's appointment in the

Middle East will see him play an integral role for Mercedes-Benz Passenger Cars, where his knowledge of automotive sales and marketing will be pivotal in the expansion of Mercedes-Benz sales and service operations in the region.

On the new appointment, Thomas Klein, President & CEO of Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East said: "Krishan brings with him years of experience and has a proven record of success. We are delighted to welcome him on board. In his new role as the Director of Sales and Marketing of MIBCE he will be instrumental in further strengthening our position as a leading automotive brand in the region."

Krishan Bodhani, Director of Sales and Marketing of Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East added: "The Middle East is a key region for Mercedes-Benz: one that is progressive and steeped with opportunity. In the years ahead not only do we have a wave of new models to look forward to but with digitalization, customer centric mobility and new business models revolutionizing our industry, I'm hugely excited and look forward to the prospect of contributing to the growth of the brand in the region at such a focal time."



Krishan Bodhani

## China races to stop job losses as coronavirus hits economy

BEIJING: When cameraman Mark Xia returned to his job this month after holidays, the Shanghai video production house where he worked told him to take three months of leave with no pay, as a coronavirus epidemic takes a toll of China's businesses.

Now Xia is looking for a part-time job after the company, with a workforce of about 100, rejected his request to pay at least half his monthly salary during the suspension, and left him no choice but to resign. "I understand the company's cash-flow is tight," Xia, 25, told Reuters. "We postponed some shooting due to the coronavirus outbreak, and that's had a huge impact on our revenues, that's the reality."

Xia is one of many losing their jobs in the epidemic, which has killed nearly 1,870 and infected more than 72,000,

sparking strict travel and movement curbs that have kept many businesses shut, disrupting demand and supply for goods and services.

Many small firms like Xia's former employer face cash crunches because of a lack of orders, forcing them to lay off workers or dock salaries to keep afloat. But the outbreak has yet to show signs of peaking. Any rapid rise in unemployment could pose a big challenge to China's stability-obsessed leaders, with growth in the world's second-largest economy already slumping to near three-decade lows.

Just 34 percent of nearly 1,000 small and medium-sized firms said they could survive for a month on current cashflow, a recent survey by Tsinghua University and Peking University showed. A third said they could last for two months, while 18 percent said they could stick it out for three months.

"There could be big layoffs," said Wang Jun, Beijing-based chief economist at Zhongyuan Bank.

"I think it's more appropriate to compare the current impact to the global crisis, instead of that of SARS," he added, referring to the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002 and 2003. — Reuters



## Business

# Boubyan Bank wins two awards from Service Hero, maintains top position

## A decade atop the pyramid of Kuwait's customer service

**KUWAIT:** Boubyan Bank stayed at the top of customer service in Kuwait by winning two awards from Service Hero, the international consumer-driven customer satisfaction index, namely, the first place in customer service across economic sectors in Kuwait for the fifth time and the Best Islamic Bank award in customer service for the tenth year in a row since 2010, in addition to the Decade's Award for the best Islamic bank by Service Hero for a complete decade.

Commenting on the bank's continued excellence and leadership in customer service, Boubyan Bank's Deputy CEO, Abdullah Al-Tuwaijri said: "When we first won the award ten years ago, our main challenge was how to maintain such superiority and keep that level of outstanding services up to our customers' expectations."

"We all know that reaching the top is easy, however, maintaining this position is much harder, or nearly impossible sometimes. However, thanks to Almighty Allah, then to our human resources and our customers' confidence, we succeeded in maintaining our top position", Al-Tuwaijri elaborated. He went on to add: "Despite the huge number of Boubyan Bank's customers and their constant increase, our customer service levels have not gone down or been compromised as a result of this increase, which always poses a new challenge for employees to maintain the same levels of service."

Moreover, Al-Tuwaijri explained: "Customer service is a well-established concept and an integral part of the bank's culture. It is no secret that almost all competitors offer similar products and services, however, the excellence and outperformance come through service and the way of dealing with customers, especially in Kuwait where customers have high expectations."

He elaborated: "Customer service necessitates that the bank staff continue providing the highest levels of service, while enhancing the same constantly in a manner that maintains the confidence of customers and gives them the edge compared with other financial institutions. Customer



The awards

service challenges are increasing day-after-day, and this brings more responsibilities to the doors of various departments of the bank."

### Reasons for selecting Boubyan Bank

Boubyan Bank's choice by Service Hero relied on a group of criteria they followed during a survey, which extended over a period of one year among consumers who evaluated companies on a scale of 10 against their service-level expectations prior to actual experience, and their satisfaction following the customer-service experience.

The evaluation relied on many elements such as staff's attitude, location of the bank, speed of service, confidence in the product, quality of service or product, value for money, the contact center, and the website of the bank. Service Hero's survey implements a strict protocol to confirm the identity of consumers who take part in the survey.

Al-Tuwaijri added: "One of Boubyan Bank's Values which we seek to instill in our staff is (Customer Focus). Also, since 2010, the bank has been focusing on customer



Boubyan Bank officials pose for a group photo

service as the basis of success side by side with excellence of services, products as well as the banking and financing solutions offered by the bank in compliance with the principles of Islamic Sharia."

"Perfection of work and service is the main pillar of customer service, especially when we observe the accomplishments of the bank over the past years which witnessed the increase of its market shares, coupled with the bank's ambitions towards more achievements in the future. We stress that customers are among our priorities, so, we listen to them and conduct surveys to hear their voice; this is the most significant factor for our

assessment since customers' feedback is the main driver of any improvement sought by any organization", Al-Tuwaijri elaborated.

Al-Tuwaijri concluded by adding that one of the remarkable things about Service Hero's awards was that they came from an institution renowned for its competence, expertise, and fairness, especially that the awards were based on studies and consumer surveys that covered a large number of customers representing various segments in Kuwait in addition to the competition with well-established players in the Kuwaiti markets who enjoy vast experience."

## Jazeera Airways launches flights to Sharjah

**KUWAIT:** Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost airline, operating regionally and internationally, yesterday announced that it will launch the airline's first service to Sharjah on April 2, 2020, marking its third destination in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Jazeera Airways CEO, Rohit Ramachandran, said: "We are very pleased to be operating our first direct service to Sharjah and to be launching this new route following our successful service to Al-Ain in December last year. "The flight not only connects our customers to a great tourist destination for families, but also connects Kuwaiti students to an airport closer to where they are studying as well as residents of Sharjah to our growing network of destinations in Europe, the Middle East and Indian Subcontinent."

Sharjah is a leading destination for Kuwaiti students attending universities such as the University of Sharjah and the American University of Sharjah. Sharjah International Airport also connects Kuwaiti

students to universities located in the emirate of Ajman as well as the northern emirates. Moreover, Sharjah is home to distinct archaeological sites, historic museums, galleries and heritage houses that provide a rich experience into the local culture and history.

Rohit added: "We thank Sharjah's Department of Civil Aviation and Sharjah Airport Authority for enabling Jazeera Airways to launch this new service and support the growing demand for flights between both airports."

The airline will operate direct flights to the third largest Emirati city with two convenient weekend return flights every Thursday and Saturday. Flights take off from Kuwait at 13:55 local time and return from Sharjah at 16:30 local time.

Bookings for Kuwait-Sharjah flights are open and available on [jazeeraairways.com](http://jazeeraairways.com). Fares start from KD 31 for a one-way flight from Kuwait and KD 49 for a return flight from Kuwait.

Jazeera Airways offers passengers the choice between three fare categories in Economy Class: Light, Value or Extra, each providing them with a set of services to meet their needs. Passengers of Economy Class Light, the lowest fare category, are allowed a carry-on and a small bag, and can add on the services they require for their travel itinerary. Passengers of economy class value are additionally allowed 20



kilograms in checked-in baggage allowance, while passengers of economy class extra are allowed 30 kilograms in checked-in baggage allowance, priority check-in and the ability to choose from the preferred seats located on rows 4 to 10.

Passengers can add on services as needed such as excess baggage, a meal from the Jazeera Cafe, access to the Jazeera business Lounge, or the new priority service for a faster travel experience that includes access to priority check-in, priority baggage and priority boarding.

The new seat selection allows them to choose between Premium Seats located on rows 1 to 3 which provide generous legroom with a 33-inch seat pitch, or the Preferred Seats located on rows 4 to 10 which provide a 31-inch seat pitch, or the Extra Legroom Seats located on rows 11 and 12 giving passengers the maximum legroom in the 35 to 38-inch seat pitch, or finally the Standard Seats with 28-30-inch seat pitch are located on rows 13 to 28 / 29 and are designed for the best comfort at great value.

## Shades of Detroit? Germany's auto heartlands in peril

**BAMBERG, Germany:** When Kristin and Thomas Schmitt took out a mortgage and bought a house last summer, the German couple's dream looked as if it was coming true. Two months later, they learned that the tire factory where both work would be shut down early next year.

A malaise in Germany's mighty automobile industry, caused by weaker demand from abroad, stricter emission rules and electrification, is starting to leave a wider mark on Europe's largest economy by pushing up unemployment, eroding job security and hitting pay. "It's a nightmare. This is pulling the rug out from under our feet," said Kristin Schmitt, 40, of the plant closure in the Bavarian region of Bamberg, one of Germany's auto supplier hubs.

The couple, who have three children, still hopes managers at their Michelin tire factory change their mind, but the risk of unemployment looms large - and not only for the Schmitts.

The German auto sector is expected to cut nearly a tenth of its 830,000 jobs in the next decade, according to the VDA industry association. Some think-tanks and government officials fear that the toll will be higher as electric cars provide less assembly work than combustion engine vehicles, simple work steps are replaced by automation and companies relocate production.

This is not yet 1970s Detroit, a US car centre that was plagued by urban decay as factory relocations, cheaper imports and higher fuel prices destroyed jobs. But the danger is growing, automotive companies, workers, as well as regional and labour leaders, told Reuters.

Different firms are taking different steps. At the Schmitts' plant in Hallstadt, workers are trying to avoid forced layoffs: at a Bosch factory in nearby Bamberg, pay cuts and reduced hours have been agreed, as has investment in new fuel cell technology.

With pockets of rising joblessness in the affluent, auto-producing heartlands of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg in southern Germany, there are serious implications for a country which relies on the car industry for roughly 5 percent of its economic output and, and an important part of its national identity. "Germany is entering uncharted waters. The transition could well mark the end of the golden age for cars as a mass employer," said Stefan Bratzel, head of the Center of Automotive



BAMBERG: Employees Kristin and Thomas Schmitt walk towards the main gate of the Bamberg branch of French tyre manufacturer Michelin, in Bamberg, Germany. — Reuters

Management, a German research institute. "For politics, it's a ticking time bomb." The outbreak of the coronavirus is adding to the crisis by disrupting global supply chains and dampening passenger car sales in China, an important market for German manufacturers. Threats of mass layoffs will be a defining feature of upcoming wage negotiations in the metalworking industry where unions are focusing more on job security than pay hikes.

"It could well be that we have passed the peak of automotive production," Volkmar Denner, CEO of Germany's largest car supplier Robert Bosch, said in January when he announced massive job cuts and a business review to cope with plunging profits.

### Post-war 'miracle'

The Schmitts live north of the city of Bamberg, whose medieval and baroque architecture has been lovingly restored since the 1950s. It is typical of the well-heeled cities that prospered during the "economic miracle" of Germany's post-war reconstruction. Yet this region, which heavily depends on combustion engine technology, is facing a challenge that will have repercussions for Germany as a whole.

"We're talking here about some 25,000 jobs in the region: that's roughly 15 percent of the overall workforce," Bamberg mayor Andreas Starke told Reuters. "This shows how dependent the region is on combustion engines." For the Schmitts - Thomas works on the assembly line and Kristin in the stockroom - and their more than 850 colleagues at the Michelin tire factory, the chances of keeping their jobs are looking grim. Works council head Josef

Morgenroth is trying to convince the management that the company can't pull out of an earlier agreement which ruled out forced lay-offs until the end of 2022. The local Michelin management declined to comment, saying it was still in talks with the works council.

### 'Automobile crisis'

To help workers affected by the car industry disruption, politicians, companies and labour unions have called on the government to support the shift to alternative technologies such as electric cars or hydrogen-powered fuel cells. In a rare joint statement, automakers and unions said in January that Berlin must expand state-backed employment schemes, known as Kurzarbeit, to cover a longer pay subsidy period of up to 24 months as well as retraining in new skills such as building electric vehicle parts.

The German cabinet is expected to approve the more flexible Kurzarbeit rules next month. Under the scheme, companies can apply for state aid to avoid lay-offs and keep skilled workers for a limited time of currently up to 12 months. Depending on agreements between company and works council, employees work reduced hours or even stay at home, with the government paying two-thirds of the lost net income.

For the economy as a whole, this means consumers have less money to spend, eroding Germany's most important pillar of economic support in recent years as exports falter. That in turn could become an issue for the European Central Bank as it seeks to stimulate the wider euro zone economy with a limited arsenal. Research institute GfK expects German household spending to grow by 1 percent in 2020, down from roughly 1.5 percent last year.

Even without the planned changes, the number of employees already forced to work in Kurzarbeit schemes jumped to 96,000 in November, up from about 20,000 two years before, and surpassing levels last seen during the euro zone debt crisis in 2012/13, according to the Federal Labour Office.

Projections suggest that the number will rise to 117,000 this month, with the increase mainly due to the problems in the car industry, said Detlef Scheele, head of the state agency. Some auto suppliers have cut pay without applying for state aid under the short-time schemes. At the Bosch factory, management and the works council sealed a deal to avoid forced lay-offs until 2026 under the condition that all 7,000 employees reduce working hours and accept a pay cut of nearly 10 percent from April 2020.

"Of course, this is causing mixed feelings," said Sven Bachmann, production manager at the plant, which is 100 percent focused on combustion engine parts. "For me personally, the relief prevails that my job is safe for the next six years." — Reuters

## ABK launches 'Call Me' service

**KUWAIT:** Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently launched its 'Call Me' service, in line with the Bank's commitment to constantly provide experiences that simplify banking for clients. The 'Call Me' service enables ABK customers to request a call back at the click of a button via ABK's app or online banking. Once the customer has logged in and completed the secure authentication process, they can request a call back and will be contacted automatically by ABK.

The system will eliminate the need for a telephone authentication process providing a seamless transition between online applications and live assistance. ABK recognizes that while customers enjoy the convenience of using the ABK app and online banking, many benefit from the interaction with a customer service agent when further assistance is required.

The addition of 'Call Me' to the suite of services available to ABK customers is a testament to ABK's commitment to drive exceptional service underpinned by security and convenience.

## Health Assurance Hospitals company

**KUWAIT:** The ordinary general assembly of the Health Assurance Hospitals company, which was held on 17 Feb 2020 with an attendance rate of 82.283 percent, has agreed to dismiss the representatives of Arabi Holding Group Company from the board and reconfigure a new board. The assembly was held in the presence of:

- Kuwait Investment Authority representing itself and as well as a subscriber on behalf of citizens 69%
- General Organization for Social Insurance 5%
- Arabi Holding Group Company 8.283%

## Syria targets property, cars to curb cash buys

**DAMASCUS:** The government in war-devastated Syria decided Sunday that all property and car sales must be conducted through banks, in an apparent bid to revive the banking sector and fight tax evasion. Under the directive, which came into immediate effect, buyers and sellers must use bank accounts for vehicle and property purchases, in a country largely used to transactions in cash.

"The decision targets the two important sectors in terms of money supply," economic journalist Ali al-Agha said. Notaries and public services can no longer register property and vehicle sale contracts unless documents show "that the sum or a part of the sum has been settled" through banks, under the regulation.

The move aims to encourage electronic transactions and limit the use of banknotes, Agha said, adding it was also a way to curb tax evasion. Syria's almost nine-year-old war has killed more than 380,000 people and ravaged its cities and infrastructure. The United Nations estimated in 2018 that the conflict had caused nearly \$400 billion in war-related destruction. In other moves, the central bank last week tripled the upper limit on mortgages to 15 million Syrian pounds (\$12,500 at the black market rate) as well as the ceiling for renovation loans. — AFP



What's On

Higher Institute of Communications and Navigation honours graduates



Under the auspices and with the presence of PAAET Deputy Director for Training Affairs, Tareq Al-Omairi, the Higher Institute of Communications and Navigation recently held a special ceremony to honor its outstanding graduates. The ceremony was also attended by the institute manager, Captain Monther Al-Kandary, heads of departments and graduates' parents.

LAPA organizes concert for ABBA tribute band

On concluding its third Arab Youth Festival activities organized with Al-Shaheed Park, LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) recently organized a concert for the ABBA Tribute band which took the audience back in a nostalgic trip to the 1970s top hits enjoying sensation that transported them back to the golden days of ABBA, with stunning harmonies, costumes, choreography and a sprinkling of light-hearted humor.

Singing for the first time in Kuwait, ABBA Tribute band performed ABBA's best songs including Mamma Mia, Dancing Queen, Chiquitita, Fernanndo, I Do I Do, Waterloo, Money... Money, Take A Chance on Me, Gimmie...gimmie and many others.

Speaking on the occasion, Al-Shaheed Park manager, Salman Al-Roshoud stressed the importance of building cultural bridges through such cultural and artistic activities, as music is a universal language shared by all peoples.



DWC holds open recreation day for diplomats



Within the programs it specifically designs for employees' families, the Defence Ministry recently organized an open recreational day activity for members of the Diplomatic Women Committee and their families at the ministry's annual camp. Besides DWC members, ambassadors of Venezuela, Austria, Tanzania, Kenya and a number of ambassadors' spouses, consuls, diplomats and their spouses also attended.

TIES Center

The TIES Center cordially invites you to another session on the Stories of Prophets this Thursday, February 20th, at 7 pm. This will be the second session on the life and times of Jesus (peace be upon him) based primarily on verses from the Noble Quran and Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) narrations. We will answer the following questions and deduce a lot of great lessons:

1. What happens when Allah (SWT) loves you, and why should He be at the center of our priorities in life?
2. What is our purpose in life, and what happens when we focus on the bounty and forget the giver?
3. What were the special favors given to Mary, Jesus' Mother, what challenges did she face, and how did she react?
4. Why is Mary the best woman ever created, and how did she live her life?
5. How did Mary react to the news that she would conceive a baby without a husband, how did she conceive, and what is the Islamic ruling regarding desiring death?

Come and learn more about the life and times of Prophet Jesus (PBUH) in a serene and relaxed environment at the TIES Center.



## Health &amp; Science

# Bezos launches \$10bn fund to combat climate change

WASHINGTON: Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos has pledged \$10 billion to a new fund to tackle climate change but activists have urged the world's richest man to first clean up the e-commerce giant's own lacklustre environmental record. The e-commerce tycoon said the Bezos Earth Fund would "fund scientists, activists, NGOs - any effort that offers a real possibility to help preserve and protect the natural world". "Climate change is the biggest threat to our planet," Bezos, whose net worth is estimated to be around \$130 billion, said in an Instagram post to his 1.4 million followers on Monday.

However, Greenpeace USA said Amazon still had "massive climate issues," asking: "Why won't Bezos lead by cleaning up his own house?" Hundreds of Amazon employees last month signed a blog criticizing the online retail giant's climate policies and demanding it do more to tackle climate change. Amazon has been accused of creating vast amounts of waste from the packaging it uses for doorstep deliveries, as well as for the greenhouse gas emissions from huge vehicle fleets.

The company, which in December said its workforce had hit 750,000, has also been denounced over its carbon footprint because of the high energy consumption of its server farms for its lucrative cloud com-

puting activities. Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, the group behind last month's criticism, responded to Bezos' pledge by urging the company to stop working with oil and gas companies and swap its diesel trucks for electric vehicles. "We applaud Jeff Bezos' philanthropy, but one hand cannot give what the other is taking away," the group said in a statement.

Bezos, who maintained his status as the world's richest person despite an expensive divorce last year, said his new foundation would begin issuing grants later this year. "I want to work alongside others both to amplify known ways and to explore new ways of fighting the devastating impact of climate change on this planet we all share," Bezos said in his announcement on Monday.

#### Amazon's carbon targets

Last September, he said Amazon would pledge to become carbon neutral by 2040 and vowed that the company would order 100,000 electric delivery trucks. Rather than make investments that the business guru might profit from, the fund would allocate grant money to projects, The New York Times said, quoting unnamed sources familiar with the initiative. Bezos divulged few details on his social media post. Bezos has often clashed with US President Donald Trump, who regularly attacks cli-

mate change activists and recently called them "perennial prophets of doom".

The fund was described as Bezos's biggest philanthropic commitment. However the New York Times said that even if Bezos spent the full \$10 billion - approximately 7.7 percent of his fortune - immediately, he would still be the world's richest person. Last week, he reportedly agreed to buy a Beverly Hills mansion built in the 1930s by Hollywood movie mogul Jack Warner for \$165 million, a record price for a California home.

Global corporations in all sectors have been churning out climate action plans to reduce carbon footprints and adapt to tomorrow's low-carbon economy but experts have cautioned that many of these seemingly ambitious pledges are more greenwashing than green. Microsoft announced a plan earlier this year that would not only allow the software giant to become "carbon neutral" within a decade, but also to erase its entire carbon footprint since its creation in 1975.

But the claim partly depends on technologies that do not yet exist on a meaningful scale, such as machines that suck carbon dioxide directly out of the air. The company also has highly lucrative deals supplying major oil and gas companies with state-of-the-art tools to boost extraction rates and supply forecasts. — AFP



Jeff Bezos

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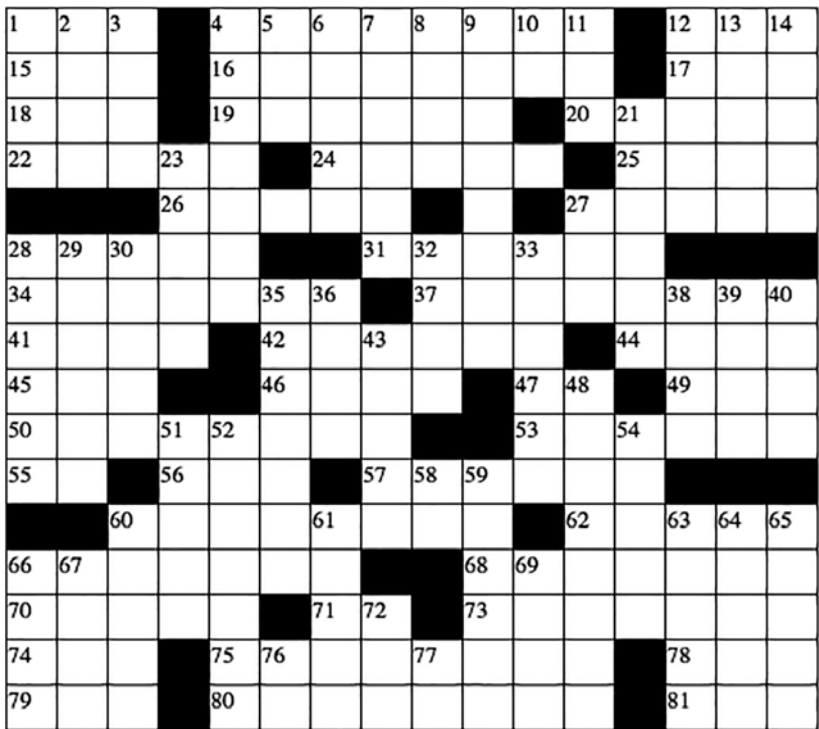
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ACROSS

- 1. An honorary degree in science.
- 4. Part of the province of Newfoundland in the eastern part of the large Labrador-Ungava peninsula in northeastern Canada.
- 12. South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
- 15. An actor's line that immediately precedes and serves as a reminder for some action or speech.
- 16. An organism (especially a bacterium) that does not require air or free oxygen to live.
- 17. Tooth on the rim of gear wheel.
- 18. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- 19. United States writer (born in Lebanon) (1883-1931).
- 20. A British doctorate.
- 22. Make less visible or unclear.
- 24. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- 25. English prelate noted for his pessimistic sermons and articles (1860-1954).
- 26. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
- 28. The second month of the Moslem calendar.
- 31. Radish of Japan with a long hard durable root eaten raw or cooked.
- 34. Occurring every day of the week except Sunday (and sometimes Saturday).
- 37. of or relating to poetry.
- 41. Type genus of the family Arcidae.
- 42. A small tent used as a dressing room beside the sea or a swimming pool.
- 44. A strip of land projecting into a body of water.
- 45. Brief episode in which the brain gets insufficient blood supply.
- 46. (old-fashioned) At or from or to a great distance.
- 47. A metallic element of the rare earth group.
- 49. A fatal disease of cattle that affects the central nervous system.
- 50. Dry apple brandy made in Normandy.
- 53. (Irish) God of love and beauty.
- 55. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 100 liters.
- 56. A religious belief of African origin involving witchcraft and sorcery.
- 57. Port city on Atlantic coast.
- 62. A communist state in Indochina on the South China Sea.
- 66. A movable barrier used in motor racing.
- 68. (zoology) Having a tail or taillike appendage.
- 70. English physician who in retirement compiled a well-known thesaurus (1779-1869).
- 71. An international organization of European countries formed after World War II to reduce trade barriers and increase cooperation among its members.
- 73. Existing as an essential constituent or characteristic.
- 74. Antibacterial drug (trade name Nydradiz) used to treat tuberculosis.
- 75. The flattened end of a motor neuron that transmits neural impulses to a muscle.
- 78. A unit of electrical power in an AC circuit equal to the power dissipated when 1 volt produces a current of 1 ampere.
- 79. The money risked on a gamble.
- 80. Incapacitated by injury or illness.
- 81. The compass point midway between east and southeast.

DOWN

- 1. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- 2. A three-dimensional shape with six square or rectangular sides.
- 3. Lacking or deprive of the sense of hearing wholly or in part.
- 4. Inclined to waste time and lag behind.
- 5. Black tropical American cuckoo.
- 6. A coffee cake flavored with orange rind and raisins and almonds.
- 7. Read anew.
- 8. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
- 9. A voluntary gift (as of money or service or ideas) made to some worthwhile cause.
- 10. A Russian river.
- 11. Having any of numerous bright or strong colors reminiscent of the color of blood or cherries or tomatoes or rubies.
- 12. Type genus of Ochnaceae.
- 13. Expandable metal or wooden wedge used by printers to lock up a form within a chase.
- 14. Metal or plastic sheath over the end of a shoelace or ribbon.
- 21. A day devoted to an outdoor social gathering.
- 23. Port city on southern Honshu on Osaka Bay.
- 27. A chronic drinker.
- 29. In or belonging to the air or operating (for or by means of aircraft or elevated cables) in the air.
- 30. Foul with waste matter.
- 32. South American armadillo with three bands of bony plates.
- 33. United States comedian and actor in silent films noted for his acrobatic skills and deadpan face (1895-1966).
- 35. An early French settler in the Maritimes.
- 36. A port in western Israel on the Mediterranean.
- 38. Open-heart 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.
- 39. (Akkadian) Father of the gods and consort of Tiamat.
- 40. The sediment from fermentation of an alcoholic beverage.
- 43. A city in northwestern Switzerland.
- 48. Ornamented in a vulgar or showy fashion.
- 51. The distinctive quality or pitch or condition of a person's speech.
- 52. Made smaller or less by melting or erosion or vaporization.
- 54. Smaller of two tall fast-running flightless birds similar to ostriches but three-toed.
- 58. 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.
- 59. Of or belonging to an accutem.
- 60. Physical strength.
- 61. In such a manner as could not be otherwise.
- 63. Marked by or showing unaffected simplicity and lack of guile or worldly experience.
- 64. (Greek mythology) A Titan who was forced by Zeus to bear the sky on his shoulders.
- 65. The basic unit of length adopted under the System International d'Unites (approximately 1.094 yards).
- 67. A whetstone made of fine gritstone.
- 69. (prefix) In front of or before in space.
- 72. An accountant certified by the state.
- 76. A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.
- 77. 16 ounces.

Yesterday's Solution

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

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

A friend, perhaps a woman, could well be upset or even angry with you today, Aries. Money might be involved in some way. There may be nothing you can do to reassure her at this time, so it's best to give what reassurances you can and then back off. Whatever has gone wrong, she's probably overreacting, and eventually she'll see that. In the meantime, you do what you can to work off your own anxieties. Hang in there!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Is your boss a woman, Taurus? If so, stay out of her way today. To put it mildly, she isn't in a good mood. Work hard, be very sweet to everyone, and make copious use of your innate diplomacy. You may be on the receiving end of some sharp words, but by remaining focused and continuing your routine in your usual efficient manner, you should avoid any major blowups. Try to stay calm, and hope she goes home early!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Travel may cause more problems than it's worth today, Gemini. You may forget some vital items when packing or there could be too little time to get everything ready. Your plane could be delayed or something valuable lost. Try to short-circuit potential problems. Use a checklist when packing, keep valuables close to you, and take lots of books and CDs in case you have to wait out a delay. In spite of it all, have fun!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Finances may cause an upset between you and a friend today, Cancer. Perhaps this person owes you money and can't pay it back, or vice versa. If this is the case, try to work out some kind of arrangement that suits you both. There's always a way to create a win-win situation if you don't both get so angry that your objectivity is totally wiped out. Stay calm and focused and all should be well. Hang in there.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

A social event could put you in touch with someone who's carrying around a lot of bitterness and anger, Leo. This probably won't be very pleasant for you, as this person could well see you as the perfect listening post for all their problems. Don't feel trapped! Be polite but make your excuses as soon as you can. There are other friends present whose company you'll enjoy a lot more!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

The workplace could be very hectic today as a colleague prepares to leave on an important business trip, Virgo. Nerves could be strained and tempers short. Try to stay focused and get everything necessary done without making yourself crazy. You may be the one who keeps everyone else from going crazy, although you might consider hiding in the closet yourself. Say a prayer of thanks when your colleague finally rides off in the taxi.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Musical Instruments 1

Find and circle all of the musical instruments that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message.

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

ACCORDION	CONGA	HURDY-GURDY	SAZ
BAGPIPE	CORNET	LAUTA	SITAR
BALALAICA	COW BELL	MANDOLA	TARKA
BANJO	DIDGERIDOO	MARACAS	TRIANGLE
BASS	DRUM	MELODICA	TROMBONE
BODHRAN	EUPHONIUM	MIZMAR	UKULELE
CABASAS	FLUTE	OBOE	VEENA
CELLO	FRENCH HORN	ODU	VIBRAPHONE
CHIMES	GUITAR	PENNYWHISTLE	VIOLIN
CITTERN	HARP	PICCOLO	XUN
CLARINET			



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You may have a wonderful day today, Libra. Your imagination, intuition, and creativity are all high, and inspiration for new artistic works could be filling your heart and brain. You'll be all too happy to discuss your ideas with anyone who shows an interest. The one dark spot in the day might be that a child, close friend, or lover goes into a snit because he or she feels ignored. Don't worry. They'll come out of it.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your home could be a very busy place today, Scorpio. Visitors could come and go throughout the day, probably annoying you at times. You might also find yourself having to soothe angry outbursts on the part of a member of your household. Take care, however, that this person's problem doesn't get you so inflamed that you go into a fit of anger, too. Try to stay calm and focused and you'll get through the day.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Someone you work with might need a sympathetic shoulder to cry on today, Sagittarius. Stresses on the job extend beyond everyone's capacity to endure, so don't be surprised if at some point a colleague sheds a few tears. You might find your patience pushed beyond its normal limits. On days like this it's best to work as quickly as you can, stay focused, and go for a drink after you leave work. Then have a nice walk home!



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Children or possibly some close friends or a love interest could be upset today, Capricorn. The financial coffers aren't full enough to afford something they think they absolutely have to have right now. You might find yourself having to soothe their feelings, reassuring them that "not now" doesn't necessarily mean "never." If they don't respond, don't keep pushing. They'll have to come to terms with the situation in their own way.



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.

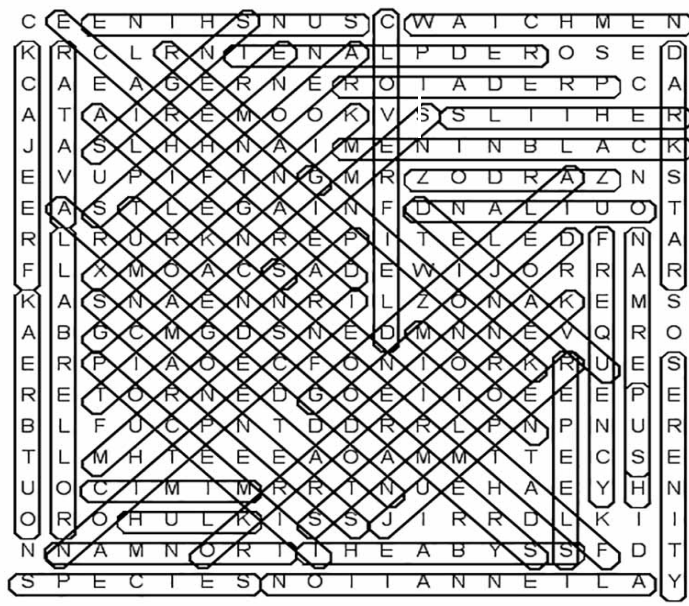


Pisces (February 19-March 20)

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!

Yesterday's Solution

Movies: Science Fiction 2



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

Hidden movie: CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND

Daily Sudoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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



# Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2020



This picture shows a poster by Italian urban artist Salvatore Benintende aka 'TVBOY' depicting Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa wearing a protective facemask and holding a mobile phone reading 'Mobile World Virus' in a street of Barcelona yesterday, a week after the World Mobile Congress was cancelled due to fears stemming from the coronavirus that sparked an exodus of industry heavyweights. — AFP

## ‘JETMAN’ STUNS WITH IRON MAN-STYLE FLIGHT OVER DUBAI

Daredevil Vince Reffet has soared into the skies above Dubai in the latest “Jetman” stunt, taking off from the ground and climbing to 1,800m (nearly 6,000 feet) in a feat reminiscent of Marvel’s “Iron Man” and hailed as a world first. Reffet and his collaborators, known as “Jetmen”, have literally scaled new heights with the help of jetpacks and carbon-fibre wings, staging a series of aerial displays that send them tearing through the skies at breakneck speed.



Vince Reffet, known as Jetman, taking part in a flight in the Emirati city of Dubai.

In an awe-inspiring flight captured on viral video, the Frenchman on Friday hovered five meters above the crystal waters of Dubai’s coast before shooting off into the air and skimming the city’s skyline. “We accomplished another world first in 100 percent autonomous human flight with @jetmandubai, who took off from the



A handout picture released by the Expo 2020 on Monday shows Vince Reffet, known as Jetman, taking part in a flight in the Emirati city of Dubai. — AFP photos

ground before soaring to a high-altitude flight of up to 1,800m!” tweeted Expo 2020 Dubai, the mammoth trade fair that will open in October. The Jetmen had previously launched themselves into the air by jumping down from high platforms. “It’s the result of extremely thorough team-work, where each small step generated huge results. Everything was planned to the split second, and I was overjoyed by the progress that was achieved,” Reffet said in a statement. “One of the next objectives is to land back on the ground after a flight at altitude, without needing to open a parachute. It’s being worked on.” Reffet’s carbon fibre wings are powered by four mini jet engines. The equipment, which is controlled by the pilot’s movements, is capable of reaching

speeds of 400 kilometers (250 miles) per hour. On Friday, Reffet hovered five meters above the crystal waters of Dubai’s coast before shooting off into the air and skimming the city’s skyline. The Jetmen have pulled off a series of eye-popping flights in Dubai, soaring in tandem above the world’s tallest building Burj Khalifa, and alongside an Emirates Airbus A380, the world’s largest commercial airplane. Last year, Reffet and fellow Frenchman Fred Fugen also flew through the famed “Heaven’s Gate” archway in the mountains of China’s Hunan province. — AFP



Vince Reffet, known as Jetman, taking part in a flight in the Emirati city of Dubai.



## Britain’s Kate talks of ‘mummy guilt’ in podcast

Prince William’s wife Kate laid bare her “mummy guilt” during a landmark podcast on Saturday, recorded as part of her efforts to bring about a “generational change” in early-years childcare. The duchess told the “Happy Mum, Happy Baby” podcast that she suffered anxiety about her performance as a mother “all the time”, adding that “anyone who doesn’t as a mother is actually lying”. “Questioning your own decisions, and your own judgments, and things like that... I think that starts from the moment you have a baby,” said the mother-of-three. “I totally underestimated the impact and the change it had on our lives. Asked if she felt “mummy guilt”, the duchess-mother to George, aged six, Charlotte, four and Louis, 20 months, responded: “yes, absolutely”. She said she “definitely would have done things different... knowing what I know now” referring to her first pregnancy with Prince George. The morning sickness that she suffered with all three of her children had strained the family, she said.



The Duchess of Cambridge with Prince George at a children's party for Military families during the Royal Tour of Canada. — WireImage.

“William didn’t feel he could do much to help and it’s hard for everyone to see you suffering without actually being able to do anything about it,” she explained. Despite the challenges, she said that since having children she had “found a new enjoyment out of life”. Her experience of bringing up three children have led her to launch an early years survey to help find answers about raising a “happy, healthy” generation. “I think there’s a few things that really stand out for me,” she said. “One is quality of relationships—so those moments that you spend with people that are around you. I remember that from my own childhood. “I had an amazing granny who devoted a lot of time to us, playing with us, doing arts and crafts and going to the greenhouse to do gardening, cooking with us, and I try and incorporate a lot of the experiences that she gave us at the time into the experiences I give my children now,” she added. When asked what she hopes her children will remember from childhood, Kate replied: “Going to the beach getting soaking wet, filling our boots full of water.” Kate has previously spoken of worrying about how well she was adapting to motherhood, saying “it is lonely at times and you do feel quite isolated”. — AFP



# Coronavirus casts shadow on China’s big screen ambitions

On a Friday night in one of Beijing’s central shopping districts, the popular Megabox cinema is shuttered and empty. Like entertainment venues across the capital, the eight-screen movie theatre has been closed for nearly a month in response to the coronavirus outbreak which has swept China, infecting more than 70,000 people. Glossy posters for this year’s blockbusters hang inside the closed entrance, while a sign outside says it was closed to “avoid spreading infections”. No reopening date was given.

The government told hundreds of millions of people to stay home through the Lunar New Year holiday—a crucial period in China’s movie industry. Normally, blockbuster films are released and consumers pack cinemas—but this year, all was quiet. The closures could have a devastating impact on China’s film industry—and its target to overtake the US this year as the biggest box office in the world. With sales decimated in the first two months of the year, this now looks unlikely. “Based on 2019, the contribution from Chinese New Year was about 20 to 30 percent of the total box office,” said

Wilson Chow, head of PwC’s global technology, media and entertainment and telecommunications practice. “It is really a big portion.”

### ‘Not optimistic’

The takings at the box office on the first day of the new year in 2019 was \$240 million, according to Chow. This year, the same day managed just \$300,000. “I’m not very optimistic (of overtaking US sales this year),” he said, describing the virus as “a big blow to the industry”. Film groups in China are only beginning to count the cost. State-owned China Film Co. said during the New Year holiday last year it earned 144.03 million yuan (\$20 million) at the box office—nearly 8 percent of annual earnings. This year, cinemas have closed and films the group has produced are postponed.

“The coronavirus outbreak has ground China’s film industry to a halt,” said Deloitte China’s Polly Lee. She says only 117,000 people went to the cinema during the first few days of the holiday—compared with 130 million last year. Shares in Shenzhen-listed Wanda Film have tumbled by more 25 percent since mid-January, with Hong Kong-listed

iMax China down over 16 percent. Chow warned older or less successful cinemas might be forced to close permanently.

### ‘Destroying the industry’

The outbreak could also hit the pipeline. Hengdian Studios—China’s largest film and TV production site—said some production work began again last week, but only with crew members who have undergone a 14-day quarantine. Beijing’s Film Bureau promised to give financial support to production companies hit by the outbreak. The loss of lucrative Chinese audiences will have a global impact. According to state agency Xinhua, more than 40 non-domestic made films last year had box office sales over 100 million yuan (\$14 million).

The virus has also caused waves in China’s film circles. One anticipated blockbuster, “Lost In Russia”, was set to be released during the new year holiday—but the film studio, Huanxi Media, decided to release the film online instead of waiting for cinemas to reopen. The studio signed a partnership to screen it for free with internet firm Bytedance, which paid Huanxi a

one-time fee of \$90 million to release it on its Douyin and Toutiao platforms. The move was popular with those trapped at home, but prompted a huge backlash from cinemas. A joint letter signed by the country’s biggest theatre chains threatened to boycott future releases from Huanxi. It claimed the agreement was “intentionally destroying the movie industry”.

### Global impact

The streaming giants have had an unexpected hit from the locked-down holiday, with shares surging for the likes of Baidu’s Nasdaq-listed iQiyi and Bilibili. iQiyi said it has brought forward the release of new programs and released VIP films for free viewing during the holiday. Meanwhile others remain in limbo. Disney was hoping its new film *Mulan*—based on the tale of a legendary Chinese warrior—would be a huge hit with Chinese audiences.

Now the US entertainment giant, which will also face losses from closing its Disneyland parks in China and Hong Kong, can’t even be sure when the film will open. Even the Oscar awards felt the coronavirus impact. The first film from Barack and



Michelle Obama’s production house, “American Factory”, won best documentary, about a Rust Belt factory reopened by a Chinese billionaire. But the film’s co-producer and the factory’s chairman were unable to leave China for the ceremony—due to US travel restrictions over the coronavirus.—AFP

This photo shows two workers wearing face masks manning a promotional stand for the Disney movie “Mulan” in an almost empty shopping mall in Beijing. — AFP



## UK music producer Andy Weatherall dead at 56

Andy Weatherall, the DJ who produced Primal Scream’s “Screamadelica” and a pioneer of the acid house movement, died Monday at age 56 after suffering a pulmonary embolism, his representatives said. “He was being treated in hospital but unfortunately the blood clot reached his heart. His death was swift and peaceful,” a statement from his PR agency said. “His family and friends are profoundly saddened by his death and are taking time to gather their thoughts.” Weatherall was acclaimed for his remixes of Primal Scream’s 1990 hit “Loaded”, Happy Mondays’ “Hallelujah” and New Order’s “World In Motion”, produced for England’s 1990 football World Cup campaign.

New Order said it was “very saddened” to hear the news, while bassist Peter Hook added: “He was a truly nice, kind man who shared many, many words of wisdom.” Ministry of Sound, the super-club dance venue that opened in 1991, called Weatherall “a master of his craft”. Weatherall helped to document rave culture with the Boys Own fanzine but shunned the path towards becoming a celebrity DJ, preferring to concentrate on creating music instead.

“I don’t start a project as such, I just make music every day and see what happens,” he told The Independent newspaper in a 2016 interview. “I’m usually three-quarters of the way through an album when I officially start making it. This is like a hobby, but also a job. I’ve found a job I like and I’ve found a level that I like.” On working with Primal Scream frontman Bobby Gillespie for “Screamadelica”, he told the BBC: “I was very nervous. I didn’t know what you could do and couldn’t do.” But I was full of what Orson Welles called ‘the confidence of ignorance.’ The details surrounding his funeral “will be made in due course”, his agency said. — AFP



In this file photo British director Steve McQueen poses with the award for best film for “12 Years A Slave” at the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards. — AFP

## Carrey believes the redesign to ‘Sonic the Hedgehog’ has made the film ‘much better’

The release date of the adventure comedy movie was pushed back after a fan backlash to the initial design of the hedgehog, but the ‘Dumb and Dumber’ star, who plays villain Dr. Robotnik, now feels the delay has actually “turned out to be a great thing”. In an interview with Fox News, Jim said: “It turned out to be a co-op where everybody was in on the creation. I think everybody felt good about it because ultimately (director) Jeff Fowler (had) no ego involved at all. “He just went, ‘These people grew up with it, and it’s important to them that we get it right.’ And I think it was just a much better movie because of it.”

The 58-year-old actor previously expressed concern about audiences getting involved in the design of characters. Jim said: “I don’t know quite how I feel about the audience being in on the creation of it, while it’s happening. Sometimes you find that the collective consciousness decides it wants something and then when it gets it, it goes, ‘OK, I don’t want it... You become a Frankenstein’s monster at some point, right?’” Meanwhile, Ben Schwarz, who voices the titular character, felt that the initial backlash demonstrated the passion that fans have for Sonic. Ben said: “We had no idea if anybody even cared about the property. When that trailer came out, the idea that all of these people were so passionate and cared so much and had ideas was this huge rush to us because like, ‘Oh, we have something special here. — Bang Showbiz

# Weinstein jury to begin deliberations

Jurors began deliberating the fate of ex-Hollywood titan Harvey Weinstein yesterday in his high-profile sex crimes trial that marked a watershed moment in the #MeToo movement. The disgraced movie mogul, 67, faces life in prison if the jury of seven men and five women convict him of predatory sexual assault charges in New York. More than 80 women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct since allegations against him ignited the #MeToo global reckoning against men abusing positions of power in October 2017.

But the jury is considering charges related to just two: ex-actress Jessica Mann and former production assistant Mimi Haley, with many claims too old to prosecute. Mann, 34, says Weinstein raped her in March 2013, while Haley alleges he forcibly performed oral sex on her in July 2006. The proceedings, which began hearing testimony on January 22, threw up complicated issues surrounding consent and abuse of power for the jury. Under cross-examination, both Mann and Haley acknowledged at least one consensual sexual encounter with Weinstein after the alleged assaults.

Defense lawyers presented dozens of emails and text messages in court that appeared to show both Mann and Haley on friendly terms with Weinstein years

after the alleged attacks. His team said the relationships were consensual and transactional, arguing that the accusers used sex with the defendant to advance their own careers. Prosecutors said he was a career sexual predator who took advantage of his powerful position in the American film industry to prey on aspiring young actresses.

Weinstein, the producer of “Pulp Fiction” and “Sin City,” is the first man accused of abuse in the #MeToo movement to face a criminal trial. In closing arguments Thursday, lead attorney Donna Rotunno urged the 12 jurors to make themselves “unpopular” by acquitting Weinstein, insisting he had been innocent from the start. She stressed that prosecutors had failed to present any forensic evidence or eyewitness accounts. The prosecution’s case rests on whether the jury believes the six women, including actress Annabella Sciorra of “The Sopranos,” who testified that Weinstein had sexually assaulted them.

### Los Angeles case

Judge James Burke will begin instructing jurors at 9:30 am (1430 GMT), before they retire to consider their verdict. He will remind them that to convict, they must be sure of the defendant’s guilt beyond all reasonable doubt. Weinstein faces five

## Oscar-winning director McQueen returns to art with Tate show

Oscar-winning British director Steve McQueen is returning to his art roots with a series of short films at London’s Tate Modern art gallery, offering a sensory exploration of black identity. McQueen, who became the first black director to win the best picture Academy Award in 2014 for “12 Years a Slave”, is now based between London and Amsterdam and is focused on championing diversity in the film industry.

Visitors to his new exhibition will be greeted by “Static”, a film of New York’s Statue of Liberty, scrutinising the iconic symbol from every possible angle at very close range against a deafening backdrop of the helicopter from where the footage was filmed. “What interests Steve is our view of the world, how humans are trying to represent Liberty,” said Fiontan Moran, assistant curator of the exhibition. “7th Nov, 2001” features a still shot of a body while McQueen’s cousin Marcus tells of how he accidentally killed his brother, a particularly traumatic experience for the artist.



In this file photo British director Steve McQueen poses with the award for best film for “12 Years A Slave” at the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards. — AFP

“Western Deep” is another visceral work, giving a sense through sights and sounds in an interactive installation of the experiences of miners in South Africa, following them to the bottom of the mine. “Ashes”, meanwhile, is a tribute to a young

fisherman from Grenada, the island where McQueen’s family originated. The images of beauty and sweetness filmed from his boat are tragically reversed on the other side of the projection screen, which shows a grave commissioned by McQueen for the eponymous young fisherman, who was killed by drug traffickers.

### Poetry

African-American singer, actor and civil rights activist Paul Robeson (1898-1976) is honored in “End Credits”. The film shows censored FBI documents detailing the agency’s surveillance of Robeson, read by a voice-over artist, for five hours. “He is... testing the limits of how people can be documented in an era of mass surveillance,” said Moran. In a similarly militant vein, the exhibition features the sculpture “Weight”, which was first shown in the prison cell where the writer and playwright Oscar Wilde was imprisoned.

It depicts a golden mosquito net draped over a metal prison bed frame, addressing the theme of confinement and the power of the imagination to break free. The show runs alongside an exhibition of McQueen’s giant portraits of London school classes, many of which appeared on the streets of London last year. “I remember my first school trip to Tate when I was an impressionable eight-year-old, which was really the moment I gained an understanding that anything is possible,” said McQueen, adding it was “where in some ways my journey as an artist first began”.

He recently told the Financial Times newspaper the difference between his art films and his feature films was that the former were poetry, the latter like a novel. “Poetry is condensed, precise, fragmented,” he said. “The novel is the yarn”. The exhibition opens on February 13 and runs until May 11. — AFP



File photo shows Harvey Weinstein arrives for his sexual assault trial at New York Criminal Court in New York City. — AFP

counts including predatory sexual assault, rape and a criminal sexual act. The jury must reach unanimous verdicts on each count. If they cannot, the judge may be forced to declare a mistrial.

A split verdict is possible where Weinstein is convicted of some charges and cleared of others. Weinstein is facing a

## Willis to star alongside Fox in Midnight in The Switchgrass

Bruce Willis has been cast in Randall Emmett’s directorial debut, ‘Midnight In The Switchgrass’. The 64-year-old actor will star in the movie alongside Megan Fox and Emile Hirsch, according to Deadline, which reports that the Highland Film Group will be selling the project at the upcoming European Film Market. The movie - which is set in 2004 - will tell the story of an FBI Agent (Megan) and a Florida State officer (Emile) who team up to investigate a string of unsolved murder cases, with Bruce playing the part of Megan’s FBI Agent partner.

Randall has produced more than 100 movies with partner George Furla under their Emmett/Furla banner, including ‘The Irishman’ and ‘2 Guns’ - but will make his bow behind the camera on this project, which is set to begin shooting in Puerto



Bruce Willis

Rico on March 9. George will serve as a producer on the movie, alongside Tim Sullivan, Alex Eckert and Luillo Ruiz. Randall expressed his delight at Bruce and Megan joining the project, posting a picture of the story on his Instagram account. He captioned it: “It’s happening, so grateful!” Megan, 33, recently appeared alongside James Franco in ‘Zeroville’ as well as the South Korean war film ‘The Battle of Jangsari’, both of which were released in September last year. — Bang Showbiz

## Sam Smith says new single reaction made them ‘sob’

Sam Smith cried over the positive response to their new single. The ‘To Die For’ hitmaker - who unveiled their latest track on Valentine’s Day - has been left overwhelmed by the reaction from fans after releasing the title track from their upcoming third studio album. Taking to social media, Sam tweeted: “Reading all your responses to my new song is making me sob. Love you all.” The 27-year-old singer recently revealed the track came from a place of “self-discovery and heartbreak”, and they dedicated it to the “lonely hearts” on what is largely seen as the most romantic day of the year. In a statement, they said: “I wrote the song with Jimmy Napes and Stargate in L.A. during a time of self-discovery and heartbreak. This is for all the lonely hearts out there on another Valentine’s Day xx.”

“And after revealing the new single and video, the ‘Writing On The Wall’ star also confirmed their upcoming third album - also called ‘To Die For’ - is set to drop on May 1 with fans already able to pre-order

the collection. On Instagram, Sam wrote: “Gorgeous people, I’m so happy to see you all so excited about my new song, so I wanted to share another surprise... My THIRD album TO DIE FOR will be yours on May 1st!!!! You’ll be able to preorder tomorrow. “I am more proud of this album than anything I’ve ever done. I’ve really set myself free the last two years whilst writing this and I hope you can dance and relate to these stories. It’s all for you, always xx (sic)”. — Bang Showbiz



Sam Smith



# Sinead Burke: Thinking big in changing fashion industry

Despite her tiny stature, Sinead Burke has become a force to be reckoned with in the world of fashion, pushing for designs to become accessible for all. The 29-year-old Irishwoman, just 1.05 meters (three feet and five inches) tall, has not gone unnoticed at London Fashion Week. Burke was in the front row at the Victoria Beckham and Roksanda catwalk shows, sitting just a few places away from Anna Wintour, the high priestess of fashion. She cuts a surprising figure amidst the models, movie actors and pop stars-yet she too sports luxurious outfits.

Before the Beckham show, Burke was wearing some of the former Spice Girls singer's creations, donning a canary yellow blouse decorated with a black flower, and a straight brown skirt. But there is plenty more in her wardrobe that she could have chosen from. "There is some Gucci, some Prada, some Dior, some Balenciaga, some Victoria Beckham, some Christopher Kane, some Burberry," she told AFP. How did the school teacher from Dublin end up on the cover of Britain's Vogue magazine?

The journey started in March 2017 with a TED Talk-the online ideas conferences-and a speech entitled "Why design should include everyone". Her talk went over the obstacles she faced in daily life in the designed world, from the height of locks on toilet doors to the available range of shoe sizes. The video, which has been viewed 1.4 million times, seems to have triggered some changes. "That seemed to be a moment when people were listening to design and accessibility and thinking about this industry in a different way for the first time, so there has been progress," said Burke.



Sinead O'Burke poses for a photograph during London Fashion Week. — AFP photos

### Vogue cover star

Burke did not leave it at that. At London Fashion Week in February 2018, she introduced herself to British Vogue editor-in-chief Edward Enniful, tugging on his sleeve at a Burberry show. Then she ended up on the cover of the magazine's September 2019 issue, chosen by guest editor Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex as one of 15 female



Sinead O'Burke (right) poses for a photograph with British model Karen Elson during London Fashion Week.

"forces for change". Top designers have created custom-made outfits for her-something she considers a "huge privilege and an honor"-but that was never her goal. "What I want is just that people understand disability as customisation, which the fashion industry already is familiar with, and make that a tool that is available for everybody," she said.

More than just the symbolism of disabled

people on catwalks, she wants long-term systemic change so that "an 18-year-old who is at university, who studies marketing, who is a little person like me, can understand that he can work for Victoria Beckham or for Gucci". Burke hosts a podcast where she conducts interviews on the theme of identity and difference.

She has also collaborated with the Open Style Lab, an organization which works on creating wearable clothes for people with disabilities without compromising on style or comfort. "The idea of this is not necessarily that that collection would be marketable and commercial," she said.

More so that the young designers would learn from working with "different types of bodies" and take that forward into the companies they go on to work for. "Change has to happen at the most senior level with the chief executive and creative directors but also with the new generation" of designers, said Burke. Little by little, representation and visibility of people with disabilities was improving, she said, citing the example of 18-year-old Aaron Philip-the first transsexual, black, disabled model to have joined the books of a large modeling agency, Elite. There is still a long way to go to transform "the most exclusive industry in the world", she said, though she remains optimistic. "I thought I would be a teacher forever and here we are, in London Fashion Week!" — AFP



Giant figures depicting German fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld and French fashion designer Coco Chanel are seen during the 136th Nice Carnival parade in Nice, southeastern France. — AFP

## Chanel halts Beijing fashion show over virus fears

French fashion house Chanel said Monday it was postponing a show set for May in Beijing following an outbreak of a new coronavirus that has infected some 70,000 people across China. "Considering the current situation and following the guidance of Chinese authorities, Chanel has decided to postpone its project of a replica of the Paris - 31 rue Cambon 2019/20 M&T collection in May in Beijing to a later and more appropriate moment," a statement said, without giving a new date.

"Chanel is monitoring the situation closely. At the foremost are the health and well-being of its teams and clients," it said. The "31 Rue Cambon" show was first held in Paris in December, inspired by the studio and workshop of founder Coco Chanel. The decor was created by the film director Sofia Coppola. Hundreds of trade shows and other major events in China have been cancelled in recent weeks over fears of the virus, which has killed nearly 1,800 people in mainland China since it was first reported in December. Last week, the Chinese designer Jarel Zhang cancelled the showing of his new collection during Paris Fashion Week in March "in order to ensure the health and safety of both countries and reduce the number of contacts" that could spread the flu-like disease. — AFP







A view of the Kasbah (ancient fortress) of Ait-Ben-Haddou. — AFP photos



A tourist walks near the Kasbah (ancient fortress) of Ait-Ben-Haddou (background).



A man stands atop the Kasbah (ancient fortress) of Ait-Ben-Haddou.



Tourists walk past the Kasbah (ancient fortress) of Ait-Ben-Haddou.

## MOROCCO FORTRESS VILLAGE HOPES TO DRAW ‘GAME OF THRONES’ FANS

Millions worldwide may have seen the desert fortress in the hit fantasy series “Game of Thrones”, but fewer know they can visit the Moroccan village of Ait-Ben-Haddou. The fortified old settlement at the foot of the majestic Atlas mountains enchanted audiences in the HBO series and also served as a dusty backdrop in Ridley Scott’s epic swords-and-sandals film “Gladiator”. But unlike other famous locations from movie and television history, this UNESCO World Heritage Site has so far missed out on a mass influx of tourism—something some of its inhabitants are eager to change.

“Several people have told me that they came here to see the filming location of ‘Game of Thrones,’” said Ahmed Baabouz, a local tour guide. “There is tourism linked to cinema here but frankly we have not developed it to the extent it could be.” Ait-Ben-Haddou is southern Morocco’s most famous fortress. Time seems to have stopped at the site overlooking a valley some 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) from the town of Ouarzazate. After passing through the imposing entrance way, visitors navigate a labyrinth of winding alleys that eventually lead onto a public square where the settlement’s inhabitants once gathered.

There is a mosque and two cemeteries—one for Muslims and one for Jews. Most inhabitants have long since departed though, with a few homes converted into stalls selling handicrafts. The fortress is an ideal film setting, located a short distance from the studios of Ouarzazate, the “Mecca” of Moroccan

cinema. Productions ranging from “Lawrence of Arabia” to “The Mummy” have been filmed here. More recently, scenes from the cult series “Game of Thrones” were shot at Ait-Ben-Haddou, with the site standing in for the fictional Yellow City of Yunkai which is conquered by Daenerys Targaryen, a key character in the “GOT” universe.

Hammadi, 61, is a privileged witness to the location’s cinematic history. “All of these productions have contributed to the reputation of the region,” he said, grinning widely. Hammadi himself has appeared as an extra in a number of films. And while like most people he lives in a more modern home in a village on the other side of the valley, he continues to return to Ait-Ben-Haddou to welcome tourists.



**‘House of the Dragon’**  
On a wall at the entrance to Hammadi’s former home, photos bear witness to the projects he has worked on. One shows him dressed as an ancient Roman with director Ridley Scott on the set of “Gladiator”. “We have a very rich cinematic heritage that we hope to use to attract tourists,” said tour guide Baabouz, who is 29. But “nothing indicates that ‘Game of Thrones’ was shot here,” he added.  
On Morocco’s Atlantic coast, the city of Essaouira also formed the backdrop to scenes from the series. But there too, Moroccan tourism promoters are yet to capitalize on the connection. In comparison, Northern Ireland, Malta and Dubrovnik in Croatia have attracted hordes of fans from around the world, drawn by their links to the franchise. To remedy this, Baabouz and other young people in the village are pooling their limited resources towards an ambitious project: a museum in the fortress, gathering photography from the productions that have been filmed here. US channel HBO has commissioned a prequel to “GOT”, called “House of the Dragon”. George R.R. Martin, the author of the books on which the series is based, wrote on his blog that shooting would also take place in Morocco. — AFP

A man sits atop the Kasbah (ancient fortress) of Ait-Ben-Haddou.

## Body work: Russia’s ‘biohackers’ push boundaries

Gripping a scalpel, Vladislav Zaitsev makes an incision in the fold of skin between his client’s thumb and index finger and pushes in a small glass cylinder. Alexei Rautkin, a 24-year-old programmer in a hoodie, is having a chip inserted in his hand so he can open the door to his office without swiping a card. “It’s something I decided a long time ago,” he says. “Mainly because it’s convenient but there’s also a kind of exclusivity, because practically no one else has this.” Rautkin and Zaitsev are among a growing number of Russians interested in biohacking, a global movement whose followers seek to “upgrade” their bodies with experimental technology and DIY health fixes that began in Silicon Valley at the start of the last decade. For some, the lifestyle trend involves implanting technology under their skin.

For others—mainly wealthy Russians—the quest is to live longer, which they hope to do through intensive monitoring of their bodies, taking vast quantities of supplements or extreme exercise. Although it’s unclear how many biohackers there are in Russia, the movement is spreading, with social media forums, conferences and businesses springing up to cater to their needs. Zaitsev, a programmer with a ducktail haircut, taught himself to insert chips, helped by the fact he’s a medical school dropout. The 28-year-old caught national attention in 2015 by taking the chip out of a Moscow metro pass, dissolving it in acetone and encasing it in silicone before inserting it into the back of his hand.

The disc, about the size of a British one penny coin, is still visible but currently defunct—Zaitsev reprogrammed it with bank card details, only for the bank to close. He also has magnets on his fingertips, mainly for party tricks. He says the biohacking movement is about using technology to facilitate concrete tasks. “In biohacking, I like things that give a real, confirmed effect, for example putting in chips,” he says. Based on the contact between the close-knit community on social media, he estimates that about 1,000 Russians are chipped.

Most install work passes, he says, while some insert magnets or a compass implant that vibrates when they turn north. “I like the idea of expanding the capabilities of the human body.” Around the world, implanted microchips are being used to start cars, turn on smartphones, computers and printers, monitor body temperature and store medical information or as business cards. Professional magicians even use them to enhance their tricks. Some chips have been approved for human use, but Zaitsev said he uses veterinary ones made in Taiwan and ordered by mail for about 500 rubles (\$8) each. While some have raised concerns over potential surveillance and hacking, the number of chipped people is still very small in Russia, and unlike smartphones, the chips do not transmit the users’ location.

### Studio flat surgery

In his studio flat, Zaitsev charges Rautkin 2,000 rubles (\$32) for the operation to insert the chip that is slightly bigger than a grain of rice. He has chipped about 50 others, too, he says. The “typical client is a geek”, he adds. “Most are men aged 35 or younger.” Other biohackers have little time for chipping, however. Entrepreneur Stanislav Skakun says that biohacking is about extending life, potentially for thousands of years, an idea known as transhumanism. “I haven’t yet found a chip that would be useful for

prolonging life... I can’t see any point in doing this yet,” the 36-year-old said.

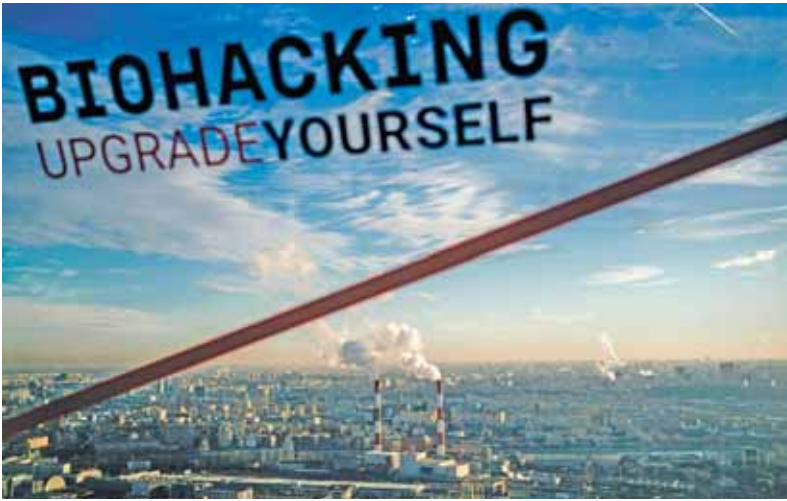
Instead, he regularly attends a private clinic where nurses fill some 20 test tubes with his blood for analysis. It’s just part of his exhaustive routine over the last five years, measuring hundreds of biochemical markers and taking handfuls of vitamins and supplements daily. Although he declines to talk in detail about what he takes, he says the supplements include iodine, Vitamin D, magnesium and probiotics. As well as genetic tests to identify personal risk factors and compensate for them, he

Currently the oldest human on record, France’s Jeanne Calment, died at the age of 122. Some biohackers have jumped on breakthroughs in gene therapy, one of the hottest areas of medical research. Controversially, US biohacker Josiah Zayner, who is a scientist, in 2017 livestreamed an experimental attempt to alter his own DNA using new gene editing technology called CRISPR. The tool, informally known as molecular “scissors”, is being used to treat genetic conditions, such as sickle cell disease, and has made gene editing more widely accessible.

But the US Food and Drug Administration has



Igor Korabelnikov exercises on a treadmill wearing a facemask to analyse the gases in his breath at a gym that calls itself a “biohacking laboratory”.



An aerial view of Moscow from inside a gym that calls itself a “biohacking laboratory” on the 58th floor of a skyscraper in the Moscow business district.

undergoes tests for inflammation, cholesterol, glucose, bone density, the stress hormone cortisol and the efficiency of his immune system.

### Molecular ‘scissors’

Trim with piercing blue eyes, Skakun claims that “in the last five years, my biological age hasn’t changed at all.” He hopes to live long enough to see scientific advances extend life massively. “If we conquer cancer, Alzheimer’s and cardiovascular disease, we’ll prevent practically all the reasons we die,” he said. Such ideas are espoused by international pro-

expressed concern about safety risks involved in DIY kits available to the public for self-administered gene therapies. Kiran Musunuru, a genetics professor at the University of Pennsylvania, says the CRISPR “scissors” often cut next to the targeted gene, causing unexpected mutations. “It’s very easy to do if you don’t care about the consequences,” Musunuru added. Top US science journal Science said last July that the tools for public and private regulators to manage biohacking’s public health risks were largely already available. “But they must be used better,” it said, in an opinion piece.

### ‘Wishful thinking’

Maxim Skulachev, a Russian biologist at Moscow State University who studies longevity, said that biohackers were right to say that ageing may be programmed into our genes and theoretically could be blocked. “We think ageing was somehow introduced in our genome as a program,” he said. “For us the only way to fight ageing is to somehow break this program—hack it.” In doing so, this could end age-related conditions and cancer, he said, adding that living to the age of 100 would become the new norm.

Nevertheless, he also predicts that the super-elderly will develop other health problems limiting their lifespan which have not yet even manifested themselves. The problem with biohackers is they are “running too fast,” said Skulachev, 46, whose team is trying to come up with a drug to interfere with the genetic ageing process. “At the moment there is no technology to break this program and from this point of view... biohackers are engaged in wishful thinking.”



A view of the chipped hand of programmer Alexei Rautkin, 24. — AFP photos

ponents of transhumanism, such as controversial British gerontologist Aubrey de Grey, who believe humans will be able to significantly extend their lifespan and only die from accidents or violence.



Programmer Vladislav Zaitsev, 28, shows his chipped hand while posing for pictures.



# Classifieds

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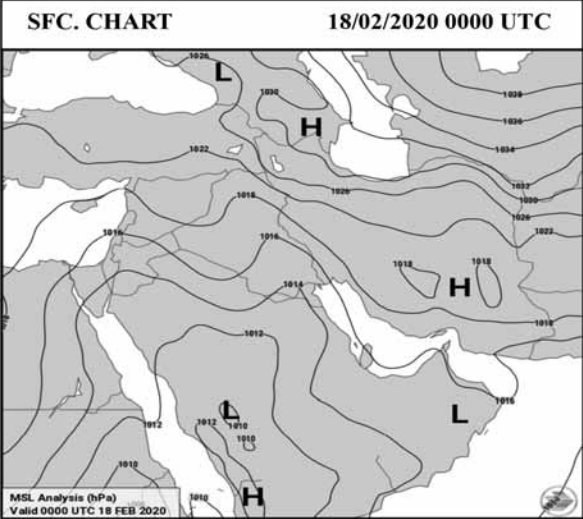


Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 10 - 40 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

**BY NIGHT:** Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate easterly wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 15 - 38 km/h .

WEATHER WATCH			Thunder rain	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.		
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	16 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	26 °C	16 °C		
ABDALY	26 °C	12 °C		
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C		
JAHRA	27 °C	14 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	21 °C	14 °C		
SALMIYAH	19 °C	16 °C		
AHMADI	19 °C	16 °C		
NUWAISIB	24 °C	16 °C		
WAFRA	27 °C	13 °C		
SALMY	27 °C	13 °C		



4 DAYS FORECAST					
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction
			MAX.	MIN.	
Wednesday	02/19	Relatively hot and Partly cloudy to cloudy causing rising dust with a chance for rain that	31 °C	15 °C	S-SE
Thursday	02/20	Warm and clouds with a chance of rain will decrease gradually with a chance for rising dust	26 °C	17 °C	SE-NW
Friday	02/21	Rather hot	24 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB
Saturday	02/22	Warm and some scattered clouds will appear	26 °C	07 °C	VRB-SE

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:05
Sunrise	06:24
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:14
Sunset	17:39
Isha	18:57

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	26 °C
MIN. Temp.	17 °C
MAX. RH	91 %
MIN. RH	20 %
MAX. Wind	S 57 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

## CHANGE OF NAME

**I, Charesma** Kotapati Passport No. K5706852, D/o Kotapati Lingamma Naidu, R/o D. No. 5-20, Medavada, Marripalli Dakshinapu kandriga, Chittoor District. A.P, India. My name was changed as Kotapati Charshima D/o Kotapati Lingama Naidu for the purpose wrong entries occurred in birth certificate SD No: BR/2008/06. **(C 5495)**

**I, Ashiney** Merin Joseph D/O Joseph Varghese holder of Indian Passport No. L3857701 issued in Kuwait has changed the given name in Passport from Ashiny Marin Joseph to Ashiney Merin Joseph, permanent resident of Maliyackal Parambil, Chethackal P.O Ranni, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India. Solemnly declare. **(C 5643)**

**I, Agnelo** Basilio Lazaro Lourdes Fernandes, resident of House No. 330, Vass Vaddo, Velim, Salcete, South Goa - 403723, would like to state that, I have changed my name from Basilio Lourdes Fernandes to Agnelo Basilio Lazaro Lourdes Fernandes. Hereafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by the name Agnelo Basilio Lazaro Lourdes Fernandes. **(C 5642) 19-2-2020**

**I, Faith** Ann Varghese holder of Indian Passport No. N8633661 having permanent address at Chenthitta house, Keezhukara Rd. Kozhencherry P.O., Pathanamthitta, Kerala 689641, residing at Kuwait at present hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given name: Faith Ann and Surname: Varghese. **(C 5493)**

**My name** in Passport No. T0704504 has wrongly been mentioned as Shubhan Vimal. But as per all other records, my correct name is Shubham Vimal which should accordingly be corrected in the passport Shubham Vimal S/o Mr. Jeet Bahadur R/o 523 Gandhi Nagar, Unnao. **(C 5640)**

**I, Mohamed** Hanif Moosa holder of Indian Passport No. N8640923 would like change my name to Mohamed Hanif

Moosa Tambu. **(C 5641) 18-2-2020**

**I, Yaseen Abdur** Razzak Rawoot S/O Abdul Razzak Adam Rawoot holder of Indian Passport No. N7013260 issued at Kuwait on 07/03/2016 & Civil ID No. 276061602539 has changed my name from Yaseen Abdur Razzak Rawoot hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Yaseen Abdul Razzak (Given name) Rawoot (Surname). **(C 5639)**

**I, Yaseen** Abdur Razzak Rawoot S/O Abdur Razzaque Adam Rawoot holder of Indian Passport No. N7013260 issued at Kuwait on 07/03/2016 & Civil ID No. 276061602539 has changed my name from Yaseen Abdur Razzak Rawoot hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Yaseen Abdul Razzak (Given name) Rawoot (Surname). **(C 5639)**

**I, J.Yazar** Arafath, holder of Indian Passport No. Z5488692 having permanent address No. 95, Maraimalai Nagar, Kadayakudi PO., Pudukkottai - 622003, Tamilnadu, India, Residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given Name: Yasseemaal and Surname: Jafarulla. **(C 5637)**

**I, Abdul** Rahim Banderkar Tawfiq holder of Indian Passport No. Z1923691 having permanent address: Mumbai, Maharashtra, India 400010 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under Given name: Banderkar Tawfiq Abdul Rahim. **(C 5638) 17-2-2020**

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

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Air India	22456700	
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4	
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444	
Egypt Air	22421578	
Swiss Air	22421516	
Saudia	22426306	
Middle East Airlines	22423073	
Lufthansa	22422493	
PIA	22421044	
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8	
Oman Air	22958787	
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1	



Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page ([www.kuwait-airport.com.kw](http://www.kuwait-airport.com.kw))

## DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Wednesday 19/2/2020									
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10		
ETH	3620	Addis Ababa	00:01	KAC	752	ELQ	14:20		
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	14:20		
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	FDB	059	Dubai	14:20	Airlines	Flt
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	KAC	742	Dammam	14:35	MSC	412
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	KAC	672	Dubai	14:40	QTR	1093
JZR	772	Istanbul	00:50	KAC	774	Riyadh	14:40	FDB	072
KAC	102	London	00:55	GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40	BBC	144
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	SVA	500	Jeddah	14:45	ETH	3621
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	KAC	118	New York	14:50	AIC	990
MSR	618	Alexandria	01:35	KAC	364	Colombo	14:50	IGO	1758
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	286	Dhaka	14:55	JZR	111
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	KAC	618	Doha	15:00	KAC	285
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	KAC	512	Mashhad	15:15	KAC	363
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	JZR	234	Taif	15:15	PGT	859
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15	KAC	677
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	788	Jeddah	15:25	JZR	119
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	JZR	222	Riyadh	15:30	THY	501
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	IRA	601	Muscat	15:40	KAC	247
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	OMA	645	Tehran	15:40	DLH	625
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	KAC	412	Bangkok	15:40	MSR	619
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	UAE	857	Dubai	15:45	IGO	1765
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	JZR	732	Cairo	15:50	ETH	621
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	KAC	562	Amman	15:50	UAE	854
QTR	1076	Doha	03:40	ABY	127	Sharjah	15:55	KLM	446
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	JZR	152	Mashhad	16:00	OMA	644
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	RBG	211	Luxor	16:10	THY	765
KAC	302	Istanbul	04:30	JZR	212	Jeddah	16:25	QTR	1087
KAC	796	Madinah	04:40	QTR	1072	Doha	16:35	ETH	306
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	KAC	198	Baku	16:40	MSR	613
JZR	702	Asyut	04:55	JZR	612	Tbilisi	16:40	KAC	621
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	JZR	116	Doha	16:40	PGT	861
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	FDB	051	Dubai	16:45	JZR	713
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	KAC	546	Cairo	16:45	KKK	1269
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	SAW	705	Damascus	17:00	JZR	707
KAC	382	Delhi	05:20	FEG	341	Sohag	17:20	KAC	103
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:25	IGO	1752
JZR	654	OSS	05:25	GFA	215	Madinah	17:30	QTR	1077
JZR	770	Istanbul	05:25	JZR	214	Bahrain	17:30	OHY	351
JZR	502	Lahore	05:35	UAE	875	Jeddah	17:45	THY	771
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	FDB	063	Dubai	18:00	JZR	113
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:35	JZR	302	Istanbul	18:15	FDB	070
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	JZR	124	Dubai	18:20	GFA	212
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	MSR	620	Cairo	18:30	KAC	167
KAC	332	Trivandrum	06:05	QTR	1080	Doha	18:30	KAC	171
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	RJA	640	Amman	19:10	IGO	1767
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	156	Istanbul	19:20	KAC	165
BAW	157	London	07:05	ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25	ABY	120
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30	FDB	050
JZR	120	Dubai	07:10	KAC	744	Dammam	19:35	JZR	601
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:10	KAC	1090	Doha	19:35	LGW	1000
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	KAC	782	Jeddah	19:50	KAC	511
ABY	129	Sharjah	07:50	JZR	104	Bahrain	19:55	KAC	787
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	BAW	156	London	19:55	BAW	156
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	JZR	731	Cairo	20:00	JZR	1085
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:10	QTR	1085	Doha	20:00	QTR	1085
KAC	622	Doha	08:30	KAC	545	Cairo	20:05	KAC	671
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	671	Dubai	20:20	ABY	126
JZR	408	Ahmedabad	08:45	KAC	126	Sharjah	20:20	KAC	501
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	KAC	101	Amman	20:30	KAC	161
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	KAC	101	London	20:30	KAC	233
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	MSC	401	Alexandria	20:30	ETD	302
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	166	Rome	20:40	JZR	151
IRA	665	Shiraz	09:35	DLH	624	Frankfurt	20:55	JZR	151
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	674	Dubai	20:55	UAE	856
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	MEA	402	Beirut	21:20	KAC	751
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20	KAC	117
RBG	553	Alexandria	09:50	KAC	229	Colombo	21:20	KAC	613
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	UAE	859	Dubai	21:30	JZR	301
IAW	157A	Al Najaf	10:00	KAC	172	Frankfurt	21:30	KAC	197
JZR	114	Doha	10:20	GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45	KAC	775
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KLM	445	Amsterdam	21:50	KAC	155
JZR	714	Sohag	10:50	RBG	217	Asyut	22:00	Luxor	212
JZR	708	Luxor	10:55	KAC	564	Amman	22:00	IRA	600
AXB	889	Mangalore/Bahrain	11:10	KAC	620	Doha	22:00	FDB	056
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	KAC	168	Paris	22:00	KAC	617
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	QTR	1082	Doha	22:05	IGO	1754
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	JAV	621	Amman	22:15	JZR	211
PVV	730	Sharjah	12:00	ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15	JZR	611
KIS	6032	Mashhad	12:00	OMS	225	Muscat	22:20	QTR	1071
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:05	AIC	975	Chennai/Goa	22:25	IAW	158A
AHY	119	Baku	12:05	SVA	514	Riyadh	22:30	KAC	741
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	KAC	786	Jeddah	22:50	GFA	214
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25	GOW	061	CNN	23:00	JZR	221
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	JZR	002	LGW	23:05	JZR	213
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	QTR	1092	Doha	23:10	AXB	890
TBZ	6605	Mashhad	13:40	SVA	502	Jeddah	23:10	MEA	405
RBG	213	Sohag	13:45	MSC	411	Asyut	23:15	QTR	1075
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:50	JZR	736	Dubai	23:15	IAW	158
CLX	7912	Luxembourg	14:00	FDB	071	Cairo	23:30	KIS	6033
						Dubai	23:40	JZR	115
								GFA	210

Departure Flights on Wednesday 19/2/2020									
AHZ	MSR	120	Baku	13:05					
KAC	781	611	Cairo	13:25					
JZR	123		Jeddah	13:30					
KAC	105		Dubai	13:40					
UAE	872		London	14:00					
RBG	218		Dubai	14:15					
TBZ	6606		Asyut	14:25					
QTR	1079		Mashhad	14:40					
KNE	382		Doha	15:00					
PVV	730		Taif	15:00					
MSR	576		Sharm el-Sheikh	15:05					
FDB	060		Dubai	15:10					
GFA	222		Bahrain	15:25					
KAC	775		Riyadh	15:45					
CLX	7912		Hanoi	15:50					
KAC	673		Dubai	15:50					
SVA	501		Jeddah	16:00					
AMA	563		Amman	16:05					
ETD	304		Abu Dhabi	16:20					
KAC	743		Dammam	16:20					
KAC	283		Dhaka	16:25					
KAC	785		Jeddah	16:30					
OMA	646		Muscat	16:35					
ABY	128		Sharjah	16:35					
IRA	664		Shiraz	16:40					
KAC	615		Bahrain	16:45					
JZR	735		Cairo	16:50					
JZR	103		Bahrain	16:50					
KAC	503		Cairo	17:05					
RBG	554		Alexandria	17:10					
KAC	361		Colombo	17:30					
KAC	619		Doha	17:35					
KAC	357		Kochi	17:35					
KAC	405		Kochi	17:40					
UAE	858		Dubai	17:45					
FDB	052		Dubai	17:45					
JZR	539		KTM	17:50					
KAC	331		Trivandrum	17:55					
KAC	343		Chennai	18:00					
QTR	1073		Doha	18:00					
SAW	706		Damascus	18:00					
JZR	733		Cairo	18:10					
FEG	342		Sohag	18:20					
SVA	511		Riyadh	18:20					
GFA	216		Bahrain	18:20					
SVA	505		Madinah	18:30					
KAC	301		Mumbai	18:35					
JZR	127		Dubai	18:35					
JZR	403		Hyderabad	18:40					
KAC	381		Delhi	18:45					
JZR	721		Alexandria	18:55					
FDB	054		Dubai	19:20					
JZR	263		Amman	19:20					
UAE	876		Dubai	19:30					
MSR	621		Cairo	19:30					
QTR	1081		Doha	19:55					
ABY	124		Sharjah	20:05					
RJA	641		Amman	20:10					
GFA	218		Bahrain	20:15					
KAC	353		Bengaluru	20:35					
FDB	058		Dubai	20:45					
KNE	232		Riyadh	20:50					
JZR	401		Mumbai	20:55					
QTR	1091		Doha	21:00					
OMA	648		Muscat	21:20					
MSC	402		Alexandria	21:30					
DLH	624		Dammam	21:45					
DHX	171		Bahrain	21:50					
QTR	1089		Doha	21:55					
KAC	205		Islamabad	22:15					
JZR	701		Asyut	22:15					
MEA	403		Beirut	22:20					
ALK	230		Colombo	22:25					
ETD	308		Abu Dhabi	22:25					
GFA	220		Bahrain	22:30					
KLM	445		Bahrain	22:50					
UAE	860		Dubai	22:55					
RBG	214		Sohag	23:00					
OMS	226		Muscat	23:00					
ETD	310		Abu Dhabi	23:05					
KAC	783		Jeddah	23:15					
JAV	622		Amman	23:15					
KAC	383		Delhi	23:20					
KAC	411		Bangkok	23:25					





Residents walk past a mural painted on a building at a slum clearance residential community in Chennai yesterday. — AFP

# Syria presses assault amid fears over mass displacement



ALEPPO: Residents of a residential neighborhood on the edge of this northern Syrian city facing Kafr Hamra return to their homes to check the damage caused by fighting between regime forces and rebel fighters yesterday. — AFP

## Fists fly as guards called in during...

Continued from Page 1

Opposition MPs protested at what they called the “illegal” procedure adopted by the committee and demanded that voting on the three draft laws be carried out separately. The Assembly agreed and as the debate was about to begin, the troubles began. Some lawmakers traded jibes and insults and threatened physical action after MP Mutair described the cell members as “traitors”, which Shiite MP Salah Khorshid did not like and he insulted Mutair.

The arguments soon developed into a quarrel that involved four lawmakers: Mutair, Khalil Abul, Faisal Al-Kandari and Khaled Al-Otaibi. MPs quickly separated them amid loud shouts by MPs and the public attending the session from the gallery. At this point, the speaker ordered the guards to expel the spectators from the gallery, during which a number of MPs claimed the guards beat up some people.

At this point, Ghanem also adjourned the session and vacated the whole Assembly chamber, including reporters. Ghanem said after the Assembly resumed the session that MPs voted on the three bills separately and rejected them. This means that the draft law for granting amnesty to the former opposition MPs who include vet-

erans like Musallam Al-Barrak, Faisal Al-Mislem and Jamaan Al-Harbash and others, who have been living in Turkey since July 2018, has failed, and they will continue to live in exile for the time being.

Speaking to reporters after the session, Ghanem described what happened as a premeditated “theatre play”, saying MP Mutair came to the session only to disrupt procedures. “What happened was an attempt to make Kuwaiti people hate democracy,” Ghanem said. He said some of the MPs had orders from some quarters he did not name to sabotage the session. He also apologized to the crowds for being compelled to expel them from the hall.

But a statement signed by 15 opposition lawmakers accused Ghanem of “deliberately” committing “flagrant constitutional and legal mistakes” during the session, citing several examples. The lawmakers said they will not remain silent regarding the alleged attacks by Assembly guards against the public at the orders of the speaker, who failed to control the proceedings of the session and did not give MPs the opportunity to speak.

The lawmakers held the speaker fully responsible for the breaches of the constitution and violating national interests, saying they will discuss in the coming days among themselves and with their voters “appropriate political and constitutional options”. Before the drama, MPs voted with an overwhelming majority to approve a law amending the pension law, providing easier terms on loans taken by retired people. But the government did not support the law, saying its cost is too high. The Assembly is due to meet today.

in abundance and the gathering was supervised by stewards wearing fluorescent jackets proclaiming them ‘Knights of the Dawn,’ and bearing the stenciled image of the nearby Al-Nasr (Victory) mosque. The crowds have been much smaller than the numbers that attended the Great March of Return protests at the Gaza border fence when that campaign started nearly two years ago. In those Gaza demonstrations, 215 Palestinians were killed and several thousand injured in confrontations with Israeli troops. One Israeli soldier was killed by a Palestinian sniper.

In Nablus the crowds at dawn prayers have been peaceful, with little sign of any heightened security. Hani Al-Masri, a Palestinian political analyst, said the campaign reflected Hamas’ cautious approach to operating in the West Bank, where, unlike Gaza, it faces Israeli troops and Palestinian Authority forces intent on stopping Hamas from inflaming the streets and seizing control. “Hamas’ organization in the West Bank is not in good shape because of crackdowns by the Palestinian Authority and by Israel,” he said. “Fajr prayers is the most that Hamas can do.” Asked whether Israel was aware of the enlarged dawn prayer meetings, an Israeli military spokesman and the Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency had no immediate comment. — Reuters

BEIRUT: Syrian troops pressed an offensive yesterday on the country’s last major rebel enclave where the mass displacement of civilians is sparking fears of a humanitarian catastrophe. Around 900,000 people have been forced from their homes and shelters in less than three months, leaving huge numbers to sleep rough in the thick of winter. The United Nations said that half a million among them were children, some of whom have died of exposure in snow-covered camps.

The UN has warned that the crisis could worsen if no ceasefire is reached to facilitate the relief effort. “Over the past four days alone, some 43,000 newly displaced people have fled western Aleppo where fighting has been particularly fierce,” UN spokesman David Swanson told AFP. Since the start of February, the displacement figure was a staggering 300,000, he said. The wave of displacement is the biggest since the start of the civil war nearly nine years ago. It is largest exodus of civilians since World War II.

“The violence in northwest Syria is indiscriminate. Health facilities, schools, residential areas, mosques and markets have been hit,” the UN head of humanitarian affairs and emergency relief, Mark Lowcock, said on Monday.

### ‘Only option’

“The biggest humanitarian horror story of the 21st Century will only be avoided if Security Council members, and those with influence, overcome individual interests and put a collective stake in humanity first,” Lowcock added. Russia, the main foreign broker in Syria, has vetoed countless resolutions on the conflict. “The only option is a ceasefire,” Lowcock said.

The latest violence yesterday left at least two civilians dead. One was killed in a Russian air strike and the other in regime shelling. A member of regime-backer Iran’s Revolutionary Guards was killed in Aleppo province in a rocket strike, Iranian state media reported.

According to Save The Children, seven children – including a baby only seven months old – have died from freezing temperatures and bad living conditions in the camps. “We’re worried that the death toll will increase given the absolutely inhumane living conditions that women and children are finding themselves in,” the charity’s Syria director Sonia Khush said.

## Iraqis wanted to topple the system...

Continued from Page 1

Youth chant against a once-untouchable cluster of politicians and paramilitary commanders, and women spend nights in tents next to adult men.

Students defy orders to return to class and neighborhoods once seen as dangerous are buzzing with people en route to demonstrate. Slogans like “Forget outdated traditions,” “End classism” and “No more differences” are trending on Twitter in Iraq. “Tahrir lets us dream,” wrote one activist whose friend – who ekes out a living driving a rickshaw – had fallen in love with a medic from a prestigious family.

Since the 1970s, Iraq has endured Saddam Hussein’s authoritarian regime, back-to-back wars and devastating sanctions that isolated it from the world. There were few cellular phones and barely any internet access until the 2003 US-led invasion that collapsed Saddam’s nominally secular regime. Sectarian fighting gave rise to hardline Shiite and Sunni militias as society became more divided and religious.

When Iraq defeated the Islamic State group in 2017 after years of fighting and displacement, many anticipated long-overdue peace and prosperity. “The young generation was in a coma for many years, but stability opened their eyes to the truth: there is more to life than just surviving,” said protester Ahmad Haddad, 32. “There’s living in dignity in a civil society, breaking conservative norms and loosening the grip of religious parties,” said Haddad.

But instead of easing into normalcy, it was a sudden uprising that transformed Iraq. Hiyyam Shayea, a 50-year-old teacher in protest-hit Diwaniyah province, can testify to that. “There were some huge, surprising changes to a lot of social affairs,” said Shayea, wearing a traditional black robe at a recent rally in her hometown. Such a stance had long been unimaginable in the south, where tribal customs trump federal

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said the temperature dipped to minus 7 Celsius in some areas last week. “Those families who could take some of their belongings as they fled from their homes are reportedly burning whatever they could find, including pieces of furniture and whatever can be spared to stay warm for a short while,” it said. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called for the establishment of humanitarian corridors for fleeing civilians to prevent further loss of life.

There was no sign of any let-up in the violence, however, with President Bashar Al-Assad promising on Monday that government forces would press on with their offensive. “The battle for the liberation of the provinces of Aleppo and Idlib continues, regardless of all the hot air coming out of the north,” Assad said, in reference to warnings by Turkey. In recent weeks, Syrian troops and allied forces backed by Russia have stepped up their offensive against jihadists and their rebel allies in Idlib and the neighboring province of Aleppo. They have reconquered swathes of Idlib as well as key areas that have secured the strategic M5 highway connecting the country’s four largest cities as well as the entire surroundings of Aleppo city for the first time since 2012.

“We have won a victory over the fear they tried to instill in our hearts... but we are fully aware that this liberation is not the end of the war,” Assad said in a televised speech. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, government forces made fresh gains in western Aleppo province yesterday. “Regime forces are trying to push towards the Sheikh Barakat mountain,” said Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the Britain-based monitoring organization.

If they capture the area, government forces will control a vantage point over vast swathes of land in Idlib and Aleppo provinces, including areas where tens of thousands of displaced people live in sprawling camps. Deadly incidents between government forces and rebel-backer Turkey have raised tensions near Syria’s northern border, prompting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to threaten Damascus. Turkey, which already hosts more Syrian refugees than any other country with more than 3.5 million people, is unwilling to open its borders to a new wave. — AFP

law and restrict women’s public role. But it has come at a high price. Around 550 people have been killed and 30,000 wounded in protest-related violence. “That was all for a homeland – one that’s civilized and civil, not backwards and outdated,” said Shayea.

Some are resisting the changes, describing rallies as hotbeds of promiscuity, alcohol and drugs, fuelled by the West. Leading Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr has tried to discredit the movement with such claims, insisting men and women stay separate and protests be “cleaned”. Women swiftly organized their own rally mocking Sadr, long untouchable because of his violent past as a militiaman and his diehard followers.

In the protests’ early days, angry crowds slapped shoes against portraits of paramilitary leaders and Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, who held tremendous sway in Baghdad and was never publicly criticized. Soleimani was later killed in a US strike. Demonstrators also railed against “muhassassa”, the sectarian power-sharing system governing Iraq after Saddam. Few current protesters are old enough to remember Saddam – 60 percent of the population is under 25 – and blame their elders for Iraq’s slide into broken politics.

The rallies exposed “a huge rift” between the two generations, Iraqi researcher Khaled Hamza told AFP. “We’re in the middle of a spontaneous movement by a group of youth who weren’t expected to be responsible for achieving what our generation couldn’t,” said Hamza, who is in his 60s. Protesters recognize it, too. In Baghdad, a woman in a pink headscarf carried a sign: “In the end, I made a revolution. What did you do?”

Further south in oil-rich Basra, Heba, a protester in her 20s, said the rallies have changed her. “They strengthened our personalities, made us distinguish between right and wrong and demand our rights,” she said. The movement is now at a crossroads: Numbers have dwindled as activists face an intimidation campaign and parties seek to recapture momentum with a new cabinet. “Now, it’s time to unite under a new vision, a plan that addresses Iraqis’ needs,” said protester Mohammad Al-Ajeel. “What’s happening is huge, but it’s new for us. We can’t expect everything to happen overnight,” said Ajeel, a businessman living between Iraq and the UAE. “It may need years.” — AFP



Sports

# Sport will rebound in China but coronavirus exposes flaws

## Preparations for 2022 Winter Games in Beijing remain on track

**HONG KONG:** The coronavirus exposes an ignorance of China's lucrative sports market and poor contingency planning, experts say, after Formula One became the most high-profile casualty of a mass pullout from the country.

Formula One chiefs are scrambling to fit the Shanghai race into this season's schedule after the April 19 grand prix last week joined the World Athletics Indoor Championships and European Tour and LPGA golf tournaments in being shelved because of the deadly outbreak. The Formula E Grand Prix, badminton, skiing and Olympic qualifying events have all been cancelled, postponed or moved elsewhere in recent weeks. All activity in the country's two most popular sports — football and basketball — has been suspended, but the obliteration of the sporting calendar is regarded as unavoidable given the circumstances.

The virus, which emerged in December in the central city of Wuhan, has killed more than 1,800 people, almost all in China, and sparked global alarm. The world's most populous country has become a major sporting destination in the last decade and top clubs and organisations, among them the Premier League, FIFA and NBA, have courted fans — and their money — in the world's second-largest economy.

Marcus Luer, founder and chief executive of sports marketing agency TSA (Total Sports Asia), said that it will be business as usual once the virus clears but a lesson has been learnt that extends beyond China.

"This could happen anywhere in the world and federations and organisers need good contingency plans, especially in an Olympic year, where athletes are still qualifying for the Games (Tokyo 2020)," said Luer.

"I think that's a global learning for major sports organisations to be ready and have a good Plan B in

case something like this happens again in the future anywhere in the world.

"Honestly, I don't think any sport or event had a Plan B in place," Professor Simon Chadwick echoes that sentiment. Chadwick, director of the Centre for the Eurasian Sport Industry based in Shanghai, also said that European football clubs in particular had failed to grasp the opportunity to show support for China and its people. "The current health issues have exposed how distant many international sport stakeholders are from China, in terms of both geographic distance and cultural understanding," Chadwick said. "Furthermore, it appears that many are rather too dependent upon second-hand information, suggesting that most don't have people on the ground to provide accurate insight and first-hand experience."

He added: "If they are going to successfully engage in business in China, then they need to better understand the nuances and complexities of working there."

### ANOTHER GALACTICOS MOMENT?

China says that preparations for the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing remain on track, despite a test skiing event being cancelled over coronavirus fears. China has been here before, with the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2002-2003, but at that time the country hosted nothing like the number of international sporting events it now holds.

In the summer of 2003, a Real Madrid squad boasting "Galacticos" David Beckham, Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane and Luis Figo visited China, the first time the Spanish giants had come to the country.

China is now a regular summer destination for top European football teams, but this year's tours will fall by the wayside if the coronavirus continues to spread



**HANOI:** File photo taken on February 14, 2020, workers set up a kerb on the track at the under-construction Formula One Vietnam Grand Prix race track site in Hanoi, amid concerns of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. Vietnam's inaugural F1 Grand Prix will take place in Hanoi as planned, organisers told yesterday, bucking a trend of cancellations as fears over the COVID-19 coronavirus rip up Asia's sporting calendar. — AFP

in the coming months. "When they appeared at Beijing Workers' Stadium, the panic effect caused by SARS disappeared instantly... the stadium was full and the city's confidence returned," said a recent column in the Oriental Sports Daily, reflecting on Real's morale-boosting landmark trip.

"This is the power of sports!" said the column, declaring that China's sporting life will similarly bounce back with renewed vigour after the coronavirus subsides. "The confidence of life, the confidence of the city, the confidence of the government and the good use of the spirit of sports culture will surely return quickly." — AFP

## Mako Vunipola out of Ireland Six Nations clash

**LONDON:** England powerhouse prop Mako Vunipola is to miss Sunday's Six Nations match with Ireland as he has returned to Tonga for family reasons the Rugby Football Union announced yesterday.

The 29-year-old Saracens star — whose parents are Tongan — played in the 13-6 win over Scotland having been omitted from the opening defeat by France. Bath's Beno Obano has been drafted into Eddie Jones' 33-man training squad as cover.

Veteran Joe Marler is set to return at loosehead prop, with Ellis Genge — who scored the lone try in the Scotland game — resuming his role as a replacement. "Mako Vunipola is not included as he has travelled back to Tonga for family reasons," read a brief statement from the RFU after the initial 33-man squad for the game was revealed.

Centres Manu Tuilagi and Henry Slade are both included in the training squad after recovering from injury. Tuilagi is on track for a return to the side after a minor groin niggle, but Slade's involvement is in doubt given his two-month absence with a fractured ankle.

Sunday's match is a high stakes one. England will



**EDINBURGH:** File photo shows England's prop Mako Vunipola (C) is tackled during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Scotland and England at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh. — AFP

hope to keep their Triple Crown dreams alive and at the same time prevent Ireland maintaining their push for a second Grand Slam in three years. The Irish beat Scotland and Wales both at home but

travel to Twickenham having lost to England on their last two meetings, a rare home reverse in last year's Six Nations and then a 57-15 whipping before the World Cup. — AFP

## Women's golf great Mickey Wright dead



**Mickey Wright**

**LOS ANGELES:** Thirteen-time major winner Mickey Wright, often described as the greatest woman golfer of all time, died on Monday aged 85. Wright, who accumulated 82 LPGA Tour titles during a professional career which stretched from 1954 to 1969, died in Florida after a heart attack, reports said.

"We're saddened to learn today of the passing of Mickey Wright, a 13-time Major Champion and 82-time winner on the @LPGA, just three days after celebrating her birthday," the World Golf Hall of Fame announced on Twitter. "One of the best to ever play the game, she will be greatly missed. #RIPMickey." Born Mary Kathryn Wright in San Diego, California in 1935, Wright enjoyed a stellar amateur career which included a US Girls Junior Championship in 1952.

She won the 1954 World Amateur Championship before turning professional the following season. Her haul of 13 major victories included four US Women's Open titles and four US Women's PGA Championships. Only Patty Berg, who had 15 major wins, has won more. Her retirement in 1969 shocked women's golf, coming at the relatively early age of 34.

Wright would later cite the pressure of the spotlight as influencing her decision to step away from the sport. "It was a lot of pressure to be in contention week after week for five or six years," Wright said in a 2000 interview. "I guess they call it burnout now, but it wore me out. Unless you're a golfer, you can't understand the tension and pressure of tournament play."

"And it was the expectations: It was always, 'What's wrong with your game? 'Are you coming apart?'" Second or third isn't bad, but it feels bad when you've won 44 tournaments in four years. "I'm not real good as far as wanting to be in front of people, glorying in it and loving it. I think you have to love that to make that kind of pressure tolerable. It finally got to where it wasn't tolerable to me."

Kathy Whitworth, who holds the record for LPGA Tour wins with 88 titles, believes Wright would easily have beaten her career haul had she continued playing. "She was the best I've ever seen, man or woman," Whitworth said in 2015. "I've had the privilege of playing with Sam Snead and Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer and all of them. And some of our ladies had wonderful swings. But nobody hit it like Mickey, just nobody. "She had 82 wins, but she would have won over 100 with no trouble if she had stayed on tour." — AFP

## Rockets to sign Carroll, Green

**LOS ANGELES:** The Houston Rockets are keeping busy during the All-Star break, with plans to sign veteran forwards DeMarre Carroll and Jeff Green, according to multiple media reports Monday.

Green, who has been a free agent since the Jazz waived him on Dec. 24, is expected to sign a 10-day contract as early as Tuesday, according to league sources at ESPN. Sources indicate he will be offered a deal for the rest of the season if he feels comfortable enough to commit to it.

Carroll, who took a buyout from the San Antonio Spurs on Monday after playing only 15 games (averaging 2.2 points, 2.1 rebounds a game), needs to clear waivers before signing with the Rockets.

"I don't know what went wrong, what happened," Carroll said via the San Antonio Express-News about his short stint with the Spurs after signing as a free agent last summer. "I felt like San Antonio was going to be a great place for me, for my talents, but it didn't work out."

The 6-foot-6 Carroll, 33, is in his 11th NBA season, having started his career with the Memphis Grizzlies in 2009 after they made him a first-round pick in that year's NBA draft. During the 2010-11 season, he played for the Rockets, and also had stints with the Denver Nuggets (2011-12), Utah Jazz (2011-13), Atlanta Hawks (2013-15), Toronto Raptors (2015-17) and Brooklyn Nets (2017-19). In 569 career games, he has averaged 9.0 points and 4.3 rebounds.

The 6-8 Green, also 33, has career averages of 13.0 points and 4.4 rebounds a game while playing for eight NBA franchises, beginning his 13-year career with the Seattle SuperSonics in 2007-08. — AFP

## Scott sails on, Woods woe, McIlroy goal

**HONG KONG:** Adam Scott will be gunning for a hat-trick of wins, Rory McIlroy scents history but Tiger Woods takes a rest as the circuit heads down to Mexico for the first World Golf Championships event of 2020.

Here are three talking points in golf this week:

### SCOTT KEEPS ROLLING

Revitalised Adam Scott is on a roll. He ended an almost four-year win drought three days before Christmas at the Australian PGA Championship. After the long wait, the red-hot Aussie then made it back-to-back victories with his triumph at the US PGA Tour's Genesis Invitational on Sunday — his first outing of 2020.

It propelled the 39-year-old into the world's top 10 for the first time since June 2017 and Scott heads to the WGC Mexico Championship this week looking to make it three wins from three. He has form at the event, which he won in March 2016 in its previous incarnation as the WGC-Cadillac Championship at Doral in Florida which, coincidentally, had been his last victory before the near-four year barren patch.

### WOODS FACES WAIT FOR 83

Tiger Woods was back to his best in 2019 with a stunning 15th major win at the US Masters, a record-equalling 82nd PGA Tour victory in Japan and then captaining the USA to glory in the Presidents Cup. It seemed only a question of how quickly the 44-year-old would reach the magic mark of 83 victories and eclipse Sam Snead as the golfer with most PGA Tour wins.

But fitness concerns are again being raised and Woods clearly struggled with his troublesome back, shooting weekend rounds of 76 and 77 at Riviera to finish last.

"That's not normal for him," said his caddie Joe LaCava. "I'm not really concerned with the score, I just want him to be healthy. Because he's certainly capable."

Woods will sit out the WGC Mexico Championship this week as he takes care of his fitness for his Masters defence in April.

He has time to rest his back before his next scheduled outing, at Bay Hill on March 5, which starts a busy run with the Players Championship at Sawgrass on March 12

and the WGC Match Play in Austin two weeks before the Masters tees off on April 9.

### MCILROY AIMS FOR WGC 'SLAM'

World number one Rory McIlroy carded a top-five finish at Riviera but will rue another tournament that slipped from his grasp with a final-round blowout as he heads to Mexico. Starting in a share of the lead, McIlroy's two-over 73 on Sunday was largely down to a shocking triple-bogey seven on the fifth.

"Apart from that, I played pretty well," the Northern Irishman reflected wryly before heading off to contest the \$10.5 million WGC Mexico Championship, which begins Thursday. McIlroy won the WGC-HSBC Championship in Shanghai for the first time in November and has the added incentive of being able to complete a "grand slam" of the four WGC titles in the rarefied air of the high-altitude Chapultepec course.

He was runner-up last year to Dustin Johnson — the only player to have won all the WGCs — so if McIlroy can turn the tables he will equal the American big-hitter, having also won the WGC Match Play in 2015 and the WGC Invitational in 2014.

### NEW WORLD RANKINGS

Scott was the big mover this week, leaping from 14th to seventh with his Genesis Invitational victory. Matt Kuchar rises five spots to 15th after sharing second place.

### Top 20 week beginning Monday, February 17:

1. Rory McIlroy (NIR) 9.30 pts
2. Brooks Koepka (USA) 8.80
3. Jon Rahm (ESP) 8.48
4. Justin Thomas (USA) 7.49
5. Dustin Johnson (USA) 6.98
6. Patrick Cantlay (USA) 6.14
7. Adam Scott (AUS) 6.06 (+7)
8. Webb Simpson (USA) 5.98 (-1)
9. Tiger Woods (USA) 5.93 (-1)
10. Xander Schauffele (USA) 5.71 (-1)
11. Tommy Fleetwood (ENG) 5.53
12. Justin Rose (ENG) 5.43 (-2)
13. Tony Finau (USA) 4.96 (-1)
14. Patrick Reed (USA) 4.75 (-1)
15. Matt Kuchar (USA) 4.63 (+5)
16. Bryson DeChambeau (USA) 4.40 (+2)
17. Louis Oosthuizen (RSA) 4.39 (-2)
18. Shane Lowry (IRL) 4.34 (-1)
19. Gary Woodland (USA) 4.30 (-3)
20. Marc Leishman (AUS) 4.18 (-1). — AFP



Sports

# NZ's Taylor bats away retirement talk ahead of 100th Test

## It will be a party atmosphere for Taylor at Basin Reserve on Friday

**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand's Ross Taylor will celebrate his 100th Test in the series-opener against India this week and the veteran batsman says he has no intention of winding down his international career as he nears his 36th birthday.

Taylor became New Zealand's leading run-scorer in Tests when he surpassed Stephen Fleming's career tally of 7,172 against Australia in Sydney last month. In front of home fans in Wellington on Friday, he will become the nation's fourth cricketer to play 100 tests after Fleming, Daniel Vettori and Brendon McCullum.

He will also become the first cricketer to reach the milestone in all three major formats. Far from seeing the finish line for his career, Taylor said he had been urged to reset his goals in a congratulatory call from former New Zealand test opener and coach John Wright.

"He said it was a nice time to relax, but at the same time nice to rejig those goals," Taylor said in comments published by New Zealand's Stuff media yesterday. "Give yourself something to chase ... Goals aren't everything but they're a nice reminder when your mind is going in different directions, to bring you back on track and give you a focus."

Taylor said he was keen to be in the frame for New Zealand's bid for a maiden T20 World Cup title when the men's tournament kicks off in Australia in October. He would also not rule out the next one-day World Cup in India in 2023, having played in the heart-breaking defeat to hosts England in last year's title-decider.

"First and foremost I want to get to next year — the Twenty20 World Cup and then the home summer — and then I'll have a good idea on how I'm placed at the end of next summer. "Whether there is still a drive, whether I'm good enough, whether I'm fit enough, and whether I deserve my spot in the side. If I can tick all those, then definitely 2023 is an option."

It will be a party atmosphere for Taylor at the Basin Reserve on Friday, with New Zealand Cricket offering dozens of free tickets for his extended family on the weekend of his sister's wedding. "You always want to do well, and first and foremost the game is more important," he said.

"At the same time you can put extra pressure on yourself. "You've just got to go out and enjoy it and take it as another game. Hopefully I can contribute in any way I can." — Reuters



Ross Taylor

## IPL begins on March 29

**NEW DELHI:** Defending Indian Premier League (IPL) champions Mumbai Indians will host three-time winners Chennai Super Kings in the first match of this year's edition on March 29, the Indian cricket board (BCCI) said yesterday.

The IPL will run six days longer than last year, it added, with the extra days necessitated by the decision to do away with double-headers on Saturdays, limiting them to only Sundays.

While the BCCI revealed the league fixtures it did not disclose the venue of the May 24 final for the eight-team tournament, which begins 11 days after India's

home ODI series against South Africa.

The Steve Smith-led Rajasthan Royals begin their campaign at Chennai on April 2 with Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler expected to join the side after England wrap up a two-test series in Sri Lanka in late March.

Meanwhile, the owners of Kings XI Punjab have bought a Caribbean Premier League side, becoming the second Indian Premier League club to own a Twenty20 franchise in the West Indies.

Punjab took over St Lucia Zouks, led by former West Indies captain Darren Sammy, on Monday. In 2015 the Kolkata Knight Riders purchased Trinidad and Tobago. "We are excited at the opportunity to invest in one of the most exciting sporting tournaments in the world, and we have been impressed by the vibrancy of CPL over the last seven years," Punjab co-owner Mohit Burman said on a St Lucia Zouks media release. The eighth edition of the CPL will be held from August 19 to

September 26.

MS Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings will take on defending champions Mumbai Indians in the opening match of the Indian Premier League Twenty20 extravaganza on March 29, organisers said yesterday.

The 38-year-old Dhoni, Chennai's captain, has not appeared for club or country since the 50-over World Cup last year and speculation has swirled over his international retirement.

But cricketers and pundits believe the veteran wicketkeeper-batsman's performance in the cash-rich IPL could be key if he is eyeing a last hurrah at the T20 World Cup in October and November in Australia.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the IPL fixtures on Tuesday but have yet to reveal the venue of the May 24 final. The popular tournament, which began in 2008, will run for 57 days — six more days than the last edition. — Agencies

## Trump set to open world's biggest cricket stadium

**AHMEDABAD:** US President Donald Trump will inaugurate the world's largest cricket stadium when he arrives in Ahmedabad, the home base of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Monday at the start of a two-day visit aimed at smoothing ties strained by trade disputes.

Making his first official trip to the world's largest democracy, Trump is also expected to visit the humble abode of India's independence hero Mahatma Gandhi in Ahmedabad. The leaders of China, Japan and Israel have all visited Ahmedabad since Modi became prime minister. It is the biggest city in Gujarat, the western state where Modi made his mark as chief minister before his Hindu nationalist party swept to power in 2014.

If his Indian hosts can help it, Trump probably won't see a slum as they've ordered for a 400-metre wall to be built along his route to block the view of where poor people live. Authorities in Ahmedabad expect to spend around 800 million to 850 million Indian rupees (\$11-12 million) on preparations for the visit by the American president that is likely to last around three hours, two government officials with direct knowledge of the plans told Reuters. The sum is equivalent to equivalent to about 1.5% of the annual budget for the home ministry in Gujarat.

Security-related costs, with more than 12,000 police officers expected to be deployed, will account for almost half the expense, said the officials, who declined to be named as they are not authorised to speak publicly about the visit. Ahmedabad municipal commissioner Vijay Nehra, the city's top civic official, told Reuters that authorities had already spent around 300 million rupees (\$4.2 million) on widening roads and improving infrastructure around the new cricket stadium.

With capacity for 110,000 spectators, the Motera Stadium will dislodge the Melbourne Cricket Ground as the world's largest cricket stadium.

"Eighteen roads of about 20 kilometers (12 miles) in length from Ahmedabad Airport to Motera Stadium have been widened or re-laid," Nehra said, adding that the improvements had been planned before Trump's visit was confirmed. A further 60 million Indian rupees (\$840,000) will go on "beautification" of the city, said Nehra, including erecting the wall to spare Trump's view.

Ashok Brahmabhatt, secretary of Gujarat Cricket Association, which owns the Motera Stadium set to be opened by Trump, said it would also spend tens of millions of rupees during the event.

Nehra tweeted on Sunday that more than 100,000 participants had registered so far to greet Trump as he heads from the airport to the city centre. Trump said last week Modi had promised "millions and millions" of people would line his route. Trump may also visit the famous Taj Mahal monument in the city of Agra, and all leave for police officers in that city has been canceled, according to a document seen by Reuters. — Reuters

## Hussey hails 'focused and driven' Australia ahead of SA series

**JOHANNESBURG:** Former Australia batsman Mike Hussey said yesterday he may not know exactly what his title is but he is delighted to be back with the team to help head coach Justin Langer build towards the Twenty20 World Cup on home soil in October.

Hussey is in South Africa with the touring Australian side as they prepare for the start of the three-match Twenty20 International series in Johannesburg on Friday. "I'm not really sure what my title is, whether it is mentor or batting coach," Hussey told reporters yesterday. "But I don't really mind, I just want to get out there and help as much as I can and throw a lot of balls."

Hussey previously worked as a batting consultant for Australia at the T20 World Cup in 2016, and Langer has asked him to return ahead of the next edition of the tournament. "I'm hoping to stay involved with the T20 team right through the World Cup," Hussey says. "It is a fantastic environment, I really like that the guys work so hard and there is some real excitement about the tournament that will be on our doorstep."

"They are focused and driven to do well and motivated to put in the performances that will get them into that squad." Hussey said he had mostly been working with the middle order batsman and welcomed the return of Matthew Wade, whose form in the domestic Big Bash T20 competition earned him the chance for a first international appearance in the format since 2016.

"I played with Matty Wade, and I really like the place he is in right now. I think he has a great understanding of his game. "I am rapped that he has got an opportunity and I really hope that he can take it and cement his place in the middle order."

He expects the side to hit the ground running with



Mike Hussey

the recent completion of the Big Bash, but said South Africa would also be in form after their tight 2-1 series loss to England.

"A lot of the guys are coming off Big Bash, so they have been playing really good cricket. I think it is going to be a tough challenge though; South Africa are a real-

ly good team and are coming off some tough cricket against England."

Following the series start in Johannesburg, the teams move to Port Elizabeth on Sunday and finally Cape Town on Feb. 26. They then clash in three One-Day International matches. — Reuters

## Australia win final WCup warm up but England smashed

**ADELAIDE:** Australia's women warmed up for their Twenty20 World Cup defence yesterday with a battling win over South Africa, but England suffered a setback in a shock 10-wicket hammering by Sri Lanka.

Playing their last game before the tournament starts on Friday, Australian skipper Meg Lanning and deputy Rachael Haynes steered them to a four-wicket victory with three balls to spare in Adelaide.

Lanning (47 from 36 balls) and Haynes (39 from 35) put on a 90-run stand after they slumped to 35 for four in reply to South Africa's 147 for six. "We're as ready as we can be. Now it's just about going out there and putting it on the park," Lanning said after a build up that saw the four-time World Cup winners beat India and England in a tri-series, but also lose to both sides.

England's final preparations couldn't have gone any worse. Heather Knight won the toss in

Adelaide and batted first but her team never got going, struggling to 122 for 9, with Sri Lanka's spinners inflicting the damage.

In reply, Sri Lankan skipper Chamari Atapattu smashed 78 from 50 balls with fellow opener Hasini Perera unbeaten on 29 as they reached their target without loss inside 13 overs. "It was a disappointing performance, but I'd rather we got it out of the way ahead of the World Cup," said Knight. "We're still in a good place."

In Brisbane, India warmed up for a tilt at a first ever World Cup crown by beating 2016 champions the West Indies by two runs. They set the West Indies a very makable 108 to win after being restricted to 107 for eight.

But Stafanie Taylor's side couldn't reach the target, managing just 105 for seven in their 20 overs. The 10-team World Cup starts in Sydney on Friday when Australia face India. — AFP





Sports

# Hamilton, Messi share men’s Laureus award

## This is my third Laureus award and I’m really grateful: Biles

**BERLIN:** Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton and football superstar Lionel Messi shared the Laureus sportsman of the year award at Monday’s ceremony in Berlin.

Hamilton, 35, a six-time world champion and Barcelona star Messi, 32, share the award for their achievements in 2019. This is the first time a footballer has won the award and also the first occasion in the event’s 20-year history when the jury reached a tied decision.

“I am honoured to be the first to win this award being a sportsperson coming from a team sport,” Messi said from Barcelona via a video message. US gymnastics superstar Simone Biles, who won five titles at the 2019 world championships in Stuttgart to leave her with a record 25 world gold medals, took the Laureus sportswoman of the year award for the third time.

“It means the world to me, this is my third Laureus award and I’m really grateful,” said Biles in a video message. South Africa, who won the 2019 World Cup, were named team of the year, beating Jurgen Klopp’s Liverpool and the US women’s football team.

Springboks captain Siya Kolisi was joined on stage by six South African team-mates to collect the trophy. “With this group of players, we came together for the love of the game with one goal and fought so hard for each other,” Kolisi told the audience in Berlin.

“We gave everything we had to win the trophy and hopefully inspire kids for generations to come.”

## Leipzig ‘keeper Gulacsi relishes Tottenham test

**LEIPZIG:** Having joined RB Leipzig when they were still in Germany’s second division, Peter Gulacsi has seen the club grow from Bundesliga new boys and on to a first appearance in the Champions League knock-out stage. The Hungarian goalkeeper is relishing Wednesday’s last 16, first leg when the ambitious eastern German club, bankrolled by energy drinks giants Red Bull, face last season’s beaten finalists Tottenham Hotspur in London.

“It’s a new experience to play against an English side. It’s a big opportunity and a big test,” Gulacsi told AFP. “If we have a good day, maybe we could surprise them.” While Jose Mourinho’s Tottenham sit fifth in the Premier League, Leipzig head to London in the midst of a battle at the top of the Bundesliga with Bayern Munich, with whom they drew 0-0 earlier this month.

“It’s going to be two difficult games, but this is what you look forward to,” Gulacsi said of the Spurs tie. “These are the games we have been fighting to play in.”

The last-16 showdown is the latest step in Leipzig’s

Snowboarding sensation Chloe Kim, 19, won the action sportsperson award after taking gold medals at the world championship halfpipe and X Games super pipe.

Oksana Masters, who was born with limb impairments caused by radiation from Chernobyl and was later adopted in the US, won the sportsperson with a disability award. The 30-year-old won five gold medals and a silver at the world para nordic skiing championships and also took the cross-country overall world cup title.

She also won silver medals in the road race and time trial H5 at the para cycling road world championships. Colombia’s Egan Bernal, 22, who became the youngest rider to win the Tour de France for 110 years, won the breakthrough award after winning the world’s top cycling race in what was only his second three-week classic event.

“I’m really happy, this is a big result for me in my career,” the Colombian said in a video. German F3 driver Sophia Floersch scooped the comeback of the year award for racing once again at the Macau Grand Prix last November, a year after a crash on the same circuit left her with a spinal fracture.

Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar won the public vote for the top sporting moment over the last 20 years for leading his country to victory at the 2011 World Cup at the sixth attempt. German basketball star Dirk Nowitzki was recognised with the lifetime achievement award. — AFP



**BERLIN:** Laureus World Comeback of the Year award winner German racing driver Sophia Floersch poses on the red carpet after the 2020 Laureus World Sports Awards ceremony in Berlin. — AFP

on loan at lower-league sides Hereford United, Tranmere Rovers and Hull City.

“I managed to be on the bench 52 times at Liverpool and I never played a game in the first team but I learned a lot on my loans,” said Gulacsi.

“When you are at a big club like Liverpool, you know it is not easy to get into the first team. “I still gave my best, but Pepe Reina was one of the top three ‘keepers in the whole world at that time.

“It was still a great experience to train with the first team, to learn from those players.” Gulacsi was 23 when he left in 2013 to join Salzburg, winning the Austrian league and cup double in each of his two seasons there.

Today, while Gulacsi tries to keep a Spurs attack deprived of Harry Kane at bay, he will also hope Germany striker Timo Werner can wreak havoc at the other end. Werner has 20 league goals this season and three in the Champions League.

“In terms of his first few steps, Timo is one of the quickest players in Europe,” said Gulacsi. “He has also stepped up his game tactically this season and his scoring form is simply superb.”

Gulacsi turns 30 on May 6, when he hopes Leipzig will still be in the running for the German title. They are currently second, a point behind Bayern. “It would probably be the biggest moment in my career and a fantastic achievement,” he said of the prospect of Leipzig becoming champions. “But we still have a lot of work to do.” —AFP

## Lampard asks for Chelsea fight after United defeat

**LONDON:** Chelsea manager Frank Lampard told his side the “fight starts now” for a place in the Champions League next season after suffering a 2-0 smash and grab defeat at the hands of Manchester United on Monday.

The Blues had two goals disallowed by VAR reviews and were furious Harry Maguire was not sent-off for an off-the-ball kick out at Michy Batshuayi before he headed in United’s second goal after Anthony Martial’s opener.

Lampard cut a frustrated figure as the flaws in both boxes which have seen his side win just four of their last 14 league games were exposed once more against ordinary opposition.

“The fight starts now,” said Lampard. “It’s not worth me going on about it now but the reality was there for us to see. “If we’re not going to take chances then we’re not going to win games. When you dominate large periods you have to take your chances.”

Victory lifts United up to seventh and within three points of Chelsea in fourth, while fifth could now even be good enough to qualify for the Champions League next season pending Manchester City’s appeal again a two-season ban from European competition. However, even United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted he had not been impressed by the visitors’ performance. “When you win 2-0 here you are delighted,” said Solskjaer. “Then again I didn’t think we played well, particularly with the ball in the first half. We were cumbersome, slow, passing wasn’t great but we got the first goal then we hung in there.”

Lampard made a bold call before kick-off by again dropping the most expensive goalkeeper in football history, Kepa Arrizabalaga, to the bench in favour of the 38-year-old Willy Caballero.

Batshuayi also started with Tammy Abraham ruled out by injury and Lampard’s anger at missing out on a striker in the January window was borne out by a poor night for the misfiring Belgium forward.

But the course of the game could have been very different had Maguire not escaped unpunished for kicking Batshuayi after the two collided in front of the dugouts. “I know I caught him and I felt he was going to fall on me and my natural reaction was to straighten my leg to stop him,” said Maguire.

“I apologised to him and it was nice that the referee saw sense.”

Chelsea’s sense of injustice increased when Willian was harshly booked for diving as he went down under a challenge from Bruno Fernandes looking for a penalty.

United had not made Caballero make a single save before going in front a minute before the break when Martial planted a brilliant header into the far corner from Aaron Wan-Bissaka’s cross.

There was still time for Batshuayi to miss another chance before half-time when he skewed wide from a narrow angle. The one-way traffic continued at the start of the second period as Mount hit the post and a brave block from Wan-Bissaka deflected Pedro’s goal-bound effort behind. But even when Chelsea did get the ball in the net through substitute Kurt Zouma, the goal was ruled out by VAR for a push on Brandon Williams by Cesar Azpilicueta.

Fernandes was unable to make much of an impact from open play in his second United appearance since a £47 million (\$62 million) move from Sporting Lisbon. However, the Portuguese international is a huge threat from set-pieces and nearly caught Caballero out with a free-kick that crashed back off the post.

Moments later, Fernandes provided his first assist for the Red Devils with a corner which Maguire powered home. Lampard had seen enough from Batshuayi and handed Olivier Giroud a rare appearance off the bench for the final quarter.

The French striker thought he had given Chelsea a lifeline with a near post header, but was ruled offside after a VAR review. —AFP

## AC Milan eye Euro spots after Torino win

**NILAN:** AC Milan closed in on the European places in Serie A after Ante Rebic fired them to a 1-0 win over Torino on Monday. Rebic swept home Samu Castillejo’s low pull back in he 25th minute to consign to draw Milan level on 35 points with Hellas Verona, who currently occupy the final Europa League spot on goal difference.

Rebic’s winning goal was his sixth in seven games in all competitions, a run that comes after failing to score at all in the first half of the season. The Croatian’s strike helped the hosts bounce back from last week’s derby disappointment against Inter Milan to continue a positive run under coach Stefano Pioli that also saw them unlucky not to beat Juventus in the Coppa Italia semi-final first leg last week.

They have lost just once since the turn of the year — to title-chasing Inter — and are playing well enough to aim for European football next season. However the Champions League will likely be beyond them thanks to the 10-point gap between them and fourth-placed Atalanta.

Torino meanwhile are inching closer to the relegation zone after their fifth straight defeat, a slump that shows little sign of ending. They are just five points from the drop despite bringing in Moreno Longo to replace Walter Mazzarri earlier this month. — AFP



**DAMASCUS:** Members of the Amuda women’s team carry the winner’s cup as they are greeted by locals in the northeastern Syrian town of Amuda in Hasakeh province on February 1, 2020 upon their return from a football tournament in Damascus. — AFP

## Kurdish women win big with Syria title

**AMUDA:** Samar Sheikh’s neighbours used to tell her football was not for girls but the criticism stopped when her team won the very first women’s championship in Syria. The 20-year-old also finished top scorer at the end of a season that saw teams from all over Syria face off over weeks before the final that was held in late January in Damascus.

“I’ve been hooked on football since I was little,” says Sheikh during a training session in Amuda, a town in northeastern Syria where part of the autonomous Kurdish administration is headquartered.

“I used to watch my brothers play and I’ve watched a lot of games,” she says, as her teammates, all wearing fluorescent bibs, jog behind the coach on the artificial grass of the covered pitch. The young Kurdish woman, sweat pearly down her face and her ruffled hair in a ponytail, recounts how she started playing when she was 15 but had to stop “because of the criticism from her family and neighbours.”

She came back to it more determined than ever to

overcome social and gender prejudice and it all paid off when it was with cheers that a crowd greeted her and her team off the bus after winning the national trophy.

With their medals around their necks, Sheikh and her teammates even went on a celebratory tour of Amuda, joined in dance by residents congratulating them and asking for selfies. “I couldn’t believe it,” she says. “Seeing all these people in the street to celebrate our victory.”

After a week-long break the team has resumed training for two hours a day. Dalaf Hussein faced the same challenges as a teenage girl trying to live her passion for football in northeastern Syria. Plastered on the walls of her room are posters of her favourite players, including one of Portuguese legend and Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo.

“Passersby used to bother us when they saw us play in the street because it was considered a boys’ sport, but we never paid attention,” she says. Hussein says she also had to deal with her parents’ opposition to her playing football.

“But after our victory in the championship, there was no pushback,” she says, with a chuffed smile. Syrian society is still largely patriarchal and conservative but women enjoy greater gender equality in areas under Kurdish control.

Hussein says she hopes football will continue to grow in her region. “Many girls have come to sign up since our victory,” she says. —AFP

<div> <div> <div>Live</div> </div> <div>Matches on TV</div> <div>(Local Timings)</div> </div>		
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Manchester City v West Ham United	22:30	
beIN Sports		
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
Atalanta v Valencia C.F	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 2		
Tottenham Hotspur v RB Leipzig	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 1		



**25** Mako Vunipola out of Ireland Six Nations clash



**26** NZ's Taylor bats away retirement talk ahead of 100th Test



**27** Hamilton, Messi share men's Laureus award



## Lightning top Avalanche in OT



**LAS VEGAS:** Mark Stone #61 of the Vegas Golden Knights skates with the puck against Michal Kempny #6 of the Washington Capitals in the second period of their game at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Golden Knights defeated the Capitals 3-2. — AFP

**DENVER:** Nikita Kucherov scored at 3:03 of overtime, and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Colorado Avalanche 4-3 for their franchise-best 11th consecutive win in Denver on Monday night. Kucherov stole the puck from Avalanche All-Star Nathan MacKinnon, raced down the ice and beat Pavel Francouz through the pads to win it with his 29th goal of the season. Alex Killorn and Cameron Gaunce scored goals 16 seconds apart in the second period, Steven Stamkos also had a goal, and Curtis McElhinney made 24 saves for Tampa Bay. MacKinnon had a goal and an assist, Andre Burakovsky and Valeri Nichushkin also scored, and Gabriel Landeskog had two assists for Colorado. Mikko Rantanen added an assist before leaving with an apparent shoulder injury in the second period.

### GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3, CAPITALS 2

Marc-Andre Fleury finished with 24 saves, and Max Pacioretty scored the deciding goal as Vegas

moved into a tie for first place in the Pacific Division by beating Washington in Las Vegas. Reilly Smith and Nick Holden also scored goals for Vegas, which won its third straight game and split its two-game regular-season series with the Capitals. Alex Ovechkin went scoreless for a season-long fifth straight game in his quest to become the eighth player in NHL history to score 700 goals. Ovechkin sits at 698. T.J. Oshie scored two goals, his 29th career two-goal game, and Jakub Vrana had two assists for Washington, which took its second straight loss and sixth in the past nine games. Braden Holtby had 26 saves for the Capitals, who lost in regulation on the road for just the eighth time in 30 games (21-8-1).

### FLAMES 6, DUCKS 4

Andrew Mangiapane had three goals and an assist to help Calgary rally from a two-goal deficit in the third period and defeat visiting Anaheim. Matthew Tkachuk

had a goal and an assist, Sam Bennett and Sean Monahan also scored in the third period, and Cam Talbot made 26 saves for Calgary, which is fighting for a wild-card spot in the Western Conference. Jakob Silfverberg had a goal and an assist, Adam Henrique, Nicolas Deslauriers and Devin Shore also scored, and Ryan Miller made 37 saves for Anaheim, which had earned points in its previous six road games (4-0-2).

### PANTHERS 5, SHARKS 3

Sergei Bobrovsky, who was winless in his previous five starts, made 29 saves in leading Florida to a victory at San Jose. Bobrovsky, who missed Florida's previous game due to the flu, had been in a 0-4-1 slump. The Panthers, who have won eight of their past nine games in San Jose, got goals from Evgenii Dadonov (his team-high 24th of the season), Mike Hoffman, Colton Sceviour, Anton Stralman and Vincent Trocheck. San Jose, which got goals from Dylan

Gambrell, Kevin Labanc and Timo Meier, failed to get the victory for interim coach Bob Boughner, who was fired by Florida on April 7, 2019. The Sharks, who got 23 saves from goalie Aaron Dell, have lost four consecutive home games.

### COYOTES 2, ISLANDERS 1

Clayton Keller and Conor Garland scored goals for Arizona, which held off a third-period rally by New York to earn a win in Glendale, Ariz. The win was the second straight for the Coyotes — their first back-to-back victories since a four-game streak from Dec. 31-Jan. 7. Coyotes goalie Antti Raanta made 28 saves, including 10 in the third period. Anthony Beauvillier scored in the third period to snap the Islanders' scoreless streak at 166 minutes and 46 seconds, but New York could not get the equalizer as it lost its third straight. Islanders goalie Semyon Varlamov recorded 30 saves. — Reuters

## Late Leandro stunner breaks Perth hearts

**TOKYO:** Leandro's fine late strike gave FC Tokyo a 1-0 victory over debutants Perth Glory, as former Arsenal forward Park Chu-young scored FC Seoul's winner against Melbourne Victory in the AFC Champions League yesterday.

In yesterday's later kick-off, Beijing Guoan are the first Chinese side to take part in this year's competition after most clubs from China were barred until April over the coronavirus.

FC Tokyo dominated proceedings against Perth in the Japanese capital, but it was a turgid affair that

looked destined for a goalless draw until Leandro's brilliant winner with eight minutes to go.

The 26-year-old made space on the edge of the box and unleashed a dipping shot that curled inside goal-keeper Liam Reddy's far post.

It made for a disappointing maiden outing for last year's A-League runners-up, whose coach Tony Popovic guided Western Sydney Wanderers to the Asian title in 2014.

In Seoul, Park, 34, struck in the eighth minute to extend Victory's losing streak away to South Korean opposition to 16 games.

Beijing were cleared to play Thailand's Chiangrai United as they have been training outside of China, avoiding stringent travel restrictions imposed on Chinese passport-holders around Asia.

Nearly 1,900 people have now died and more than 72,000 people have been infected by the virus in China, with a swathe of sports events in the region cancelled or postponed. — AFP

## India bars Chinese wrestlers because of coronavirus

**NEW DELHI:** Chinese wrestlers will be unable to take part in the Asian Championships in New Delhi this week after being denied visas because of the coronavirus outbreak, an official said. India's government has suspended e-visas for Chinese nationals due to the deadly virus that has claimed more than 1,800 lives since spreading from its epicentre in the central city of Wuhan.

"They are not coming. Of course health concerns remain a big reason and the coronavirus outbreak is

deadly," Wrestling Federation of India assistant secretary Vinod Tomar told AFP. A Chinese Federation spokesperson was quoted as saying on the governing body's United World Wrestling (UWW) website: "The wrestlers are disappointed for sure."

Japanese world champions Kenichiro Fumita and Risako Kawai are among top wrestlers taking part. India's sports minister Kiren Rijiju said the denial of visas would not normally be allowed but there were exceptions for an extraordinary health crisis.

"We can't deny visa to citizens of any country because it is a part of the Olympic charter. We try to keep sports away from politics," Rijiju told reporters. "But where there is health concern or any technical issue, there are separate provisions for that."

The Asian Championships, which provide UWW ranking points that count towards seedings at this year's Tokyo Olympics, began yesterday and run until February 23. — AFP