

Friday Times

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Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

muna@kuwaittimes.net

National holidays

Kuwait is preparing to celebrate the National and Liberation Day holidays next week. The Civil Service Commission has announced that Tuesday and Wednesday will be official holidays, along with Thursday, because it falls between two holidays and the weekend. Official work will resume on Sunday, March 1, 2020.

This is great break; some people may stay in Kuwait and participate in the activities that are expected to be held during this period, while others may choose to travel outside the country to enjoy the vacation. The national days are celebrated as major historical, political and social events of the country, where official buildings are decorated with national flags as well as a number of residential

houses, and fireworks are usually launched on the occasion.

Celebrations of the national holiday have witnessed several phases in the past 50 years and went through many changes throughout history. In the Seventies and Eighties, celebrations of National Day were held along Arabian Gulf Street with the involvement of various state and private institutions, and school students participated in these celebrations.

I think in the past five years, this national celebration has been exposed to extraneous and offensive scenes, and some people have acted in a manner that does not indicate patriotism, love, respect or even understanding of why we celebrate. The celebrations have taken on more dangerous aspects of harm rather than joy, especially when foam is sprayed on pedestrians and drivers irresponsibly without any regard for their health and safety. Also, the water used in water guns may be replaced by harmful liquids.

The police and security force, of course, play their role, but, parents have a major role by encouraging their children to not use water guns against people in the name of joy and waste large quantities of water for no reason. Some behaviors are insulting the national days despite attempts to con-

trol the places where the use of water guns is permitted.

Some drivers take part in spraying foam rather than focusing on driving, which causes accidents. Some people prepare balloons that are filled with water and throw it on passing cars. Unfortunately, some families allow their children to spray cars in the inside streets of residential areas for days until the end of the weekend, so everyone is exposed to a lot of harm.

Sadly, the celebration has turned from a happy occasion that people look forward to, whether citizens or expatriates, to a celebration that is characterized by harm to innocents and riots. I hope that security will be imposed on everyone by confining these ceremonies in specific areas and away from the streets to provide safe enjoyment for the public.

It is important for these young people to know why we celebrate this occasion and its importance, but some people do not know anything other than buying water guns and spraying it on people. This is a big mistake, because this is a national occasion when many people sacrificed their lives for this land to be safe, and not a water festival.

I wish happy and safe holidays to everyone.

Vaccines in Kuwait

By Nawara Fattahova

Like everywhere in the world, in Kuwait there are obligatory and recommended vaccinations. There are no obligatory vaccinations for adults, but children receive their first vaccination after they are born. A doctor at a polyclinic spoke to Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity about vaccinations in Kuwait. "The first vaccination is given to the baby after birth, then in the second month, fourth month, sixth month, one year, 18 months, two years, three and a half years and then in school. The school health department of the ministry of health is in charge of vaccinations in the schooling period," he said.

Vaccinations include the DT (diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough) vaccination, MMR [measles, mumps and rubella (German measles)], and others. "These vaccinations are obligatory for all kids as they are the basic ones. Then



The most popular preventive vaccine is the seasonal flu shot

there are preventive vaccines that are recommended for boosting immunity against some diseases. When the ministry launched the MMR vaccination around two years ago, many people were scared of getting vaccinated after some influencers wrongly warned against it, claiming it may have adverse effects on health. Later, people regretted it and are now getting this vaccine," stressed the doctor.

Global rates of vaccinations for children have declined due to unscientific claims regarding the negative effects and this has led to resurgence in previously eradicated

diseases like measles, polio and others. Any claimed links between vaccines like the MMR and autism have been discredited and the doctors involved have lost their medical licenses.

"Some vaccinations can be taken preventively when the person is an adult, even if they received the vaccination as a child, such as MMR. Also, when people are planning to travel to countries affected by an epidemic or during certain seasons, we recommend them to get vaccinated for diseases prevalent in that country. The most popular preventive vaccine is the seasonal flu shot. Pilgrims are advised to get vaccinated for meningitis, rheumatoid arthritis and influenza," he told Kuwait Times.

Some countries require certain vaccinations before obtaining a visa. "For instance, the embassy of the United States requires DT or influenza vaccines, some countries demand the MMR, and so on.

Also, people working in some professions have to be vaccinated against hepatitis B, such as medical staff working here or those who come from abroad with reduced immunity," the doctor explained.

All these vaccinations are available at public polyclinics for everyone (citizens and expats) free of charge. "Getting these vaccinations is totally safe with no side effects. The ministry of health sometimes organizes awareness campaigns on vaccinations. We also held a campaign for polio vaccination, although this disease has been eradicated in Kuwait," he concluded.

Schedule of Essential Vaccination by Age, State of Kuwait, 2008

Age of Vaccination	Vaccine Type	Route of Administration
Pregnant mother	- 2 doses of Tetanus Toxoid in 5 th & 7 th month of 1 st Pregnancy (0.5ml) - One dose for TT for each next pregnancy (0.5ml)	- I.M in deltoid muscle
2 nd day of child birth	- 1 st Dose of Hepatitis B (HBV)	- I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of thigh
End of 2 nd month of age	- 1 st Dose of IPV (Salk) (0.5ml) - 1 st Dose of Pentavalent (DPT Hib HBV) (0.5ml) - 1 st Dose of Pneumococcal (PCV13)(0.5ml)	- I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of thigh - I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of other thigh
End of 3 rd month	- BCG vaccine	- Intradermal in the Upper lateral part of left arm
End of 4 th month of age	- 1 st Dose of OPV (type 1,2,3) - 2 nd Dose of Pentavalent - 2 nd Dose of Pneumococcal	- 2 Drops Oral Sabin - I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of thigh - I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of other thigh
End of 6 th month of age	- 2 nd Dose of OPV (type 1,2,3) - 3 rd Dose of Pentavalent - 3 rd Dose of Pneumococcal	- 2 Drops Oral Sabin - I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of thigh - I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of other thigh
1 st year of age	- MMR vaccine (0.5ml) - 3 rd Dose of OPV (type 1,2,3)	- S.C in the arm - 2 Drops Oral Sabin
18 th month of age	- 4 th Dose of OPV (type 1,2,3) - Booster Dose of Pentavalent - Booster Dose of Pneumococcal	- 2 Drops Oral Sabin - I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of thigh - I.M Upper middle or mid anterior of other thigh
2 years old	- Meningococcal meningitis (ACWY) - Booster Dose of MMR (0.5ml)	- S.C in the arm (0.5ml) - S.C in the other arm
3.5 years old	- Booster Dose of OPV(type 1,2,3) - Booster Dose of DPT (0.5ml)	- 2 Drops Oral Sabin - I.M
10-12 years old	- Booster Dose of MMR (Females) - Td (Tetanus + Diphtheria) (0.5ml)	- S.C in the arm - I.M in deltoid muscle
16-18 years old	- Td (Tetanus + Diphtheria) (0.5ml)	- I.M in deltoid muscle

(according to Ministerial Circular No. 75 /2008)

Ready for the Beach ??



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PHOTO FEATURE



Kuwait ready for National & Liberation Day celebrations

Decorated and aglow, Kuwait is ready to celebrate the country's National Day and Liberation Day holidays this coming week. The civil Service commission has granted Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday as off to all government entities. Tens of thousands of people will travel for the break but many more will stay in the country and celebrate with parades and picnics along the Gulf road and activities and events throughout the week.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh



Local



Local

How to get your child's birth certificate in Kuwait



By Ben Garcia

If you are an expat and want to start a family in Kuwait, prepare for the hassles brought about by boundless bureaucracy, starting from obtaining a birth certificate. This is needed to secure a passport (at your embassy) and iqama (from the residency department). A report of birth must be made within 60 days to avoid penalties. Negligence to do so carries a penalty of imprisonment or a fine, if you've done it twice.

At public hospitals, maternity charges have increased drastically since 2016 to KD 150 for a C-section and KD 100 for normal delivery. This is despite the fact that every expat in Kuwait needs to pay KD 50 in mandatory annual health insurance fees.

Kuwait Times followed Ronel Musni Bucu and wife Marjorie in their efforts to secure a birth certificate. They live in Khaitan, so Marjorie delivered her first baby at Farwaniya Hospital. Here's the step by step procedure for getting a birth certificate:

1. To use public health services, a married, pregnant woman must open a file in both the area clinic and the maternity hospital. Registration costs KD 10 and the woman gets a yellow card. Which clinic you may visit is determined by the address on your civil ID. Everything starts at the clinic, with a series of appointments and check-ups with doctors. During each visit, you will be required to pay KD 2. If need be, you will

be told to buy vitamins from outside. Vitamins at the clinic are only given to Kuwaitis and are not available for expats. Once you have the yellow card and visit the clinic regularly, the doctor will refer you to a hospital to open a file there too.

2. Opening the file at the hospital costs KD 10. A copy of medical interventions during the nine-month period will be sent to the hospital prior to delivery. The hospital will be ready for any eventuality or in case of emergency.

3. You are also required to attest your marriage certificate at the ministry of foreign affairs, which costs KD 5. All your legal documents have to be translated to Arabic, as they are needed at the hospital. The translated marriage certificate has to be attested by your embassy too. You will need all of this for the baby's discharge procedure from the hospital.

4. Ronel and Marjorie's baby was delivered at Farwaniya Hospital on Jan 29. She was admitted at midnight on Jan 27. Since it was not during the visiting hours for men, one of his female co-workers helped them with the necessary paperwork for the baby's delivery. After all the procedures were completed, the hospital nurse promised to contact the father once his wife delivered, but even by the third day, she hadn't. He insisted to visit the following day and found his wife had delivered their baby a day after being admitted.

5. The following day, he went to fetch his wife and the newborn baby from the hospital. Ronel submitted all the necessary documents before getting a pink copy of the birth record from the hospital. The officers at the hospital records department told him to go to the government birth records department in Subhan to secure the birth certificate. He was

reminded to submit the paper immediately to avoid being penalized.

6. At the Subhan record section, an employee told Ronel the record was not ready yet. The man advised him to return after four days. When he went there a few days later, he was told there were some erasures on his papers, which is not acceptable.

7. Ronel then had to attest these documents at the translation department. On same day, he went back to secure the birth certificate and was told to come back after a week to receive the birth certificate card.

Note: The birth card will be in Arabic and this will need to be translated into the language of your home country so that you can then proceed to apply for a passport for the child, which is necessary to obtain residency for the child.

Birth Certificate Centers:

Residents of Salmiya, Rumaithiya, Hawally, Shaab, Dasman can secure their birth certificate at Maidan Hawally

Residents of Kuwait City, Khaitan, Omariya, Farwaniya and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh should go to the birth records department in Subhan.

Those living in Fahaheel, Egaila, Ahmadi, Abu Halifa and Mangaf must secure birth certificates from Ahmadi governorate birth records office.



Local

Zain shares joys of National holidays with Zain Hospital, care centers

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, organized a number of social visits to Zain Otolaryngology Hospital and the Ministry of Social Affairs' care centers to share the joys and happiness of Kuwait's National holidays.

Zain organizes many visits to hospitals and social care centers several times a year in celebration of various occasions. The initiative, which comes under the umbrella of the company's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy, aims at sharing the joys and happiness of many occasions that are cherished by the community, most importantly the National holidays of Kuwait, ultimately reflecting the family spirit and noble values of the Kuwaiti people.

The social visits, which were conducted by Zain's volunteers, embodied a special family spirit filled with National pride and joy. Zain's team distributed gifts and toys to children, their families, and the medical staff taking care of them in Zain Otolaryngology Hospital. The team also distributed gifts and toys to orphans, the elderly, and people with special needs who reside at the Ministry of Social Affairs' Social Care Centers.

Zain expressed its heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all the parties involved in organizing the visits, including hospital staff, officials, children's families, and the volunteers themselves, who all helped draw a smile on the faces of the children and care center's residents. Through such annual social visits during special occasions, Zain aims at enriching its commitment to celebrating Kuwait's National holidays through ongoing social activities that generate a sense of generosity and caring. As a responsible telecommunications company, Zain looks to improve the lives of the people within the communities it serves.



From Zain's National celebrations with the Social Care Centers



Zain recognized for its participation

QNB Official Sponsor of "Made in Qatar 2020" Exhibition in Kuwait

QNB, the largest financial institution in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region, took part in "Made in Qatar 2020" exhibition held in Kuwait as the event's official sponsor, in the presence of Mr. Abdulla Mubarak Al-Khalifa, Group Chief Executive Officer, a number of senior bank officials, along with employees of the Group's branch in Kuwait.

The bank's pavilion displays banking services and products for individuals and companies aimed to develop small and medium enterprises in a way that enhances the national economy in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

The pavilion also highlights a package of banking products equipped with the latest technology to suit the Group customer's financial needs and exceed their expectations.

QNB Group was awarded as one of the sponsors of "Made in Qatar" exhibition, in appreciation of its continuous efforts in supporting this big event.

The Group's participation came as part of its keenness to support events that promote national products and contribute to developing economic growth in the country.

It also reflects the bank's commitment towards bolstering local industry, enhancing Qatari entrepreneurs, promoting the locally manufactured products outside the country, as well as supporting Qatari exporters and helping them find new markets for local products that contribute to enhancing local produc-



tion and benefiting local economy and industry. QNB Group and the Qatar Chamber signed a sponsorship contract for the "Made in Qatar 2020" exhibition organized by the Qatar Chamber in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Qatar Development Bank, the strategic partner. The events took place at the Kuwait International Exhibition Center in Kuwait City on 19 - 22 February 2020, with the participation of About 220 Qatari industrial companies.

It is worth noting that QNB opened its first branch in Kuwait in 2007, providing all banking products for individuals and companies, and distinguished banking services for QNB First customers, in addition to innovative products and services designed to suit the requirements of the Kuwaiti market. The bank also recently opened its second branch in the Avenues Mall, making it the first non-Kuwaiti financial institution to obtain approval from Kuwaiti regulatory bodies to open a second branch in the country.

Local

Kuwait's Amir, Omani Sultan discuss ties, regional affairs

Speaker Ghanem receives Arab, foreign ambassadors



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday received a phone call from Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tareq, dealing with deep-rooted bilateral relations and issues of common interest as well as regional affairs. The Omani sultan wished His Highness lifelong good health, prosperity for the State of Kuwait and its people. His Highness the Amir expressed iden-

tical sentiments in his reply.

In other news, Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem received yesterday a number of Arab and foreign ambassadors. Ghanem received Kuwaiti Ambassador to Lebanon Abdul'al Al-Qenai, Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tareq Al-Quoni, Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang, and the new US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski.

In the meantime, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met with French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy on the occasion of the end of her tenure. Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad commended the ambassador for her efforts to boosting French-Kuwaiti relations, wishing her the best in her future endeavors. A score of Foreign Ministry officials attended the meeting. —KUNA

Prime Minister inaugurates festival at Shaheed Park



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah inaugurates a national festival at the Shaheed Park Wednesday. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah looks at a mural for Kuwait's martyrs at Shaheed Park.

KUWAIT: Under the auspices and attendance of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah inaugurated a national festival at the Shaheed Park Wednesday marking the occasion of National Day and Liberation Day anniversaries. The festival was also attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, a number of senior Sheikhs, ministers, advisors, governors, and senior state officials from the Amiri Diwan and the Prime Minister's Office. The festival started with a presentation of two documentary films, one on the history of oil

in the country, and the other on Kuwaiti martyrs who had athletic backgrounds. In addition, the premier also inaugurated Kuwait's martyr mural, which was renovated by the martyr's office. The festival ended with a musical presentation presented by a number of Kuwaiti artists, which included paintings that embodied the country's heritage in the sea and desert. In a press statement, His Highness the Prime Minister affirmed that the state is sparing no effort in supporting everything that would perpetuate the biography of Kuwaiti martyrs in documenting their heroic sacrifices. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Qatari Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali Al-Kuwari. —KUNA



Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan and Qatari Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali Al-Kuwari tour the 'Made in Qatar' exhibition.

Kuwait's Premier receives Qatari Commerce Minister

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday Qatari Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali Al-Kuwari. Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan was present at the meeting. Also yesterday, Roudhan and Kuwari held a meeting in which they discussed ways to enhance economic cooperation. Kuwait's commerce ministry said in a press statement that officials from the ministry and other authorities attended the meeting. The 'Made in Qatar' exhibition opened Wednesday in Kuwait, under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister, and in presence of Kuwari, and President of Qatar Chamber Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim Al Thani, as well as the participation of the private sector and Qatari factories to

display their products in Kuwait's market.

On the sidelines of the exhibition's opening ceremony, Roudhan said that his ministry was seeking to make Kuwait an open market in a bid to contribute to promoting national economy. He said that the exhibition reflects distinguished economic and trade relations between Kuwait and Qatar, adding that trade exchange shot up by 30 percent over the last couple of years. The Kuwaiti minister spoke highly of the significance of such exhibitions to consumers who can get familiar with fresh types of products. Meanwhile, the Qatari minister said that the exhibition offers privileges and facilities to Qatari products, thanking the Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry for smoothing all necessary procedures. — KUNA

Local

Speaker Ghanem lashes out at opposition for assembly chaos

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday issued a very stern warning to those who try to breach the constitution and the assembly internal charter, saying he will continue to face them and will stop them.

Ghanem told reporters that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is aware of what happened and he asked him to convey his greetings to the majority of lawmakers who complied with the constitution and the law.

Ghanem accused what he called a "small minority" in the assembly of attempting to repeat the "black Wednesday" when hundreds of opposition lawmakers and activists stormed the National Assembly building in 2011, insisting that this will never happen again in Kuwait.

The speaker reiterated that it was one opposition MP - he previously named as MP Mohammad Al-Mutair - who started the chaos and problems in the assembly and called on the opposition MPs to be brave enough to criticize him. He reiterated that no pardon will be granted except from the one who grants pardons, in a clear reference to His Highness the Amir.

Ghanem also insisted that "we will not bow to intellectual and media terror" from any side. But leading opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri still held Ghanem responsible for the clashes and

chaos that took place in the National Assembly on Tuesday. Muwaizri described the incident as unprecedented in Kuwait's 58 years of parliamentary life and called on the speaker to investigate the incidents by watching all videos that were taken.

The lawmaker charged that crowds sat at opposing sides of the gallery and supporters of the speaker sat on one side and they hurled insults at opposition lawmakers and the speaker did not make any attempt to stop them.

Muwaizri also asked the prime minister if the newly-appointed minister of electricity and water Mohammad Bushehri will continue in his post after the court of cassation convicted him in a case and ordered him to pay a fine of KD 3,000.

Meanwhile, MP Saleh Ashour said yesterday that a special panel formed by the National Assembly to probe suspected irregularities at Kuwait Airways has been entrusted to carry out a comprehensive investigation into all the deals with the national carrier.

The lawmaker said the panel elected MP Bader Al-Mulla as its chairman and Ashour as the rapporteur and will commence its investigation immediately following the national holidays. He said the investigation will include the deal to purchase 25 aircraft from Airbus amid suspected kickbacks and also reported financial and administrative violations and irregularities in ap-



KUWAIT: In this file photo, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem (left) argues with MP Mohammad Al-Mutair during a parliament session at the National Assembly on February 18, 2020. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

pointments. The panel will also investigate other deals struck by Kuwait Airways.

The National Assembly on Wednesday formed the investigation panel and also asked the Audit Bureau to launch a comprehensive investigation into the deal and report to the assembly within one month. The investigation was ordered by the assembly after the names of Kuwait and several Kuwaiti personalities were mentioned in a ruling by a British court last

month which covered a settlement with Airbus which agreed to pay \$4 billion in relation to charges of paying bribes.

Similar actions were taken by some countries over similar allegations. MP Riyadh Al-Adasani, who first raised the issue, said yesterday that records related to the Airbus aircraft deal must be examined and necessary procedures must be taken to refer the whole issue to the public prosecution.

Kuwait has no plans to grant amnesty to violators: Report

KUWAIT: Kuwait does not plan to grant amnesty to visa violators this year, a local daily reported yesterday, citing the 'large number of violators' who allegedly take advantage of the grace period to leave without paying fines and retain the ability to return to the Gulf state in the future. "There is a large number of violators who use the amnesty as a way to circumvent the law," an anonymous security source told Al-Rai daily, adding that once arrested, violators of labor regulations "will be deported after their fingerprints are taken, and will not be allowed to enter Kuwait or any other Gulf country for five years."

According to the source, local authorities have noticed an increase in the number of workers reported absconding by their sponsors, who are later found working for others illegally, while hoping that a grace period would help them avoid arrest and leave Kuwait without paying fines, then return later with a new visa. "Many domestic helpers escape from their sponsors, especially before the Ramadan season, to collect large amounts of money by working in homes on hourly basis while waiting for a pardon," the source argued, noting that the "harm this situation causes for citizens and their families" is a main reason that authorities keep in consideration while making a decision not to grant an amnesty for violators. Measures taken by security authorities through raids and field tours contributed to reducing the number of residency law violators to around 120,000, according to the source.

Temporary power cuts expected in several areas around Kuwait

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Some areas in Kuwait might experience temporary power cuts in the coming few days as the Ministry of Electricity and Water is carrying out a comprehensive maintenance plan for power stations to boost the grid's production capacity in parallel with population increase. According to a statement the ministry made available to the press yesterday, power cuts are expected to occur from 8:00 am to 11:00 am for five days in the following areas: Mangaf, Um Al-Haiman, Fahad Al-Ahmad, Hadiya and Mahboula in Ahmadi Governorate, Salmiya and Hawally in Hawally Governorate, Faiha, Kaifan, Mansouriya, Mirqab and Ghernata in the Capital Governorate, as well as Omariya, Rabiya and Ferdous in Farwaniya Governorate.

Disabled employees

The parliament's committee for disabled people's affairs approved several amendments on the disabled rights' law, panel member MP Khalil Al-Saleh said yesterday, adding that one of the amendments excludes disabled citizens from the social securities law in regards to retirement, allowing employees to receive a full pension after serving for 10 years as long as the pension's amount does not exceed KD 2,750 a month. "We approved giving the right to the disabled or those who care for them to apply asking for a reduction of two working hours a day for employees with medium or sever disability, and one

hour a day for employees with mild disabilities," he added.

Retirement

The Interior Ministry has started calling high ranking officers who reached 60 years of age in order to prepare them for referral to retirement, sources said, adding that this step comes on the heels of recent promotions that saw several Colonels promoted to Brigadiers. "One Brigadier has already been asked to retire," said the sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity. This comes as the ministry looks to 'inject new blood' especially amongst supervisory staff, the sources explained, further suggesting that many of the current assistant secretaries and department directors will be replaced.

Kuwait stops work permit for expats over 70

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower began rejecting applications to renewing work permits for expatriates who reach 70 years of age regardless of their job titles, Al-Anbaa daily reported yesterday quoting an official source at the authority. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the source explained that this decision is a first step that will likely be gradually followed with another to reject work permit issuance applications for applicants who reach 65 years of age. Expat laborers who reach that age limit can still transfer to a family dependency visa according to the rules and regulations of the Interior Ministry's Residency Affairs Department, said the source.



Romanian boxer inspires girls to knock out poverty

Virus brings two foes together - Japan and China

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HANAU: General view of the street where one of the bar that was targeted in a shooting at the Heumarkt in the centre of Hanau, near Frankfurt am Main, western Germany yesterday. —AFP

Gunman hits shisha bar, kills 9

German Chancellor condemns 'poison' of racism

HANAU: Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned the "poison" of racism yesterday after a shooter with suspected far-right beliefs killed nine people at a shisha bar and a cafe in the German city of Hanau. The suspect, identified as 43-year-old German Tobias R, was found dead at his home following an hours-long manhunt. The body of his 72-year-old mother was also found at the flat in what appeared to be a murder-suicide. Federal counter-terror prosecutors said they suspected "a xenophobic motive" behind the shootings, the latest deadly attack blamed on the far right in Germany.

"Racism is a poison, hatred is a poison and this poison exists in our society and it is already to blame for far too many crimes," Merkel said in Berlin. The suspect left behind online a "manifesto" and video material suggesting "a hostile attitude to foreigners", said Peter Beuth, the interior minister of the state of Hesse. Among the dead were "several victims of Kurdish origin", the Kon-Med association of Kurds in Germany said in a statement, adding that it was "furious" that authorities were not doing more to combat rising extremism.

Tears and anger

The rampage started at around 10:00 pm (2100 GMT) Wednesday at the Midnight shisha bar in central Hanau, some 20 kilometers east of Frankfurt. The gunman reportedly rang the doorbell and then shot at people in the smoking section, mass-market daily Bild said. He fled the scene by car before opening fire at the Arena Bar & Cafe, with witnesses reporting hearing a dozen shots.

A total of nine people were killed, police said, and several were injured. The bloodshed plunged Germany into mourning, and ral-

lies are scheduled in Berlin, Hanau and other cities yesterday to honor the victims. Relatives and friends of the victims gathered at the Arena bar around midday yesterday, an AFP reporter said, tearfully embracing one another.

Police hurried to cover up the address of the perpetrator's website with a blue plastic sheet after it was spray-painted on a nearby wall. "I couldn't be any more upset," said Inge Bank, 82, who lives near the bar. "We have to nip it in the bud if the Nazi party is coming back," Bank said, adding that she had lived through World War II. Interior Minister Horst Seehofer also visited the scene, laying flowers outside the Midnight bar. He said interior ministers from Germany's 16 states would later on discuss ways to improve security in light of the "very concerning" development in the extreme right scene.

'Same pattern'

The bar shootings sparked a massive manhunt, with police tracing the suspect's vehicle back to his home. Special forces then stormed his apartment where they found him and his mother dead, killed by gunshot. In a rambling 24-page document seen by AFP, the alleged gunman wrote that people from more than two dozen countries, including Turkey and Israel, should be "destroyed".

He also said he had never been with a woman, which he blamed on being "watched" by unspecified secret services. King's College London counter-terrorism expert Peter Neumann tweeted of the text that it contained "various, but mostly extreme right views, with a do-it-yourself ideology cobbled together out of parts found on the internet". "The pattern is clear, and not at all new," he added.

AFD criticism

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier echoed Merkel in denouncing the "terrorist violence" in Hanau. "I stand with all those who are threatened by racist hatred. You are not alone," he said. French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted that he supported Merkel "in the fight for our values and the protection of our democracies". Merkel pledged to fight back against "all those who try to divide Germany". She cited the murders carried out by the neo-Nazi "NSU" cell between 2000-07 as well as last June's killing of pro-migrant politician Walter Luebcke, and the deadly anti-Semitic attack in Halle in October as examples of the threat posed by the far right.

German police have identified around 60 far-right adherents as "dangerous" individuals capable of carrying out a violent attack. Last Friday, they arrested 12 members of a German extreme right group believed to have been plotting "shocking" large-scale attacks on mosques, similar to the ones carried out in New Zealand last year. As condemnation of the apparently racist violence in Hanau poured in, the co-leader of the far-right AfD party Joerg Meuthen stood out by saying the shootings were "neither right- nor left-wing terrorism" but the actions of "a madman".

Politicians from across the political spectrum however accused the anti-Islam, anti-immigrant AfD of normalizing hate speech and fomenting anti-foreigner sentiment in recent years. Founded in 2013, the AfD has risen to become the biggest opposition party in the German national parliament. It has railed against Germany's influx of asylum seekers and called for Germany to stop atoning for its Nazi past. — AFP

Anti-headscarf campaigner calls for Iran vote boycott

Supposed political choice - 'two faces of the same coin'

GENEVA: Anti-headscarf campaigner Shaparak Shajarizadeh once believed in the potential for change in Iran but is now so dispondent she is calling for a boycott of today's parliamentary elections in the Islamic Republic. Shajarizadeh became a dissident in 2018 when she was arrested for repeatedly removing her headscarf in public and waving it on the end of a stick, as part of a women's rights protest that caused a social media storm.

"The Iranian people lost their hopes... I was among those who had some hopes. But now it is like choosing between bad and worse," the 44-year-old women's rights campaigner told AFP in Geneva, where she was attending an annual conference for human rights activists. Shajarizadeh said the supposed political choice in Iran between reformist and conservative politicians was like picking between "two faces of the same coin".

Thousands of reformist and moderate candidates are in any case being barred from contesting the elections - something that critics say could turn the vote into a choice between conservatives and ultra-conservatives. Iranians "lost their hopes," particularly after a bloody crackdown last year on fuel-price protests, she said. Shajarizadeh calls President Hassan Rohani, who was first elected in 2013 and again in 2017 and was once seen as a possible force for change, a "so-called reformer".

Escape on foot

The protest movement against Iran's Islamic dress code began when in December 2017 when a woman, Vida Movahedi, stood on a pillar box on Enghelab Avenue in Tehran without the manda-

tory long coat and raised her veil on a stick. Enghelab means revolution in Farsi and the square and avenue are among the busiest areas in the capital.

Movahedi's move sparked similar protests by other women like Shajarizadeh and they soon won recognition as "Dokhtaran-e enghelab", or the Girls of Revolution Street. "Young women are back in the streets," she said - a reference to other demonstrations in recent years which have seen women taking a leading role. During her visit to Geneva, Shajarizadeh received a prize for her defense of women's rights in Iran but she talks about herself as an ordinary person whose life changed completely when she decided to join the protest.

She was arrested three times and beaten for her defiance. She decided to run away, crossing the mountains into Turkey on foot with her head covered to avoid detection. She now lives in Toronto in Canada with her husband and their 11-year-old son, from where she is still campaigning against the obligation of wearing the hijab. The BBC has listed her as one of the world's most influential women and she has written a book about her story with Canadian journalist Rima Elkouri.

Her lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, is a leading women's rights campaigner in her own right and is currently in prison. Shajarizadeh said "targeted sanctions" on the government could help change the situation in Iran but these should be designed "not to put more difficulties on the people". Ultimately she thinks the best agents of change are civil society movements like her own and the "real heroes" are the women who decide to show their hair in public. — AFP



GENEVA: Iranian women's rights activist Shaparak Shajarizadeh poses for photos during an interview with AFP on the sidelines of The Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy, in Geneva. — AFP

A year on, what next for Algeria's 'Hirak' protests?

PARIS: The December election of a regime insider to replace longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika has triggered questions about the future of Algeria's year-long "Hirak" protest movement. The spontaneous and leaderless youth-dominated anti-government movement has been motivated by the slogan "let them all go" - a reference to a political system deemed corrupt and inefficient. But analysts say that key demand appears to have been buried since the election of Abdelmadjid Tebboune - a former prime minister and member of Bouteflika's National Liberation Front.

The Hirak movement

Should it negotiate with a president who is far from being the fresh face protesters demanded, even if he has himself repeatedly said he was ready to "extend a hand" to cooperate with them? Should the Hirak build a solid structure for itself and designate representatives? Experts say the movement is divided on all those questions and faces important decisions. The protest movement is young "and everything it has done has been spontaneous",



ALGIERS: Algerian students and other protesters take part in an anti-government demonstration in the capital Algiers. — AFP

said Karima Direche, a historian and expert on contemporary issues facing North African countries. They "have to learn to listen to each other, accept that opinions could be different and learn to negotiate in order to reach a consensus. "We're not there yet," said Direche.

She said the Hirak has been "experimenting" since the movement first emerged on the scene in February 2019 to oppose a fifth presidential bid by an ailing Bouteflika. Pressure from the street forced Bouteflika to resign in April but that has not satisfied the demonstrators who demand the departure of the entire political system in place in Algeria since independence in 1962. Despite Tebboune's election, the protest movement is still seeking "political transition" in the oil-rich country and how to achieve it. "We're stuck in something quite bizarre: there is still a mobilization on the streets," said Direche, referring to the weekly Friday protests that

continue to grip Algeria a year on. "But there is a real difficulty to move on to something else," she said.

Time for decisions

Other analysts agreed. "The movement has important decisions to take," said Dalia Ghanem, a researcher at the Carnegie Middle East Center based in Beirut. For her, Hirak members agree only on two things: the need for a complete overhaul of the political system and to keep the protest movement peaceful.

But they disagree on how to achieve that end and on who should lead the movement, Ghanem said. The absence of leaders is undermining the ability of the protest movement to negotiate with authorities, she added. And, said Direche, there are no other "opposition forces who can take over" that task because unions, independent media and opposition parties do not really exist in Algeria. — AFP

Woman who exposed secret Yemen prisons wins rights prize

GENEVA: A lawyer who exposed a network of secret prisons in war-ravaged Yemen, where thousands of men and boys were arbitrarily held and tortured, on Wednesday received the world's most prestigious human rights prize. Huda Al-Sarari, 42, was hailed by the Martin Ennals Award jury for showing "rare courage" to investigate, expose and challenge a network of secret prisons established by foreign governments in Yemen since 2015. That year, the Saudis intervened in Yemen at the head of a military coalition against Iran-backed Huthi rebels, who had seized control of the capital Sanaa. Since then, the conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, and sparked what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Al-Sarari received the award, which is often referred to as the Nobel Prize for human rights, for her work exposing "the enforced disappearances that occurred as a result of secret prisons run by foreign governments in Yemen," the award organizers said in a statement.

Within this system "thousands of men and boys have suffered from arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings," it said. Al-Sarari "collected evidence on more than 250 cases of abuse taking place within the prisons and succeeded in convincing international organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to take up the cause," they said. The lawyer was hailed for pushing on with her pursuit of justice despite threats and defamation campaigns against her and her family. "Huda Al-Sarari has chosen not to leave Yemen," jury member Alice Mogwe of the FIDH said in the statement. "That is a decision which shows a rare courage, all the more so as she is working in a high-risk context and a source of danger for herself," she added. — AFP

International

Fighting rages in Syria, people fleeing have nowhere to go

Plight of civilians at horrifying level: UN

AZAZ: Russian warplanes struck at rebel-held towns in northwest Syria again yesterday and Turkish artillery supported insurgent attacks elsewhere as officials from the two countries struggled to reach a compromise to halt an escalation in the Syrian war. In Geneva, the United Nations refugee chief called for a halt to the fighting to allow hundreds of thousands of trapped civilians to move to places of safety.

Syrian troops backed by Russian forces have been battling since December to eradicate the last rebel bastions in Idlib and Aleppo provinces in what could be one of the final chapters of the nine-year-old civil war. But Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday threatened to launch a military operation against the government forces unless they pulled back, and Turkish troops and weaponry have already massed inside Syria.

Talks between Ankara, which supports some rebel factions, and Moscow to avert a wider war and a possible direct confrontation have struggled to make progress. Turkish officials sounded more optimistic yesterday and one said the latest round had not been "completely without a result". "Russia has maintained its position that Turkey withdraws from Idlib and evacuates its observation posts since the beginning. Withdrawing from Idlib or evacuating the observation posts is not on the agenda," the official said.

However, various options were being discussed, including the possibility of joint patrols in the area. Both Ankara and Moscow expected their presidents to "end the issue," he added.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said there had been some rapprochement with Russia in the talks but they were still not at the desired levels. Ankara and Moscow have accused each other of flouting a 2018 de-escalation agreement that allowed Turkey and Russia to set up observation posts in Idlib.

Turkey has said some of its posts in Idlib were surrounded by Syrian government forces. Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, whose family dynasty has ruled for nearly half a century, has showed no sign of letting up in the campaign to crush his foes once and for all. Residents and relief staff said Russian warplanes on Thursday resumed attacks on the towns of Darat Izza and Atareb in the northern corner of Aleppo province, where Turkish troops have set up a line of defense to thwart further advances by the Syrian army and allied Iranian militias.

In Idlib province, Turkish artillery provided cover fire for renewed rebel attacks on Nairab and the strategic crossroads town of Saraqeb, according to rebels and residents. The Turkish official told Reuters the artillery bombardments did not signal Erdogan had launched a full-scale operation.

Meanwhile there was no end in sight for the misery of the nearly one million people - most of them women and children - who have fled the fighting to seek sanctuary in the border area. The exodus has overwhelmed relief agencies but Turkey, which is struggling to cope with the 3.7 million Syrian refugees already camped inside



AN NAYRAB: Members of Syria's opposition National Liberation Front remotely fire a rocket at a position near the village of Al-Nayrab amid clashes with government forces yesterday. — AFP

its borders, says it can take no more. In Azaz, about 30 km northwest of Aleppo city, Abu Abdallah had been stranded on the road for days. After his family fled the air strikes pounding Idlib, they moved from one village to another but have yet to find refuge. With him were his wife, four children and 20 other relatives. "I don't know where to take them," the 49-year-old farmer said, sitting on his tractor. "God knows

where we will go." Families are sleeping outside by roads and in olive groves, burning garbage to stay warm. Some children have died from the cold. Some have already been displaced more than once after fleeing battles in other parts of Syria earlier in the conflict.

Aziza Hadaja, 70, said this was the third time she had been uprooted but in the past, she would go back home. — AFP

France shuts oldest reactors, but nuclear power still reigns

FESSENHEIM: France will start closing its oldest atomic power plant tomorrow after 43 years in operation, the first in a series of reactor shutdowns but hardly a signal the country will reduce its reliance on nuclear energy anytime soon. Unplugging the two reactors at Fessenheim, along the Rhine near France's eastern border with Germany and Switzerland, became a key goal of anti-nuclear campaigners after the catastrophic meltdown at Fukushima in Japan in 2011. Experts have noted that construction and safety standards at Fessenheim, brought online in 1977, fall far short of those at Fukushima, with some warning that seismic and flooding risks in the Alsace region had been underestimated.

Despite a pledge by ex-president Francois Hollande just months after Fukushima to close the plant, it was not until 2018 that President Emmanuel Macron's government gave the final green light. "This marks a first step in France's energy strategy to gradually re-balance nuclear and renewable electricity sources, while cutting carbon emissions by closing coal-fired plants by 2022," Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said in a statement Wednesday.

The first reactor will start being shut down on Saturday and the second on June 30, though it will be several months before they go cold and the used fuel can start to be removed. France will still be left with 56 pressurised water reactors at 18 nuclear power plants—only the United States has more reactors, at 98—generating an unmatched 70 percent of its electricity needs. — AFP

South Sudan citizens 'deliberately starved' by warring parties: UN

NAIROBI: South Sudan's government forces and other armed groups have "deliberately starved" civilians by denying aid access and displacing communities, a United Nations rights probe said yesterday. In a report issued two days before a deadline to form a unity government, the three-member commission looked into abuses from the signing of a peace deal in September 2018 to December 2019.

The panel delivered a damning indictment of "predatory and unaccountable elites" and the suffering of civilians after six years of conflict. "Today in South Sudan, civilians are deliberately starved, systematically surveilled and silenced, arbitrarily arrested and detained and denied meaningful access to justice," it said.

As President Salva Kiir and his rival Riek Machar met in Juba to discuss outstanding obstacles to the power-sharing government, the report slammed the process as beset with delays and bickering, and "lack of political will". "Political elites remained oblivious to the intense suffering of millions of civilians for whom they were ostensibly fighting," it said. Ongoing recruitment of child soldiers by both government forces and rebel groups, bloody localised conflicts which left hundreds dead, sexual violence and theft of public funds continued unhindered by the latest peace process, the commissioners found.

"The Commission notes with grave concern that beyond climate-induced factors, both government forces and armed groups have pursued policies responsible for the starvation of

the population in Wau and Unity State" in the north of the country. "The denial of humanitarian access and displacement brought about by unlawful tactics have significantly exacerbated famine in different parts of the country, depriving hundreds of thousands of civilians of vital needs, including access to food." During the period reviewed by the commission, some 6.35 million people — 54 percent of the population—were facing severe hunger.

Major challenges

South Sudan's conflict broke out in December 2013 after a dispute between Kiir and his former deputy and longtime rival Machar. The fighting has left some 380,000 dead and forced four million to flee their homes. The September 2018 peace deal is the latest effort to end the conflict and push the two men to govern together—an experiment which has twice previously ended in disaster.

Sticky issues of state borders and security arrangements remain with just two days to the deadline, which has already been pushed back twice. However even if the unity government is formed, the UN report highlights the massive challenges facing the country—which only achieved independence in 2011—going forward. Across the country, local ethnic conflicts far removed from the national peace process left 531 dead between February and May 2019 alone, and fighting continues today against holdout rebel groups in the Equatoria region, the report said.

Meanwhile, graft has robbed the state of precious resources. "Corruption has made several officials extremely wealthy at the expense of millions of starving civilians," said the report, which found millions of dollars in tax collections had been diverted and disappeared. Both the government and armed groups continued to recruit children during the period reviewed, with 19,000 children believed to be enlisted. Additionally, some 2.2 million children did not attend school and 30 percent of schools remain closed. — AFP

International

Fear spreads in Mozambique's province as jihadist attacks rise

Villagers fleeing a gas-rich region in northern Mozambique

MAPUTO: Villagers are fleeing a gas-rich region in northern Mozambique and energy giants are pleading for more protection in the face of mounting attacks by a shadowy jihadist group. Security officials and local residents interviewed by AFP described a bushfire of fear spreading in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique's northernmost province, and plummeting morale among troops and police. The organization first came to light in October 2017, targeting a police station.

Since then, the group has killed more than 700 people, according to the medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF). The UN says at least 100,000 people have fled their homes and violence is spreading towards the province's south. "There has been a dramatic increase of brutal attacks by armed groups over the past months, with the recent weeks being the most volatile period," UN refugee agency spokesman Andrej Mahecic said this month.

Civilians are fleeing "in many directions, including to small islands, where many have nowhere to stay," he said. The group is known locally as "Al Shabaab," although there is no dis-

cernible connection with the notorious Somali jihadist organization of that name. Since June, the so-called Islamic State group has claimed around 20 attacks in Cabo Delgado, saying these targeted the Mozambican army. But analysts say they know of no evidence of IS financial or military support to the Mozambican jihadists.

Exodus

Grassroots sources in the region confirm the worsening situation. MSF's teams in the area "have witnessed lines of people walking on main roads as their villages go up in flames," said its coordinator there, Bruno Cardoso. "Here in Macomia (district) we are all in a panic. The situation is one of great fear," a police officer told AFP by phone.

"Many children don't come to class," said a teacher at a Macomia primary school. "We live in... deep fear." The militants are operating on the doorstep of energy majors, including Exxon-Mobil and French oil company Total, which are preparing to extract gas in the Rovuma basin off Cabo Delgado's coast by 2022. With more than

\$30 billion in investment sunk into the project, President Filipe Nyusi Nyusi is under pressure to respond. Last week he skipped the African Union's bi-annual summit in Addis Ababa and held a cabinet meeting in Cabo Delgado's capital Pemba - one of the rare occasions in which he has hosted the weekly meetings outside Maputo. He blamed the "war" on unnamed "foreigners". The oil giants have asked for the doubling of the 500 soldiers deployed in April to guard a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility at Afungi, one of Africa's biggest single investments in Africa. Ryan Cummings, an analyst with Cape Town-based Signals Risk, said there had been a shift in the frequency and style of attacks.

They now targeted not only civilians but also the security forces, whose counter-terrorism capability is questionable, he said. "That could portend an evolution or sophistication in their modus operandi," Cummings said. "(This) would be especially concerning for the foreign multinationals that are engaged in the LNG industry in the Rovuma basin." Defense Minister Jaime Neto said the authorities would provide protec-

tion. "We have enough staff and we guarantee the security of the projects," he said.

Low morale

But the security forces are themselves despondent, according to internal sources. "We do not have the capacity to intercept the jihadists communications (and) that is why we don't know the enemy's capacity," an agent from the police rapid response unit told AFP. The unit opts to not respond to attacks on villages "to avoid casualties in our ranks". An agricultural college was recently raided and looted "and we didn't respond, we feared we were outnumbered", said the agent.

Another police officer said militants stole a police van in December and have been using it to stage attacks. A special operations police commander in Maputo said "many young (military recruits) abscond" if they are posted to Cabo Delgado. "The situation is chaotic. Troops on the ground opt for defensive. Now it is the jihadists who are chasing and attacking government troops and not the opposite. "Our big problem is the lack of resources," he said. — AFP

Romanian boxer inspires girls to knock out poverty

BUZAU: Steluta Duta was a teenaged orphan living on the streets when, one cold January day in 2002, she stepped through the door of a boxing gym in the town of Buzau and embarked on her unlikely path to becoming an elite athlete. Duta, whose first name means "little star", has fought for almost two decades in the ring, with every punch thrown bringing her closer to what she calls "a normal life, away from misery" and becoming an inspiration for others like her.

Romania is one of the poorest in the European Union, with 38 percent of children at risk of social exclusion and poverty, according to Eurostat. Becoming a boxer "was my only chance, my gamble", Duta, a short woman with cropped hair dyed blond, tells AFP during a break from her training at the gym in Buzau, a town in southeastern Romania. At 38, Duta is a three-time silver medallist at the sport's World Championships and a three-time gold medal-winner at the European Championships in the light flyweight category.

"If it wasn't for that day she entered the gym, she would now be another one of those living under a bridge and sniffing glue," says a tearful Constantin Voicilas, 69, who has been Duta's coach and mentor throughout her career and has been training promising boxers for more than four decades. When Duta left her orphanage aged 17, she initially became homeless and even thought about suicide. "Back then I lied to (Voicilas) and said I had a place to sleep so he would let me box," Duta recalls. When Voicilas learned the truth he converted part of the gym into a bedroom to make sure she had somewhere to sleep.

Sport as a lifeline

Duta overcame formidable odds to build a successful career in Romania. A Save the Children report released in late 2019 cited a host of threats to child welfare, particularly in rural areas: high education dropout rates, limited access to health-care and a prevalence of physical and emotional abuse as a



BUZAU: Steluta Duta takes part in a training session in Buzau, Romania. — AFP

form of discipline. Duta is now helping the next generation to fight those obstacles in the ring. At the Buzau boxing gym, she often spars with Bianca Lacatusu, a shy teenager 20 years her junior. Lacatusu also had a tough childhood. Her parents died when she was seven months old, when she was placed with a foster family who later handed her over to an orphanage. "I like to fight... I don't know how the Master found me, but I'm glad he did," Bianca tells AFP, using Voicilas's nickname.

Lacatusu says that Duta has been an inspiration to her - and that she dreams of one day defeating her in the ring. Adrian Lacatus, the national boxing team coach who has worked closely with Duta, says that girls from tough backgrounds often display this will to succeed. "Children from poor families are used to difficulties, they don't throw in the towel at the first hurdle," he says. He says with confidence that among the girls he is currently coaching in Bucharest, "many will write history".

One of them is already well on her way. Alexandra Gheorghes's delicate features belie her hardscrabble childhood. But at 17 she has already won a silver medal at the European Championships and is now training with Lacatus for future competitions. For her part, Duta is preparing for two national competitions later this year and is determined to fight on for two more years until the age of 40. After that, she wants to focus on coaching and her personal life. — AFP

Addiction in paradise: Seychelles battles heroin crisis

LES MAMELLES: On a plain suburban street in Seychelles, far from the idyllic coastline and luxury resorts pampering honeymooners and paradise-seekers, heroin addicts queue anxiously for their daily dose of methadone. It is a scene few outsiders would associate with the tropical nirvana adrift in the Indian Ocean, and one rarely, if ever, glimpsed by tourists as they shuttle from the airport to five-star luxury on white-sand beaches.

But life for many Seychellois is far from picture perfect: the tiny archipelago nation is battling what officials say are the world's highest rates of heroin addiction. Nearly 5,000 people are hooked, government figures show, equivalent to nearly 10 percent of the national workforce - a statistic that has startled the government into action. In comparison, 0.4 percent of the global population consumed opioids in 2016, half of them in Asia, according to a United Nations report that puts Seychelles among the top consumers alongside producing countries such as Afghanistan.

The Seychelles' heroin boom, which took off over the past decade, gripped young and old alike and cut across class lines. Among those queuing in the town of Les Mamelles for methadone - a substitute narcotic used to wean users off heroin - are parents with young children, an old man leaning on a cane and a taxi driver between shifts. Graham Moustache, a 29-year-old father of two, described how the arrival of affordable and high-quality heroin in Seychelles swept up his entire family.

"I have four brothers and two sisters, and we have all been heroin addicts at one point," he said, tracing his fingers over the needle scars on his arms. "I've been to prison twice," he said, adding his mother had turned him in as "she didn't know what to do any more". "Sometimes, I didn't have enough to eat and I had to choose between eating and buying heroin. I chose heroin."

The rise of new trafficking routes through East Africa in the late 2000s, coupled with porous borders and relatively high purchasing power among Seychellois, flooded the paradisaical islands with heroin. The average salary in the archipelago is \$420 (390) - high compared to other African nations. — AFP

International

Refugee puts players in his race for survival amid horrific ordeal

Can a video game save a life?

WASHINGTON: The goal of Lual Mayen's video game is to survive the horrific ordeal of a refugee, an experience that his family knows well, but the 25-year-old developer's ambition is to change the world. Mayen, who was born as his family traveled 250 miles to escape South Sudan's second civil war, hopes his game, *Salaam*, will give players a better understanding of what it means to be homeless, hungry and on the run.

"A lot of people don't understand the journey of a refugee," said Mayen, 25, who and spent his first 22 years in a refugee camp in northern Uganda before moving to the United States. "It was a journey of life and death," he said, recalling family stories about bomb attacks, wild animals and how babies

were abandoned by parents who could no longer care for them. Now head of his own video game company in Washington, Mayen believes that "gamification," where participants make decisions unlike the passive experience of watching a movie, puts ordinary people in the shoes of a refugee. *Salaam*, an Arabic greeting meaning peace, enables users who have never had to flee a war-torn country to take a virtual trek to a "peaceful environment"—if they can dodge hostile troops and find enough food and water.

Bridging the virtual and real worlds

While the game is free to play, when participants need to buy food, water or medicine for their virtual characters, they can make in-

app purchases that will go to real-life refugees, he said. "*Salaam* is going to be the first-ever game that is going to bridge the virtual world and the reality on the ground," he said. "When someone buys food in the game, you're actually buying someone in a refugee camp food." But Mayen also has a long game in mind, hoping that *Salaam* will enlighten today's teens when they become the next generation of policymakers.

"When they're making policy, they'll already understand what refugees face, just through playing my game," he said. "That's actually how we change the world and how we can be able to use the industry for good." Growing up in a refugee camp, Mayen had never even seen a computer until one day, at

age 12, he reported to the camp's registration center. "It was a moment that actually helped me to understand, wow, I want to use this one day," he said.

For the next three years, his mother, whom he made the main character in *Salaam*, worked tirelessly to stash away \$300 to buy him a laptop, which he now keeps in a glass display case in his apartment. His game went viral after he uploaded it to Facebook and caught the attention of the gaming industry. In 2018, he was named a Global Gaming Citizen at the Game Awards in Los Angeles. "To be able to ... represent the continent and represent the game for social impact, it gives me so much hope," he said. "It gives more refugees hope." — Reuters

'Feels like prison': Palestinian family cut off by barrier

AL-WALAJA: Omar Hajajla may have a private gateway to his home in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, but it is hardly a sign of luxury: it runs beneath an Israeli barrier that cuts him and his family off from the rest of their nearby Palestinian village. Israel began building its West Bank barrier in 2002 at the height of a Palestinian uprising, saying it aimed to stop attacks by bombers and gunmen in its cities. But the barrier's circuitous route along and through the West Bank - Palestinians call it a land grab - slices through some Palestinian communities.

In Hajajla's case, it boxed him off from his village of Al-Walaja, near Bethlehem, part of West Bank territory Israel captured in a 1967 war. "Prison may be better than this, because even though I am at home, it feels like prison," said Hajajla, 53, who lives in the house with his wife and three children. After appealing to Israel's Supreme Court, Hajajla in 2013 reached a settlement under which the Israeli Defense Ministry built a tunnel and a remote-operated gate under the barrier, he said, giving his family access to their village.

That underground bypass road, strewn with graffiti, is now the sole entrance to Hajajla's home. The family needs permission from Israel's military to use their remote control to open the gate and take their children to school or go to the grocery store, Hajajla says. Israel could take away his remote access if he violates a series of conditions, Hajajla says, including having guests over without coordinating their visit in advance with the military.

"My wife and I try as much as we can to keep our life normal," Hajajla said. "We try to give our kids a break from this routine, to teach them that this is our land, our country, and we will never let it slip away." US-sponsored Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking stalled in 2014. A new US peace plan, unveiled by President Donald Trump last month, envisaged Israel keeping East Jerusalem and swathes of West Bank land, and was rejected by the Palestinians. — Reuters

Virus brings 2 enemies together - Japan, China

BEIJING: As China faces increasing isolation, with some countries closing off borders over coronavirus fears, an unlikely friend has emerged - historical arch-foe Japan. After decades of war and animosity, donations and Japanese ballet dancers shouting their support are among the gestures that have endeared Japan to Chinese people and state media. News that the Japanese government sent a plane bearing thousands of pieces of protective garments for the hard-hit central city of Wuhan received more than 170 million views on the Twitter-like Weibo platform.

The flight, the fifth of its kind chartered by Tokyo, was met with gratitude on the Japanese embassy's Weibo account, but also concern for Japan's own battle against the outbreak. "You're the best! You're the best friend and neighbor of the Chinese people!" wrote one user. "But I hope you can also defeat the epidemic soon." "Keep some for yourself please," wrote another. Japan, which is set to host the Summer Olympics this year, has confirmed at least 79 cases domestically and one death, and more than 600 other infections on a cruise ship.

In late January, photos of boxes of donated masks from Japan bearing a line of classical poetry went viral on Chinese social media. "Foreign lands separated by mountains and rivers, we share the wind and moon under the same sky," the boxes say, quoting a Tang-dynasty text. China's foreign ministry said it was "extremely touched" by the poetic gift. "The epidemic is temporary, but friendship endures," said foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying, praising photos seen online of Japanese pharmacies with signs saying "Let's go, China!"

Japan 'vulnerable'

The virus has killed more than 2,100 people and infected more than 74,500 in China since it first emerged late last year. The current goodwill between the East Asian neighbors is a far cry from the diplomatic spats that have characterized their relationship in recent decades, from maritime disputes to lingering anger over victims of Japanese wartime sexual slavery. Japan invaded China in the 1930s and the two countries fought a full-scale war from 1937 until Japan's defeat in World War II in 1945. China sees Japanese politicians' periodic visits to Tokyo's Yasukuni war shrine honoring convicted war criminals as a sign of aggression.

But now, "in such hard times and particularly because of the attacks and criticisms (from other countries), the Chinese government and people are just grateful for such show of support," said Victor Teo, an assistant professor of Japanese studies at the University of Hong Kong. At the same time, "it is definitely in Japan's national interest that the health threat remains contained, too," Teo said. "Japan is extremely vulnerable because of her intense people-to-people and economic exchanges with China."



BEIJING: Restaurant workers wear protective clothing as they sell food on the street outside their restaurant in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

While the United States and several other countries have banned travelers from China, Japan has only prevented arrivals of people from two of the Chinese provinces hardest hit by the epidemic. Donations and shows of support from Japanese businesses are "natural" not just for humanitarian reasons, "but also for economic reasons," Satoshi Amako, China expert at Waseda University, said. "It's become clear that if the Chinese economy is hurt, the Japanese economy receives an impact from it and vice versa."

'Deeper incentives'

Relations between Asia's two biggest economies have warmed in recent years after suffering in 2012 when Tokyo "nationalized" disputed islands claimed by Beijing. Shinzo Abe made the first visit to China by a Japanese prime minister since 2011 last year. President Xi Jinping was expected to visit Japan this year.

"Deeper incentives" are driving an improvement in Sino-Japanese relations, Richard McGregor, a senior fellow at the Lowy Institute said. "China is always more solicitous to Japan when ties with Washington go south," McGregor said. US President Donald Trump's disregard for allies could give Beijing "a chance to begin to crack the US-Japan alliance," reducing US dominance in the region, McGregor said. But not everyone in China is impressed with Japan's displays of goodwill.

News about dancers from Tokyo's Matsuyama Ballet company singing the Chinese national anthem on stage and cheering on Chinese viewers received more than 100 million views on Weibo. State-run tabloid Global Times described the performance as showing "inner respect and praise" for China. However, some viewers blasted the video as melodramatic and inappropriate, pointing out the anthem's historic roots in anti-Japanese resistance during the 1930s. "This is a little too much, don't they know who it was who wanted to enslave us during that era?" — AFP

International

Trump ally Stone to be sentenced in case that has roiled Washington

Stone faces charges of lying on Russian meddling in US election

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's longtime aide Roger Stone will be sentenced in a case that has caused a stir in Washington following meddling by the US president and his attorney general. Stone, one of the Republican leader's allies and "oldest friends," was convicted in November of lying to Congress, tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to cheat in the 2016 election.

Just 10 days ago, four US prosecutors asked a judge to sentence the former political consultant to between seven and nine years in jail. Trump chimed in via his favorite method of communication—Twitter—to denounce what he called a "miscarriage of justice." The US Justice Department weighed in the next day, determining the recommended sentence was "extreme and excessive." The four government attorneys who prosecuted Stone resigned from the case in apparent protest.

A new prosecutor was named to the case who then filed a sentencing memo suggesting a three to four year term in prison. Trump quickly took to Twitter once more to hail the decision, praising Attorney General Bill Barr for intervening. "Congratulations to Attorney General Bill Barr for taking charge of a case that was totally out of control and perhaps should not even be brought," Trump tweeted.

Barr was quick to state that the president's comments had no impact on his department's decision, but he still found himself at the center of a firestorm. In addition to opposition from Democrats, more than 2,000 former Justice Department officials have signed a statement call-

ing for Barr to resign. "A person should not be given special treatment in a criminal prosecution because they are a close political ally of the president," the open letter said.

'Impossible'

On the defensive, Barr—one of Trump's most staunch defenders—insisted that the president had not asked him to intervene in Stone's case. Barr also blasted his boss in a highly unusual public rebuke, saying the president's tweets were making his job "impossible." "I think it's time to stop the tweeting about Department of Justice criminal cases," Barr said in an interview with ABC News.

White House advisor Kellyanne Conway defended Trump's actions on Fox News, insisting the president had not issued Barr any orders while contending it was "disingenuous" to say presidents don't comment on criminal matters. Trump himself had also tweeted he has the "legal right" to intervene in criminal cases whenever he likes, though he said he had "chosen not to" do so in Stone's case. On Tuesday, multiple US media outlets citing anonymous sources reported that Barr had informed the president's inner circle that he might resign if the tweets continued to fly. But the Justice Department spokeswoman quickly brushed off what she said were unfounded "rumors." "The Attorney General has no plans to resign," said Kerri Kupec.

Dirty trickster

Despite his attorney general's warning, Trump continued this week to be vocal in his support for Stone, who has requested a new



WASHINGTON, DC: Roger Stone (right), former advisor to US President Donald Trump arrives with family members at court prior to his sentencing hearing yesterday in Washington, DC. — AFP

trial. The self-avowed dirty trickster was found guilty of lying in testimony to Congress about acting as an intermediary between the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks, which released hacked documents that embarrassed rival Hillary Clinton during the 2016 White House race.

Stone, who maintains his innocence, accused jury members of being biased against him and appealed to overturn their verdict. Federal judge

Amy Berman Jackson refused Stone's request to postpone the sentencing, which was scheduled for 10:00 am (1500 GMT). But she said the sentence would not be carried out until a decision on Stone's call for a new trial. Jackson had previously forbidden Stone from posting on social media about his trial, after he shared a picture of her on Instagram with what appeared to be the crosshairs of a gun sight. — AFP

Dems bare fangs at Bloomberg in fiery debate

LAS VEGAS: Former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg endured a punishing assault in his debut Democratic presidential debate Wednesday from rivals who savaged him for parachuting in late and throwing astronomical amounts of money at the race. The Las Vegas showdown came at a tense time in the party's nomination race, with leftist firebrand Bernie Sanders coalescing as the frontrunner and some challengers fighting for survival.

US media magnate Bloomberg found himself targeted from the start, as candidates from Sanders to former vice president Joe Biden impugned the man whose sudden prominence in polling has scrambled the race to defeat President Donald Trump.

"Understand this: Democrats take a huge risk if we just substitute one arrogant billionaire for another," Senator Elizabeth Warren said in a fiery attack on Bloomberg. "Democrats are not going to win if we have a nominee who has a history of hiding his tax returns, of harassing women, and of supporting racist policies," she added.

Sanders hit Bloomberg hard on his vast wealth at a time of "grotesque" income inequality in America.

"Mike Bloomberg owns more wealth than the bottom 125 million Americans," Sanders said in one of the night's many abrasive moments. "That's immoral." All eyes were on Bloomberg's first appearance on the debate stage after spending hundreds of millions of dollars on campaign advertising. He endured a very pub-



NEW YORK, NY: Democratic presidential candidate former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg is shown on a screen during a debate watch party at the candidate's field office on Wednesday in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. — AFP

lic vetting and struggled to highlight his roles as problem solver, businessman, city manager and philanthropist. He found himself on the defensive when pressed to explain sexual harassment claims against him and employees, his delay in releasing his taxes and more.

Political analyst Aaron Kall of the University of Michigan said Bloomberg proved "really weak" in the face of the onslaught. "It'll be interesting to see... whether that's disqualifying for a lot of people that have recently gone on his side," Kall said.

Bloomberg at one point managed to push back forcefully against Sanders, saying if the self-declared democratic socialist is the nominee, "we will have Donald Trump for another four years." But Trump himself was dismissive of Bloomberg's performance onstage. — AFP

Former Mexico leader Nieto investigated

MEXICO CITY: Former Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto is being investigated over a graft scandal at the country's massive state oil company Pemex, the Wall Street Journal has reported. The probe relates to the conduct of the firm's former chief executive Emilio Lozoya, who was arrested in Spain last week and faces extradition over claims he accepted millions of dollars in bribes.

An unnamed senior judicial official told the Journal that Lozoya's corruption "reached the highest level" and implicated Peña Nieto, who left office in late 2018. The ex-leader could be charged as the investigation continued, according to the official quoted in the newspaper's Wednesday report.

Lozoya is wanted in Mexico for involvement in a vast corruption scandal involving Odebrecht, a Brazilian construction firm accused of paying almost a billion dollars to politicians across Latin America to win lucrative contracts. He allegedly began taking payments from the company in 2012, when he was chief international strategist for Peña Nieto who at the time was running for president. Part of the money was allegedly used to finance Peña Nieto's campaign. Lozoya denies the accusations against him. Pemex is Mexico's largest firm but has been beleaguered by more than \$100 billion in debt, making it one of the world's most indebted companies. — AFP

International

Bangladesh's first female Mideast envoy hopes to help abused women workers

Sobhan plans to build a shelter at embassy in Jordan for women laborers

DHAKA: Bangladesh's first woman ambassador in the Middle East is hoping her appointment will help female migrant workers in the region, with a mission to build a shelter at the embassy in Jordan for women laborers facing abuse or exploitation.

Nahida Sobhan, 52, a career foreign service officer who has worked in Rome, Kolkata and Geneva, starts this week as ambassador to Jordan that recruits thousands of Bangladeshi female workers monthly for its garment industry and as maids. Bangladesh ranks among the top countries sending its citizens to work overseas, with about 700,000 Bangladeshis finding jobs abroad each year but some end up cheated and become victims of abuse after being promised jobs.

"There are certain issues that woman migrants do face and I will try my best to solve those," said Sobhan, adding that she was keen to set up a shelter at the Bangladeshi embassy in Amman for women workers like those set up in Saudi Arabia and Oman.

"When you are serving ... it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman ... but it is true that if a Bangladeshi woman falls in trouble, she will be more comfortable to open up to a woman," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Jordan is home to more than 100,000 female Bangladeshi workers, mostly poor women from rural areas, and is the second ranking destination for Bangladeshi women workers after Saudi Arabia, according to government data.

Man suspected of killing wife, 3 kids in Australia fire

SYDNEY: An ex-rugby league player is suspected of murdering his three children and estranged wife in Australia by burning them alive inside their car, in what police described as one of the most horrific incidents they have encountered. Officers said 31-year-old Hannah Clarke died in a Brisbane hospital on Wednesday just hours after her three children aged three, four and six were found dead in the car on a suburban street.

Her husband, Rowan Baxter, who also died, allegedly approached the vehicle and doused it with petrol before setting it alight, The Australian newspaper reported. The paper said Clarke jumped from the burning car and rolled on the ground, saying "he's poured petrol on me".

Officials said she was rushed to hospital with severe burns following the "horrific" incident but later succumbed to her injuries. Baxter, a 42-year-old former rugby league player for the New Zealand Warriors, was believed to be in the burning vehicle but got out and died on a footpath.

Queensland Police detective inspector Mark Thompson said yesterday that Baxter died as a result of burns and a self-inflicted wound. "Information that's to hand has led us to believe that the Baxter children and Han-

nah Clarke were killed and I don't believe there's any suspicious circumstances around the death of Rowan Baxter," he said. Clarke's sister-in-law, Stacey Roberts, set up a fundraiser to pay for funeral costs and support Hannah's parents, who she said had "exhausted themselves to try and help Hannah escape this monster".

"All those who knew Hannah or had even just met her once would know how much of a beautiful soul she was. Her children (were) her life," Roberts posted on Facebook. The page has so far raised almost Aus\$100,000 (\$67,000). Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the country was "shocked, saddened and devastated" by the tragedy, which has led to an outpouring of grief on social media.

"Hannah and her three children were so senselessly and maddeningly murdered in what has occurred in a terrible act of violence and it just grieves our hearts terribly today," he said.

Natasha Stott Despoja, a former senator and chair of anti-violence group Our Watch, called for stronger action to address violence against women in Australia, which she described as a "national emergency". "I know people want change, people are angry & sad today," she tweeted. "How long before we stop this slaughter in our suburbs?"

A passer-by who tried to intervene in the situation was also taken to hospital to be treated for facial burns, a Queensland Ambulance Service spokesperson said. The emergency responders who attended the scene have been stood down from their duties and will receive support, he added. — AFP

But recruitment is largely carried out by unofficial brokers, which opens the door to trafficking and exploitation. Last year at least 1,500 Bangladeshi women returned home from Saudi Arabia after being abused, an increase from 2018 when about 1,300 returned, according to Bangladeshi charity BRAC.

Neither the government nor charities have recorded the numbers returning from Jordan although activists and government officials said they received far less complaints from Bangladeshi migrants in Jordan compared to Saudi Arabia. "In 2019 we received about 20 to 25 complaints from Bangladeshi workers in Jordan and they were mostly related to wage issues. They were not paid properly," said Lily Jahan, chairman of BOMSA, a Bangladeshi migrants rights group.

"Some of them were beaten when they protested. We informed the government about these cases."

Sobhan described the labor laws in Jordan as "supportive" and said migrants didn't face "severe difficulties" there but this would be a focus of her work. "I won't say that there are severe difficulties, but there still are certain issues and I will try my best to solve these," she said in an interview at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office in Dhaka before leaving for Jordan.

Remittances from migrant workers are key for Bangladesh's economy, making up the second-highest source of foreign currency earnings after

clothes manufacturing, government data shows. Sobhan, whose previous role was as the director general of United Nations wing of foreign office, said the government wanted to promote as many female ambassadors as possible. "Currently, there are about seven female ambassadors out of 50. The message with my appointment is that things are changing for the better and things will continue to change," said Sobhan. — Reuters



DHAKA: Garment workers listen to speakers during a rally demanding an increase to their minimum wage in Dhaka. — Reuters

Australia opens inquiry into bushfires

SYDNEY: Australia set up a national inquiry yesterday into its month-long bushfire crisis that affected three in four Australians and prompted widespread criticism of the government for its sluggish response to the blazes. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the vast scale of the fires—which killed more than 30 people and destroyed thousands of homes—required a new response from the bushfire-prone nation.

The Royal Commission inquiry will be tasked with finding ways to improve Australia's preparedness, resilience and response to natural disasters, but has been criticized as an effort to put off tackling the problem. Australia has seen dozens of inquiries into the causes of bushfires and steps that could be taken to mitigate them, with mixed results.

Many measures from the dozens of inquiries going back to the 1930s have still not been implemented.

The opposition Labor party accused Morrison of trying to "shift attention to the things that he thinks are politically convenient to talk about" rather than "ac-

tually fixing climate change and getting emissions under control." Morrison said panel would be asked to consider establishing new powers for the federal government to declare a national state of emergency, which he argued would allow a faster response to fires. The conservative leader, who was criticized for his sluggish reaction to the months-long crisis, has defended his actions by pointing to regulations requiring states to formally request federal assistance.

He claimed to have operated in a "constitutional grey zone" by deploying thousands of troops and reservists to assist in the bushfire recovery. "We did that without clear rules," Morrison said. The most recent crisis has sparked calls for Australia's conservative government to take immediate action on climate change, with street protests urging Morrison to reduce the country's reliance on coal.

The prime minister belatedly acknowledged the link between the bushfire disaster and a warming planet, but also made clear his government plans to focus on climate adaptation and building resilience ahead of measures to cut emissions. The inquiry will be led by former Air Force chief Mark Binskin, along with retired Federal Court judge Annabelle Bennett and environmental lawyer professor Andrew Macintosh. Morrison said they would be required to report their findings by August 31, "so recommendations can be acted upon before our next bushfire season". — AFP

International

Friday, February 21, 2020

Ahead of Trump's visit, Indian city of Agra cleans the swamp

India says will not 'rush into' a trade deal with US

LUCKNOW: US President Donald Trump vowed to "drain the swamp" of lobbyists and elites in Washington DC. Now, one Indian city is racing to clean up a stagnant river as he prepares to visit. Trump arrives in India on Feb 24 on a maiden two-day trip that aims to repair bilateral relations hurt by a trade spat. He plans to visit the western city of Ahmedabad and India's capital New Delhi, as well as Agra, where he will view the famed monument to love, the Taj Mahal, at sunset.

In the city, authorities are on a clean-up drive, including the polluted waters of the Yamuna river, that backs on to the monument complex.

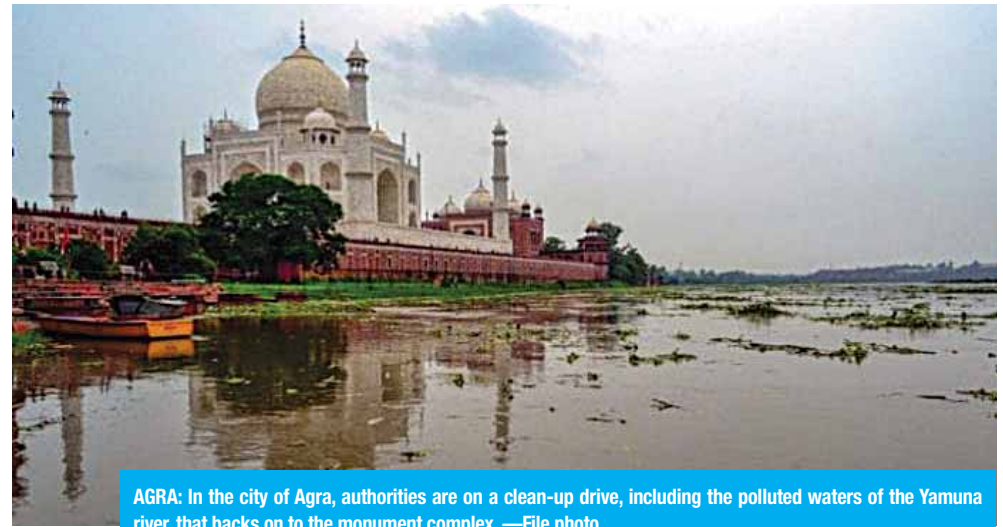
Jal Singh Meena, an officer with the Agra Ganga Nahar, the government body that manages the canal network that feeds into the Yamuna in Agra, said yesterday an additional 17 million liters of water are being released from three locks in the week preceding Trump's visit on Monday—more than double the usual amount.

The extra flow had been ordered "to keep it clean and remove the foul smell," he told Reuters. Yesterday, workers scrubbed walls and

fountains at the monument, commissioned in 1632 by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his late wife Mumtaz, TV channels showed. India's best-known attraction, the Taj Mahal is visited by nearly seven million tourists a year, according to official data, but has been blighted by overcrowding and pollution.

Along with polluted water, authorities are battling some of the world's filthiest air that stains the white marble of the monument, and increasingly aggressive troops of monkeys that have been known to attack visitors. District authorities have denied local media reports they have relocated some of the more troublesome primates for the visit, and that a bridge on a proposed route taken by Trump will be unable to bear the weight of his armor-plated limousine known as "The Beast".

India will not rush into a trade deal with the United States, an Indian foreign ministry spokesman said yesterday, days before US President Donald Trump's visit. The two sides have been trying to narrow differences over tariffs and US demands for greater access to India's poultry and dairy markets.



AGRA: In the city of Agra, authorities are on a clean-up drive, including the polluted waters of the Yamuna river, that backs on to the monument complex. —File photo

"We do hope to reach an understanding with an outcome that strikes the right balance for both sides. These are complex negotia-

tions. We would not like to rush into a deal," foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar told reporters. —Reuters

Kashmir journalist wins AFP's Kate Webb Prize

HONG KONG: Freelance reporter Ahmer Khan was named the winner of the 2019 Agence France-Presse Kate Webb Prize yesterday for his coverage on the ground in India-controlled Kashmir during Delhi's lockdown of the region. The award, named after one of AFP's finest correspondents, recognizes journalism by locally hired reporters in Asia operating in risky or difficult conditions.

Khan, 27, was honored for a series of video and written reports that vividly illustrated the impact on locals in the Muslim-majority area following India's decision to strip Kashmir of its semi-autonomous status in August. The country's Hindu-nationalist government imposed restrictions on movement and a communications blackout, virtually cutting the Himalayan region off from the outside world.

India insisted the move was aimed at bringing prosperity and peace to a region where tens of thousands of people have died in a decades-old separatist rebellion that India blames on arch rival Pakistan. Despite curfews and a heavy security presence, Khan took to the streets with his camera to document the tensions, concerns and frustrations among the residents of Srinagar and other cities in Kashmir.

Unable to skirt the communications shut-down, he flew in and out of Delhi to file his stories. "Reporting from Kashmir at this time has been extremely challenging for everyone, including the established foreign media," said



Ahmer Khan

AFP's Asia-Pacific regional director Philippe Massonnet.

"For an independent, local journalist those challenges have been far greater, and it is to Ahmer's enormous credit that he managed to provide accurate, high-quality journalism when it was so sorely needed."

Khan said on learning of his win: "This is a real honor, and a huge motivation to carry on my work with enthusiasm and determination." "I want to dedicate this award to the courageous and resilient journalists from Kashmir who have been reporting in extremely difficult conditions for the past six months. This is a collective award."

The Kate Webb Prize, with a 3,000 euro (\$3,400) purse, honors journalists working in perilous or difficult conditions in Asia, and is named after a crusading AFP reporter who died in 2007 at the age of 64, after a career covering the world's troublespots. The award, which in 2018 went to reporter Asad Hashim for his coverage of the plight of ethnic Pashtuns and blasphemy issues in his native Pakistan, is administered by AFP and the Webb family. The prize will be formally presented at a ceremony in Hong Kong later this year. —AFP

Westinghouse set to sign pact with Indian firm for N-reactors

NEW DELHI: US energy firm Westinghouse is expected to sign a new agreement with state-run Nuclear Power Corporation of India for the supply of six nuclear reactors during US President Donald Trump's visit next week, officials said, aiming to kickstart a long-running project.

The agreement will lay out timelines and the lead local constructor for the reactors to be built at Kovvada in southern India and also address lingering concerns over India's nuclear liability law.

The United States has been discussing the sale of nuclear reactors to energy-hungry India since a 2008 landmark civil nuclear energy pact and last year the two governments announced they were committed to the establishment of the six reactors. Last week representatives from US energy and commerce departments, Westinghouse, the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum and The Nuclear Energy Institute were in India for talks with government officials as part of a commercial mission to promote nuclear exports to India.

"We are encouraging moving forward with Westinghouse and NPCIL to sign a MoU. It certainly is a private industry to private industry, a business to business decision," Dr. Rita Baranwal assistant secretary for the Office of Nuclear Energy in the US Department of Energy, told

Reuters in a phone interview.

"We're optimistic that an MoU will be signed shortly," Baranwal, who was part of the mission, said. Once that is cleared the two sides will begin contract negotiations, delivery schedules and pick vendors. The plan for a new MoU has not been previously reported.

Westinghouse did not respond to a request for comment nor did NPCIL. But Indian foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said yesterday Westinghouse and NPCIL were in talks to move forward with the project. "Following resolution of Westinghouse's bankruptcy issues, the two sides are in discussion regarding the division of responsibility of the work," he said. Trump has made bilateral trade with India a top priority, seeking greater market access for US products from farm goods to motorcycles. Negotiators are trying to put together a limited trade deal before a bigger agreement that Trump said this week will probably happen after the US presidential elections.

Lack of movement on the nuclear reactors has been a sensitive issue, another member of the US delegation said, after Washington made an exception for India by agreeing to provide it civilian nuclear energy technology even though it has not given up its nuclear weapons program.

A longstanding obstacle has been the need to bring Indian liability rules in-line with international norms, which require the costs of any accident to be channeled to the operator rather than the maker of a nuclear power station. Pittsburgh-based Westinghouse's plans to supply the AP1000 reactors to India which it has also sold to China were thrown into further doubt when it filed for bankruptcy in 2017 after cost overruns on US reactors. —Reuters

International

First South Korea virus patient dies as hospital cluster emerges

Total number of cases nearly doubles to more than 100

SEOUL: South Korea reported its first death from the novel coronavirus yesterday as a new cluster of infections emerged at a hospital and the country's total number of cases nearly doubled to more than 100. The man who died was in his 60s and a long-term patient among 15 people found to be infected at a hospital in Cheongdo county, 320 kilometers (200 miles) south of Seoul, the Korean Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) said in a statement.

Two patients who Yonhap news agency said were in the psychiatric ward tested positive for the virus on Wednesday, prompting authorities to begin testing all patients and staff.

The man who died Wednesday had shown symptoms of pneumonia, and his status was only established posthumously. KCDC yesterday announced a total of 51 new confirmed cases, taking the nationwide total to 104. More than 40 were in a cluster in Daegu-near Cheongdo-and centred on the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, an entity often accused of being a cult.

Shincheonji claims its founder, Lee Man-hee, has donned the mantle of Jesus Christ and will take 144,000 people with him to heaven on the day of judgement. A 61-year-old woman member developed a fever on February 10, but attended at least four church services before being diagnosed. Local media said she had twice refused to be tested for the coronavirus on the grounds she had not recently travelled abroad.

So far at least 47 other members of the sect have been confirmed as infected, and KCDC said the original patient had visited Cheongdo earlier this month, not ruling out the possibility she may

have been the source of infections there as well. An epidemiological survey was underway to examine "the possibility of a link" between her and the hospital infections, said KCDC director Jung Eun-kyeong. "Those who visited the Cheongdo hospital this month should try to avoid outside activity," she added.

Access restricted

The mayor of Daegu-South Korea's fourth-biggest city, with a population of over 2.5 million-advised residents to stay indoors, and commanders at a major US base in the area restricted access. A total of 64 cases have been confirmed in the city and neighbouring North Gyeongsang province, and Daegu mayor Kwon Young-jin urged residents: "Starting from today, please refrain from leaving your house as much as possible." The mayor's request is not binding, but one online poster who said they were in the city tweeted: "I can't go out because of Shincheonji and it's driving me crazy."

"Convenience stores and elderly community centers are closed, it takes twice as long for food delivery. It's really making me insane." Daegu's municipal government said 1,001 Shincheonji members believed to have attended services with the infected woman have been asked to self-quarantine.

The US Army garrison in the city-where around 10,000 soldiers, civilians and family members live or work-restricted access and instructed any American troops who had recently attended Shincheonji services to self-quarantine. "Travel in and around Daegu is highly discour-



DAEGU, South Korea: Workers from a disinfection service spray disinfectant as part of preventive measures against the spread of the COVID-19 at a fruit and vegetable market in Daegu yesterday. — AFP

aged unless absolutely necessary," the garrison said yesterday in a Facebook post.

"Please avoid public places and public transportation, to include stores, restaurants, subways and other heavily congested areas." Shincheonji closed down all its facilities nationwide.

"We are deeply sorry that because of one of our members, who thought of her condition as a cold because she had not travelled abroad, led to many in our church being infected and thereby caused concern to the local community," it said in a statement. — AFP

Scores rescued from blaze in Yangon

YANGON: Scores of people were rescued from a blazing building in Myanmar's commercial hub Yangon early yesterday, many brought to safety with a cherry-picker crane from the highest floors. Around 60 fire trucks raced to the 12-storey apartment block as smoke and flames spread through the building. No deaths had been reported by mid-morning and the cause of the blaze had not been established. Nyi Nyi, 34, told AFP he ran out of his home to warn his elderly neighbors but was forced to retreat after nearly passing out. "I couldn't see anything as it was too dark with smoke," he said, adding firefighters arrived just in time. The fire service rescued people with a cherry-picker as smoke billowed out across the street, causing traffic to snarl up. After years of under-investment, Yangon's downtown buildings have notoriously poor safety standards and fires are common. — AFP

Nearly 900,000 pangolins trafficked in Southeast Asia

KUALA LUMPUR: Nearly 900,000 pangolins are believed to have been trafficked across Southeast Asia in the past two decades, a wildlife watchdog said yesterday, highlighting the challenge in tackling the illicit trade. As the world's most heavily trafficked mammal, the creatures are targeted for their body parts which are highly valued in traditional medicine in countries including China and Vietnam, and their meat is seen as a delicacy.

Also known as the scaly anteater, the shy, primarily nocturnal animals have been heavily poached for years in biodiverse Southeast Asia and are being increasingly targeted in Africa.

In a new report, watchdog TRAFFIC estimated about 895,000 pangolins had been smuggled between 2000 and 2019 in Southeast Asia. It also noted that over 96,000 kilograms (210,000 pounds) of the creatures' scales were seized in Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam between 2017 and 2019 alone.

"Not a day goes by without a wildlife seizure taking place in Southeast Asia, and all too often in volumes that are jaw dropping," said Kanitha Krishnasamy, director for TRAFFIC in the region.

Rampant trade

In 2016 the pangolin was given the highest level of protection by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), meaning all trade in the creatures is banned. Prior to that, trade was allowed under strict conditions. But protection groups say the illicit business is still rampant and TRAFFIC called for stronger laws and penalties,



and for authorities to shut down markets and online platforms selling protected wildlife.

Researchers investigating the origin of the deadly coronavirus outbreak in China have said the endangered animal may be the link that facilitated the spread of the illness to humans.

Scientists have long suspected that the virus, which has killed more than 2,100 people and infected 74,000, was passed from an animal to a human at a market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. TRAFFIC also said yesterday about 225,000 kilograms of African elephant ivory, 100,000 pig-nosed turtles and 45,000 songbirds were seized in Southeast Asia in recent years. — AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2020

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Violinist plays during brain operation as surgeons test her dexterity

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On magnets, mugs and matryoshka dolls, Putin's face still sells

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What makes dogs so special? Science says love

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Lifestyle | Music & Movies

Clinton, Mirren and co in Berlin for 70th film fest

Europe's first major film festival of 2020 opened yesterday, with the likes of Sigourney Weaver, Helen Mirren and even Hillary Clinton descending on the German capital for the 70th edition of the Berlinale. Under new direction for the first time in nearly two decades, this year's festival will tackle the issue of diversity in film while also confronting its own murky history. The 11-day Berlinale kicked off last night with "My Salinger Year" by Canadian director Philippe Falardeau.

The film about the New York literary scene of the 1990s, features "Alien" star Weaver alongside Margaret Qualley ("Once Upon a Time in Hollywood"). Some 340 films from all four corners of the globe will be showcased, with 18 competing for the prestigious "Golden Bear" prize. The winner will be announced on February 29 by an international jury headed by British Oscar winner Jeremy Irons. Carlo Chatrion and Marlene Rissenbeck are taking over the reins of the Berlinale from Dieter Kosslick who stepped down after 18

years at the helm in 2019.

The new duo's aim was to "give room to diversity", Chatrion said, as debate continues to rage over female and ethnic minority representation in Hollywood. Nevertheless, only six of the 18 films in competition are directed by women, one fewer than the previous year. "Six films is not 50/50, but it's a good path to reach it," Chatrion said at a press conference in January. Last year, Kosslick had signed a "50/50" pledge to commit the festival to gender parity in future, calling for transparency in selection and an even gender ratio in top management.

Mirren honored

While Chatrion has warned against "stamping" the Berlinale as a political event, politics will be front and centre in the 70th edition, with films such as French comedy "Delete history" about life in the age of tech giants and social media, and "Todos os mortos", a Brazilian film about slavery. Other featured directors include US indie cinema



The Berlinale 2020 film festival International Jury (From left) German film producer Bettina Brokemper, Italian actor Luca Marinelli, French-Argentinian actress Berenice Bejo, Jury director British actor Jeremy Irons, US director Kenneth Lonergan, Palestinian-US film director and writer Annemarie Jacir and Brazilian director Kleber Mendonca Filho pose during a photocall yesterday, on the day of the official opening of the 70th Berlinale film festival in Berlin. — AFP

star Kelly Reichardt ("First Cow") and Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof ("There is no evil"), who is unable to leave his home country. A number of global stars are set to tread the red carpet, such as Javier Bardem, Elle Fanning and Salma Hayek who all appear in "The Roads Not Taken" by British director Sally Potter.

Elsewhere, Cate Blanchett will present Aus-

tralian series "Stateless", while Johnny Depp stars in "Minamata", a biopic about Time magazine photographer William Eugene Smith. British Oscar winner Helen Mirren will also receive a lifetime achievement award, with several of her career highlights screened as part of the "Homage" section. — AFP



Mexican singer Ed Maverick poses for pictures in New York City. —AFP

From Chihuahua to Coachella, Mexico's Maverick is averse to fame

Teenage troubadour who not long ago was drumming at church and performing at quinceaneras, Ed Maverick has had a year of dizzying success that will see him play the premier Coachella festival this spring. The 19-year-old from Mexico's Chihuahua region caught fire after uploading his heartfelt, melancholy tracks online, using his powerful baritone to break macho stereotypes that say Latino men shouldn't voice their feelings.

In less than a year the pop-folk songs from this self-taught artist have reached more than 100,000 daily streams on Spotify, thanks to the release of his first album "Mix pa llorar en tu cuarto" ("Mix for crying in your room"). In an era of heavy reggaeton club beats, Maverick's romantic "Fuentes de Ortiz" ("Fountains of Ortiz") — in which he sings of the insecurities and uncertainties of young love—passed more than 150 million total streams on platforms including Spotify and YouTube.

Youth connection

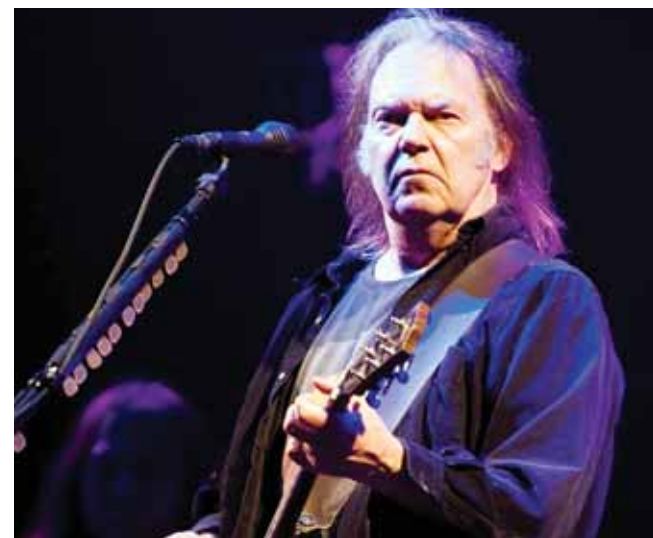
The internet has ushered Maverick to fame in Latin America, which for the fourth straight year was the region with the fastest streaming growth, thanks to its youthful population and expanded use of mobile phones, according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry. "People really connect with the songs and identify with them easily—the majority of the audience are people my age," the artist, born Eduardo Hernandez Saucedo, told AFP recently in New York. But the sensitive, shy adolescent has struggled with his success. — AFP

Neil Young calls Trump a disgrace, backs Sanders

Newly minted American citizen Neil Young is using his platform to rail against Donald Trump, calling the US president "a disgrace to my country" while endorsing Bernie Sanders. In an open letter on his website, Young said Trump's "mindless destruction of our shared natural resources, our environment and our relationships with friends around the world is unforgivable." "I don't blame the people who voted for you. I support their right to express themselves, although they have been lied to, and in many cases believed the lies, they are true Americans. I have their back," he continued.

The prolific rocker became a US citizen earlier this year, having lived in California for decades, and also retains his Canadian citizenship. In his letter, Young voiced praise for Sanders, who is currently leading the Democratic primary pack, saying the leftist has "the answers I like."

"He is aiming at preserving our children's future directly. He is not popular with the democratic establishment because unlike all the other candidates, he is not pandering to the industries accelerating Earth's Climate Disaster, the end of the world as we know it. He is truly fighting for the USA," Young wrote. "His initials are



In this file photo Canadian rock musician Neil Young performs during the headline slot on the Pyramid stage on the first "official" day of the annual Glastonbury festival near Glastonbury, Britain. — AFP

BS. Not his policies." Young voiced disdain for Trump's use of the classic hit "Rockin' in the Free World" at his rallies, which the artist has asked him to stop while acknowledging that he can't actually prevent the song's use. —AFP



Liam Neeson to star in Memory

Liam Neeson is to star in 'Memory', a new thriller directed by Martin Campbell. According to the Hollywood Reporter, the 'Taken' star will play expert criminal organization, becomes a target himself and must go on the hunt for those who want him dead. The FBI and crime syndicate are both in hot pursuit of Alex, whose attempts to escape their clutches are made harder due to him struggling with extreme memory loss.

The project is based on the 2003 Dutch film "The Memory of a Killer" and Dario Scardapane has adapted the screenplay for the English-language version. Cathy Schulman is producing with Rupert Maconick and Arthur Sarkissian through her Welle Entertainment banner. Teddy Schwarzman, Michael Heimler and Ben Stillman serve as executive producers on the movie, which is financed by Black Bear Pictures and is to be distributed by STXinternational. John Friedberg, president of STXinternational, said: "Memory is an exceptional high-concept script, and we could not be more excited to have Liam on board to star. "Martin is a true expert in elevating the genre, and will make an explosive version of this compelling and pulse-racing story." — Bang Showbiz

Max Mara's Women Fall

Winter 2020 fashion collection



US fashion college apologizes for 'racist' runway show

A prestigious New York fashion college apologized on Wednesday after a catwalk featuring models wearing large prosthetic red lips, ears and bushy eyebrows was branded racist. The president of the Fashion Institute of Technology said it was investigating the use of the accessories in the February 7 show, which was part of New York Fashion Week. Joyce Brown said it had not been the creator's intent to make a statement about race but "it is now glaringly obvious that has been the outcome."

"For that, we apologize to those who participated in the show, to students, and to anybody who has been offended by what they saw," she said in a statement emailed to AFP. The show made headlines after African-American model Amy Lefevre, 25, told the New York Post tabloid that she had refused to wear the props because they were "clearly racist." In a statement posted on

Instagram, Jonathan Kyle Farmer, chairman of the fashion design program which ran the show, apologized directly to Lefevre.

The controversy comes after Italian fashion house Prada said earlier this month it would take steps to fight racism and promote diversity following uproar over its sale of monkey-like key chain figurines. Prada was forced to apologize in December 2018 after it featured so-called "Pradamalia" objects that had exaggerated red lips and evoked blackface caricatures in its New York store. Critics said the merchandise—which was pulled from shelves following the outcry—resembled Sambo, a racist caricature that reinforced negative stereotypes about America's black community. The problematic custom of blackface dates back to about 1830, and so-called "minstrel shows," when white performers caked their faces in greasepaint or shoe polish and drew on exaggerated lips. —AFP

Models present creations for Max Mara's Women Fall - Winter 2020 fashion collection yesterday in Milan. —AFP photos

On magnets, mugs and matryoshka dolls, Putin's face still sells



Traditional Russian wooden nesting dolls, called Matryoshka dolls, depicting Russia's President Vladimir Putin and other political leaders are seen on sale at a souvenir stall in Saint Petersburg. —AFP photos



A mask of President Vladimir Putin is seen on sale among other items at a souvenir stall in Saint Petersburg.



A t-shirt with an image of President Vladimir Putin is seen.

Under the onion domes of its Orthodox churches or in front of its imperial facades, one face peers out at tourists strolling past the rows of Saint Petersburg's souvenir stalls. Twenty years after he came to power, President Vladimir Putin is omnipresent, not only across the airwaves of Russia's media but also on the magnets, mugs and matryoshka dolls throughout his hometown.

Whether it is commander-in-chief Putin looking through binoculars or mocked-up shirtless Putin riding a bear, the Russian president is on sale everywhere. Painter and businessman Alexei Sergiyenko has been cashing in on Putin for years. In 2012, he opened an exhibition of work devoted exclusively to Putin titled: "President. A man with a good soul."

'Special attitude'

The walls of his studio were lined with pop-art pictures of Putin carrying a child on his shoulders or

dressed as a Hollywood superhero stopping a meteorite from crashing into the Earth. Sergiyenko also owns 64 souvenir kiosks, most near an ornate cathedral called the Savior on the Spilled Blood. At each, the president's face has been printed on anything that tourists may be tempted to buy. "Putin souvenirs are only three-to-four percent of total sales, but the numbers are stable," Sergiyenko told AFP. His art has even been miniaturized and printed on the wrappers of chocolate bars sold throughout the city for 150 rubles (around \$2).

These kinds of flattering images of the president reinforce a portrait offered by the Kremlin of Putin as a father figure or savior of the nation. Since coming to power two decades ago following the resignation of Boris Yeltsin, Putin's popularity has remained high. It spiked after Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, with his approval rating nearing 80 percent. Although his ratings have since slumped-along with the economy-souvenir

vendors say the president is still a hit.

"Putin is a strong leader. I respect him for that," said Alexander Savenkov, an estate agent in his 40s who owns a Putin T-shirt, which he mostly wears abroad. Alexei Ivanov, director of the "Che Guevara" souvenir company which specializes in politically themed merchandise, says the success of Putin souvenirs lies in the strength of his personal brand. "The main reason these souvenirs are popular is the fame, wide recognition and a special attitude that Russians have towards Putin," Ivanov said.

Like 'North Korea'

Andrei Stepanov, a 60-year-old engineer who lives near the clutch of kiosks, would be happy to have a break from seeing Putin at every turn. "I already have the impression that I'm living in North Korea. The 'great Putin' is everywhere: on TV, in the newspapers, his portraits in every offi-

cial building and even on souvenirs. It's too much," he said. While vendors may be happy to cash in on Putin's brand, the Kremlin has hinted there should be limits.

Recent sightings of traditional Orthodox icons featuring Putin in Saint Petersburg's airport prompted a curt response from the Kremlin's spokesman. "We do not approve of it. The president does not approve of it. You can hardly call these icons," Dmitry Peskov said in response to a question from AFP. Still, the Kremlin has launched a website in honor of Putin's 20 years in power with fawning archival footage of the president singing Frank Sinatra hits or posing with animals. Much like his reign, Putin memorabilia looks set to be a mainstay for years to come, leaving vendors pondering just how long they will be able to bank on the souvenirs. "I wonder if I will be selling them until the end of my life," said Sergei, a vendor in his 30s in the city Centre. "I'm afraid it looks likely." —AFP

Violinist plays during brain operation as surgeons test her dexterity

A violinist helped surgeons avoid damage to her brain during surgery to remove a tumor by playing her instrument, the UK hospital where she underwent the innovative procedure said. Surgeons came up with the novel approach to ensure that areas of Dagmar Turner's brain responsible for intricate hand movements were not affected during the precision procedure. Turner, a 53-year-old musician with the Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra in southern England, was diagnosed in 2013 with a slow-growing tumor after suffering a seizure during a concert.

She eventually sought surgery. Professor Keyoumars Ashkan, consultant neurosurgeon at King's College Hospital in south London, hit on the plan to protect vital cells located in the right frontal lobe of her brain. The area is close to the part of the brain that controls the micro-movements of the left hand required to regulate a violin's pitch and timbre. The medical team proposed that Turner be woken up midway through the procedure so she could play and be monitored to make sure her coordi-

ination was not being affected.

Video footage of the operation showed Turner playing the violin as doctors monitored her movements on screens. "We perform around 400 resections (tumor removals) each year, which often involves rousing patients to carry out language tests, but this was the first time I've had a patient play an instrument," Ashkan said in a hospital statement on Tuesday. "We managed to remove over 90 percent of the tumour, including all the areas suspicious of aggressive activity, while retaining full function in her left hand," he added. Turner said the "thought of losing my ability to play was heartbreaking".

"Ashkan... and the team at King's went out of their way to plan the operation—from mapping my brain to planning the position I needed to be in to play. Turner, who has a 13-year-old son and has played the violin since the age of 10, underwent the procedure last month. She left the hospital three days after the surgery. "Thanks to them I'm hoping to be back with my orchestra very soon." —AFP



A still image taken from handout video footage shows musician Dagmar Turner playing the violin during brain surgery at King's College Hospital in London. —AFP

What makes **dogs so special?** Science says love

The idea that animals can experience love was once anathema to the psychologists who studied them, seen as a case of putting sentimentality before scientific rigor. But a new book argues that, when it comes to dogs, the word is necessary to understanding what has made the relationship between humans and our best friends one of the most significant interspecies partnerships in history. Clive Wynne, founder of the Canine Science Collaboratory at Arizona State University, makes the case in "Dog is Love: Why and How Your Dog Loves You."

The animal psychologist, 59, began studying dogs in the early 2000s, and, like his peers, believed that to ascribe complex emotions to them was to commit the sin of anthropomorphism—until he was swayed by a body of evidence that was growing too big to ignore. "I think there comes a point when it's worth being skeptical of your skepticism," the Englishman said in an interview with AFP. Canine science has enjoyed a resurgence in the past two decades, much of it extolling dogs' smarts.

Titles like "The Genius of Dogs" by Brian Hare have advanced the idea that dogs have an innate and exceptional intelligence. Wynne, however, plays spoilsport, arguing that Fido is just not that brilliant. Pigeons can identify different kinds of objects in 2D images; dolphins have shown they understand grammar; honeybees signal the location of food sources to each other through dance; all feats that no dogs have ever been known to accomplish. Even wolves, dogs' ancestor species known for their ferocity and lack of interest in people, have shown the ability to follow human cues—including, in a recent Swedish study, by playing fetch. Wynne proposes a paradigm shift, synthesizing cross-disciplinary research to posit that it is dogs' "hyper sociability" or "extreme gregariousness" that sets them apart.

Williams syndrome gene

One of the most striking advances comes from studies regarding oxytocin, a brain chemical that cements emotional bonds between people, but which is, according to new evidence, also responsible for interspecies relationships between dogs and humans. Recent research led by Takefumi Kikusui at Japan's Azabu University has shown that levels of the chemical spike when humans and their dogs gaze into each other's eyes, mirroring an effect observed between mothers and babies. In genetics, UCLA geneticist Bridgett vonHoldt made a surprising discovery in 2009: Dogs have a mutation in the gene responsible for Williams syndrome in humans—a condition characterized by intellectual limitations and exceptional gregariousness. "The essential thing about dogs, as for people with Williams syndrome, is a desire to form close connections, to have warm personal relationships—to love and be loved," writes Wynne. Numerous insights have also been gleaned through new behavior tests—many



In this file photo Dog lover Neda plays with the strays at the Vafa animal shelter in the town of Hashtgerd, some 70 kms west of the capital Tehran. —AFP photos

devised by Wynne himself and easy to replicate at home with the help of treats and cups. One involved researchers using a rope to pull open the front door of a dog's home and placing a bowl of food at an equal distance to its owner, finding that the animals overwhelmingly went to their human first. Magnetic resonance imaging has drilled down on the neuroscience, showing that dogs' brains respond to praise as much or even more than food. But although dogs have an innate predisposition for affection, it requires early life nurturing to take effect. Nor is the love affair exclusive to humans: A farmer who raised pups among a penguin colony on a tiny Australian island was able to save the birds from mauling foxes, in an experiment that was the basis for a 2015 film.

All you need is love

For Wynne, the next frontiers of dog science may come through genetics, which will help unravel the mysterious process by which domestication took place at least 14,000 years ago. Wynne is an advocate for the trash heap theory, which holds that the precursors to ancient dogs congregated around human dumping grounds, slowly ingratiating themselves with people before the enduring partnership we know today was established through joint hunting expeditions. It's far less romantic than the popular notion of hunters who captured wolf pups and then trained them, which Wynne derides as a "completely unsupported point of view" given the ferocity of adult wolves who would turn on their human counterparts.

New advances in the sequencing of ancient DNA will allow scientists



In this file photo Indonesian dog lover Handoko Njotokusumo and Ace ride through traffic during their weekend joy ride on a motorcycle in Surabaya located in eastern Java island.



In this file photo a woman kisses her dog while posing behind a heart-shaped pastry during a flashmob in Paris.

to discover when the crucial mutation to the gene that controls Williams syndrome occurred. Wynne guesses this happened 8,000 - 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age, when humans began regularly hunting with dogs. What makes these findings important, beyond advancing science, is their implications for dogs' welfare, he argues. —AFP

Queen could stop Harry & Meghan using 'royal' brand

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan will begin their new life outside the royal inner circle at the start of April, their spokeswoman said Wednesday, as Buckingham Palace said it was reviewing the couple's use of the "Sussex Royal" label. The couple will formally step down as senior royals from March 31, the spokeswoman said, and will no longer carry out duties on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II after that date. They will no longer have an office at Buckingham Palace—the queen's London residence—and will instead be represented through their British charity from April 1, she added.

Harry, the 35-year-old second son of the heir apparent Prince Charles, will remain sixth in line to the throne, with no change in the line of succession. The former army officer will also keep his military ranks of major, lieutenant commander and squadron leader in the army,

navy and air force, the spokeswoman announced. He and Meghan, 38, will continue to be known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, as well as the Earl and Countess of Dumbarton in Scotland, and Baron and Baroness Kilkeel in Northern Ireland.

Royal review

Harry and US former actress Meghan stunned the family last month by announcing that they wanted to step back from front-line royal duties. The couple cited wanting financial independence as one factor in their decision. But they could be dealt a blow after it was reported that the queen could ban them from using the "Sussex Royal" brand. The couple use the name for their popular Instagram account and a website set up after their shock announcement. They also have made dozens of trademark applications for various products. —AFP



In this file photo (from left) Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex and Britain's Queen Elizabeth II pose for a picture during the Queen's Young Leaders Awards Ceremony. —AFP

At six, Russian snowboarding prodigy is flying high



Russian snowboarder Vasilisa Ermakova, 6, trains at the Kant ski club in southern Moscow.
—AFP photos



Vasilisa Ermakova may be too young for school, but the six-year-old Russian girl has already made a name for herself as a snowboarding prodigy. Vasilisa spends five hours a day barreling down slopes outside Moscow and has even smashed a number of national records. “She wants to go train every day and she asks for snow, even in summer,” says her mother Natalia.

Coached by her father—himself a former competitive snowboarder—from the age of three, Vasilisa has mastered 360-degree jumps off large snow banks and even 540-degree spins. “I’m flying like a bird,” she says after landing one of the tricks. Her Instagram account has attracted more than 36,000 followers and the attention of major sports brands that now sponsor her training.

In summer, Vasilisa hones her skills on a

skateboard and has set a Russian record in her age group for a descent at 48 kilometers per hour (30 miles per hour). That record however did not make it into the Guinness Book of World Records, ironically because she is too young. “They told us that she had to be at least 16 to set such a record,” her mother said, smiling. “And Vasilisa has done it already.” Anton, Vasilisa’s father, has high hopes for his daughter. “I hope one day she’ll win the X-Games,” a popular extreme sports event, he said. “Or that she’ll be an Olympic champion.” Vasilisa shares these dreams, her mother says. “She says she wants to have lots of medals.” But away from the slopes, Natalia says her daughter is “just a girl who loves singing, drawing, and snow-ball fights.” —AFP





A Naga tribeswoman biting a coconut leaf at the end of an overnight ceremony to bless the harvest in Satpalaw Shaung village.



A child standing with dogs by a fire as Naga tribeswomen take part in an overnight ceremony.



Naga tribeswomen holding hands at the end of an overnight ceremony.



Naga tribeswomen taking part in an overnight ceremony.



Myanmar's most isolated pray for harvest

This photo shows Naga tribeswomen around a fire during an overnight ceremony to bless the harvest in Satpalaw Shaung village, Lahe township in Myanmar's Sagaing region. —AFP photos

A haunting refrain pierces the night as the tribeswomen of the Gongwang Bonyo, among the most isolated people in Myanmar, dance around a campfire to bless the harvest ahead. The group are part of the Naga, a blanket term for dozens of tribes each with their own distinct dialect living near the Indian border, only accessible by nerve-shredding motorcycle journeys and on foot.

Dressed in black and wearing orange bead necklaces and palm leaf headbands, they rotate around a fire in Satpalaw Shaung village, hands held tightly and braving the cold with bare arms. "This is the essence of our village and it brings us joy," they chorus.

Like most Naga, the Gongwang

Bonyo are mainly subsistence farmers who clear and burn the steep slopes around them to plant paddy, maize and vegetables. The next season they move on, leaving the soil to recover for up to 10 years. "The song is a prayer to bring success to the hill farms this coming year," 32-year-old village head Maung Tar tells AFP. "We dance in a circle to show we're united and that nobody can divide us. We don't let go, whatever happens." But the Naga are a people divided.

Tracing a mountain ridge, the India-Myanmar frontier is a legacy of British rule, left behind by the retreating colonial power in the wake of World War II. It has left some 400,000 Naga in Myanmar estranged from three million others in India. A struggle for independence waged

by armed factions on both sides has simmered for decades and yearning for a united Nagaland remains strong. The women continue their campfire ritual through dawn, temperatures plummeting in a test of physical endurance helped by an occasional draught of rice wine.

It will be the men's turn in a few weeks' time, once the newly designated land is fully cleared and ready for planting. As the roosters crow and the sun rises, youngsters are welcomed into the circle while the men prepare a freshly slain pig for the day's feast. "We worry about losing our traditions. That's why we teach them to our children," says village head Maung Tar. —AFP



Photo shows the end of an overnight ceremony.



Judokas attend the judo Winter Training at the Kodokan in Tokyo. — AFP photos

Kodokan: Near-religious experience for foreign judo pilgrims



Photo shows Judokas bow.

For judo lovers all over the world who make the pilgrimage to Tokyo's Kodokan, it's an emotional experience to tread the hallowed mats—a unique chance to train at the sport's hub. It would be like a club tennis player knocking up at Wimbledon, a village cricketer striding out to bat at Lord's or a Sunday League footballer doing keepy-uppies at Wembley, but in judo, the "home of the game" welcomes all comers.

Many spend small fortunes just to experience the thrill of throwing opponents where judo began and others have been known to break down in tears when they realize a life's dream. "It's everything that is judo," said Emyr Rees, a 29-year-old from Llanelli in South Wales, who said he has been dreaming of coming to the Kodokan since he started the sport 16 years ago. "Just the chance to be on the mat here, training with all these great instructors, learning from them. People from all over the world coming together, learning from each other, which is exactly one of the maxims of judo," Rees told AFP.

The pinnacle for any judoka is to train at the iconic "Kangeiko", or Winter Training, 10 consecutive days of judo starting at 5:30 am sharp that is not for the faint-hearted. But despite its global fame in the world of judo, the training is open to all—no matter where they come from—and anyone can train with anyone else regardless of age or standard. Head coach at the Kodokan, Motonari

Sameshima, said many foreigners are overcome with emotion when they step onto the tatami for the first time, bowing to the statue of the sport's founder Jigoro Kano, before they do so. "One French woman even cried at the entrance. She said 'Finally, I have got here after saving up. She stood there at the entrance weeping. I myself became emotional watching her. That's what this place does,'" the 70-year-old told AFP.

'We feel pain'

For the "Kangeiko", an English-speaking coach guides the foreign judoka through the rituals and explains the various groups they can join: free practice or "randori", women's only training, specialised throws. But foreigners are not excused from the traditional role-call, nor the president's New Year speech in Japanese, nor the strenuous warm-up guided by one of the youngest judoka.

Sameshima admitted there was a language barrier but stressed that judo was "a genuinely physical activity" that transcends language. "Even if they don't know the language, they throw and they are thrown. We feel pain, of course, when we are thrown, but we can get a connection with each other by doing so," he said.

On the day AFP visited, there were at least a dozen foreign judoka grappling at the Kodokan, from Australia, the United States, Germany,



Elderly judokas practice judo techniques during the Winter Training at the Kodokan in Tokyo.



Judokas attend the Winter Training at the Kodokan in Tokyo.



Judo masters demonstrate techniques in front of a picture (back left) of judo's founder Jigoro Kano.

France, Britain and Brazil. Over the 10-day Kangeiko, 50 had registered from 16 countries. Nick Forbes, a 29-year-old from Sydney, decided to make the trip of a lifetime after losing his job, using the redundancy money to fund his travel. "I've always wanted to come to the Mecca of judo. This is where it all started," said Forbes, who was sleeping in an 18-person dormitory on-site to keep costs down. For Sandro Endler, a 48-year-old real estate developer from Sao Paolo, his trip to the Kodokan was the culmination of a childhood ambition.

"I started judo when I was seven years old. Back then, there was no internet and coming to Japan to do judo seemed like a distant dream. Now I'm 48 and I'm finally fulfilling that dream," he said. He now lives in the United States but made the pilgrimage specially to the Kodokan. "It's the place that everyone who has ever done judo wants to come and especially for the Winter Training. Everyone knows about it. "Right now I'm pretty excited. It's a dream come true and I can't wait to get out there to train with people from all over the world," he said. — AFP



Judokas attend the Winter Training at the Kodokan in Tokyo.

Kodokan: Judo hub open to all

Blink and you'd miss it. In Tokyo's residential Bunkyo district squats a nondescript grey office block above a hardware store and within earshot of the squeals from the Tokyo Dome amusement park. Only the bronze statue of judo's founder Jigoro Kano gives a hint that this unremarkable building is in fact the Kodokan, a Mecca for judo that attracts pilgrims from around the world. Here is a guide to the mythical Kodokan, the undisputed home of judo, whose name means "place for teaching the way."

The hallowed mats

As befits judo's HQ, there are no fewer than six separate dojos for training and matches, a total of 1,300 mats with 150 top-level coaches to teach students from Japan and around the world. The seventh floor dojo is judo's Holy of Holies, with 420 mats, allowing four separate matches to be held simultaneously. There is a seating gallery above for around 900 spectators.

But the Kodokan also has smaller areas on the two floors below—an "international dojo", "women's dojo", "children's

dojo", "school dojo" and "special dojo" for hire for private events. For the small price of 800 yen (around \$8), anyone with basic judo skills is welcome to practice at the dojo with other judoka and instructors.

Judoka do however have to adhere to the strict rules of the Kodokan—including wearing a clean white judogi or uniform (not blue) and keeping fingernails and toenails short. "The most important thing is to never give up. Trainees need to conduct themselves in a disciplined manner, caring for their health through diet and daily living," according to the Kodokan rules.

Eat, sleep, live judo

Spread over eight floors, the Kodokan is a temple to judo that contains much more than the hallowed dojos for "randori"—training with random partners. The Kodokan also hosts a large museum about the history of judo, a restaurant with pictures of champions on the wall, and a library with around 6,000 works ranging from scholarly tomes to judo manga. In addition, the building contains a hostel for overseas judo fans—"once a judoka, always a judoka" reads the sign on the door. Accommodation ranges from basic single and double rooms to a huge dormitory sleeping 18 on tatami mats on the floor—for the more budget-conscious judoka at 3,300 yen per night. The hostel comes into its own during the famous Winter Training in January, where sessions begin at 5:30am sharp and bleary-eyed trainees simply have to stumble up the stairs to begin their randori.

A moveable feast

The current location for the Kodokan dates only from 1958. A new wing was built later, bringing the overall dojo space to 2,107 square meters. It's a far cry from judo's humble beginnings. Jigoro Kano first started teaching in 1882 in a tiny dojo with 12 tatami mats at the Eishoji temple in eastern Tokyo. At the time, he had nine students. Today, this historic site is tucked between an anime comic shop and a police box near an underground station on a busy main road.

A small metal plaque testifies the temple is the "birthplace of Kodokan judo" where Kano "started training with his friends and his followers." As more students flocked to the new discipline, Kano expanded and relocated his headquarters no fewer than eight times before finally settling on the present location.

Running the sport

The Kodokan also houses the All Japan Judo Federation and various other departments for administering the sport domestically and abroad. From the building, officials organize tournaments at all levels, provide training to other judo instructors, arrange seminars on judo, and issue publications and rules about the sport. Crucially, the Kodokan also certifies the "Dan" grades—judo's ranking system. Twice a year, the Kodokan runs a "Batsugun" tournament which allows competitors to move up through the Dan system with a series of wins. — AFP



Why Jordan should be your next diving and snorkeling destination

By Christina Webb

Home to a kaleidoscopic array of marine life, the Red Sea boasts some of the world's most coveted coral gardens, reefs and sunken wrecks that are perfect for scuba diving and snorkeling. It's easy to see why; with more than 1000 species of fish here, and over 200 species of hard and soft coral (including the red-hued reefs that supposedly give the sea its name), exploring its depths makes for hours of underwater adventure.

The Red Sea is the world's only tropical sea that is almost entirely surrounded by land, and the visibility is outstanding due to the fact that no rivers flow into it. Bordered by six countries, there are bountiful choices for a base. While most travellers head to Egypt or

other countries, Lonely Planet editor Christina Webb decided to take a trip to Jordan instead, to the city of Aqaba, where she found a spectacular marine park sitting pretty on the country's tiny, yet marvelous, slice of coastline.

A compact, mellow seaside spot, Aqaba is full of palm-fringed avenues and small markets; we fell in love with its no-frills vibe. The city's location is perfect to reach other experiences in the southern tip of the country, including Petra and the Wadi Rum desert.

Dive centers

Diving costs are relatively low in Aqaba, and you can find some of the world's most trusted dive centers here. My friend and I opted for PADI-operating Dive Aqaba, the self-proclaimed 'mother of the diving industry' here.



Lifestyle | Feature

I'd dived before but needed a refresher and my friend was trying diving for the first time, so we wanted to make sure we were in safe hands. We found the team to be reputable and trustworthy, but also down-to-earth. Established almost 20 years ago by father and step-son Amjad Sulaibi and Rod Abbotson, Dive Aqaba has a unique history. Aqaba's dive sites were named by Rod himself, who also holds the record for the deepest dive in Jordanian history (167m if you were curious).

Wrecks

The wrecks play a pivotal part in what lures

divers to Aqaba each year. You can find a tank, a plane and a spectacular ship all within meters of each other and the beach. There's also the well-preserved Al Shorouk shipwreck at between 30 and 60 meters depth, and a more technical dive at the Taiyong shipwreck. These sunken beauties are, quite literally, fit for a king - King Abdullah II of Jordan frequents the waters often.

Marine life

Flitting above and amongst vibrant hard and soft corals, you're likely to see a brilliant selection of fish when snorkeling or diving, the most recognizable being parrotfish, clownfish



and lionfish. More rarely, you can spot sea-horses, sea turtles, rays and moray eels. You can also find life in the nooks and crevices of the wrecks, such as starfish, crabs and shrimps.

Accessibility

I've had some incredible diving experiences before, from coasting alongside green sea turtles in Bali to seeking out the sardine run in the Philippines. In comparison, the diving in Aqaba Marine Park was the most effortless and varied because the sites are so easy to find and there are a whopping 23 to choose from.

For those who want to base themselves in the heart of the diving community, there are good dive hotels and hostels lining the reefs at South Beach such as the Red Sea Dive Center and boho Darna Village, though there is little else nearby. For others, you can easily jump into a cheap taxi from Aqaba city and be at the waterfront within 20 minutes.

My snorkeling experience

The Marine Park's shallow corals make for fabulous snorkeling. We spent two days snorkeling and took our own masks and breathing tubes - we didn't feel the need to wear wet-suits, but for some the water can feel a little

Lifestyle | Feature



The visibility was so good that we decided to swim over to some of the wrecks, one simply named 'The Tank', and the C-130 Hercules aircraft wreck, the most recent addition - it was once a military transport aircraft since donated from the Royal Jordanian Air Force.

After some time, my boyfriend started to hold his breath and freedive; very quickly he was diving to depths of about five or six meters. Swimming down to glimpse the wrecks close-up, he even managed to spot a little lionfish sitting in the cockpit of the plane!

My diving experience

We got fitted and kitted, starting our dive at South Beach. We drifted along a gorgeous, teeming reef gradually, as my ears tend to equalize pretty slowly. Once we were completely comfortable we swam along to the Cedar Pride shipwreck. Nothing can prepare you for the ship's dramatic form coming into view, lying peacefully on one side. Getting up close is even more surreal; with almost 35 years of underwater activity sprouting from all angles of the ship, it's a haven for marine life.

Next was our personal highlight. We ducked and dived into the interior of the ship. Our instructor pointed upwards, and as I looked up, it was as if I was looking at the sur-



face just above my head. At 16m deep, this couldn't be possible. Confused, we glided towards what we discovered to be an air pocket within the ship! When the Spanish cargo ship was carefully sunk in 1985 by the World Wildlife Fund, this bubble formed by chance, and the air is kept (mostly) fresh by experienced divers releasing air from their tanks into it every so often. We took our breathing regulators out and were able to verbally exclaim our surprises before setting off again into the water and back to shore.

When to go to the Red Sea

November is the perfect time for a Red Sea exploration. You can expect great visibility, lower rates at hotels and comfortable temperatures both in and out of the water. Other decent times to go are late January through to May - though this period can see more divers and higher accommodation prices - and October. I'd recommend a minimum of a few days to a week to spend diving in Aqaba, or an afternoon to two days if you're just snorkeling. — www.lonelyplanet.com



chilly! If you pay a little more, equipment, suits and fins can be provided.

Taking to the water we immediately found the beautiful reefs in the Japanese Garden, Aqaba's most popular reef for snorkeling. We also spent time drifting over other reefs such as the Rainbow Reef and Seven Sisters - all very near one another. We saw, amongst many other things, clownfish, a number of meek lionfish (though highly venomous, they tended to be hiding beneath coral or within wrecks), pipefish, masked puffer fish, parrotfish and a huge humphead wrasse fish.

Comic

Word Search

New York City 1

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

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

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| BASEBALL | FERRIES | IMMIGRANTS | SKYSCRAPERS |
| BASKETBALL | FIFTH AVENUE | LAGUARDIA AIRPORT | SOCCER |
| BOROUGH | FINANCE | MANHATTAN | SPORTS |
| BROADWAY | FOOTBALL | MEDIA | STATEN ISLAND |
| BROOKLYN | GRAND CENTRAL | MUSICALS | ST PATRICKS CATHEDRAL |
| CHINATOWN | TERMINAL | NASDAQ | SUBWAY |
| CONY ISLAND | GREENWICH VILLAGE | NEW YORK TIMES | THE BIG APPLE |
| CULTURAL | GROUND ZERO | NYSE | THE BRONX |
| EMPIRE STATE BUILDING | HARBOR | PLAYS | TIMES SQUARE |
| ENTERTAINMENT | HIGHRISES | POPULOUS | UNITED NATIONS |
| FASHION | HOCKEY | QUEENS | WALL STREET |
| | HUDSON RIVER | | |

Yesterday's Solution

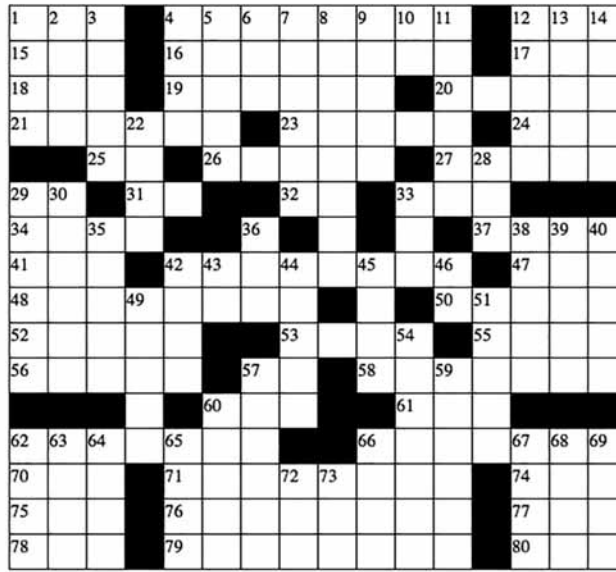
Musical Instruments 2

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

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|-----------|---------------|
| BASSOON | FIFE | MARIMBAS | SHOFAR |
| BONGOS | FLUGELHORN | MELODEON | SLIDE WHISTLE |
| BOUZOUKI | GONG | MOCENO | STRUMSTICK |
| BUGLE | HARMONICA | NEFER | TAMBOURINE |
| CASTANETS | HARMONIUM | OCARINA | TAMBURA |
| CONCERTINA | HUNTING HORN | PIANO | TIN WHISTLE |
| CONCH HORN | JEW'S HARP | REBEC | TRUMPET |
| CUMBUS | KEYBOARD | RECORDER | TUBA |
| CYMBAL | LUTE | SAROD | VIOLA |
| DULCIMER | MANDOLIN | SAXOPHONE | XYLOPHONE |

Hidden sentence: MUSIC WITH DINNER IS AN INSULT BOTH TO THE COOK AND THE VIOLINIST

Crossword 2442



ACROSS

- The extreme end of something.
- (baseball) A pitch thrown with maximum velocity.
- Sandwich filled with slices of bacon and tomato with lettuce.
- Used of a single unit or thing.
- Youthful appearance in an old person.
- Relating to or characteristic of or occurring in the air.
- Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
- A cooler darker spot appearing periodically on the surface of the sun.
- The basic unit of money in Russia.
- A political leader (especially of Tammany Hall).
- Of lesser importance or stature or rank.
- A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
- The branch of engineering science that studies the uses of electricity and the equipment for power generation and distribution and the control of machines and communication.
- Jordan's port.
- Worn or shabby from overuse or (of pages) from having corners turned down.
- 1,000,000,000 periods per second.
- A radioactive element of the actinide series.
- A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
- An inclined surface or roadway that moves traffic from one level to another.

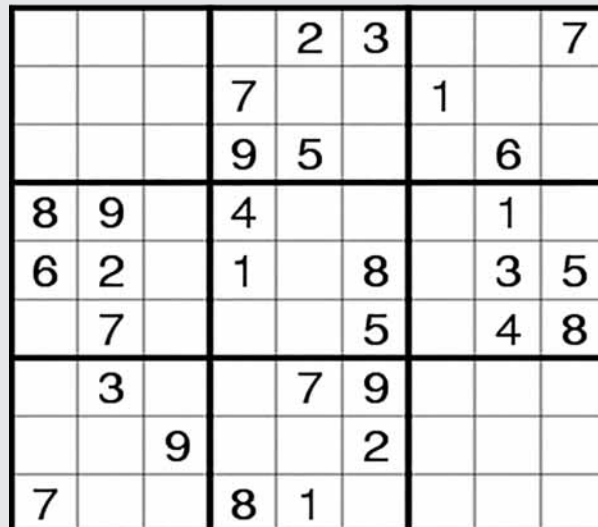
DOWN

- Informal terms for clothing.
- A ruler of the Inca Empire (or a member of his family).
- The state prevailing during the absence of war.
- The state or quality of being widely honored and acclaimed.
- Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
- (of champagne) Moderately dry.
- Elected Vice President in Roosevelt's 4th term.
- Shrubby tree widely distributed along tropical shores.
- (Hindu) A manner of sitting (as in the practice of Yoga).
- Being one more than fifty.
- Xerophytic evergreen shrubs.
- An imaginary elephant that appears in a series of French books for children.
- An industrial city in northern France near the Belgian border.
- A step in walking or running.
- A collection of objects laid on top of each other.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- A woman's large folded hooped hood.
- The law enforcement agency in the Justice Department.
- (Greek mythology) A princess of Colchis who aided Jason in taking the Golden Fleece from her father.
- A doctor's degree in dental medicine.
- A rotary duplicator that uses a stencil through which ink is pressed (trade mark Roneo).
- Long-tailed brilliantly colored parrot
- Weapons considered collectively.
- Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
- Annual grass of Europe and North Africa.
- Freetail bats.
- Informal terms for a human head.
- A river in southeastern France.
- A boy or man.
- A toothed wheel that engages another toothed mechanism in order to change the speed or direction of transmitted motion.
- Relative darkness caused by light rays being intercepted by an opaque body.
- A feeling of dissatisfaction that results when your expectations are not realized.
- Owed and payable immediately or on demand.
- A state of difficulty that needs to be resolved.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- A deceptive maneuver (especially to avoid capture).
- An informal term for a father.
- A benevolent aspect of Devi.
- Of or relating to a meal.
- A Turkish unit of weight equal to about 2.75 pounds.
- A boy or man.
- A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
- A rapid escape (as by criminals).

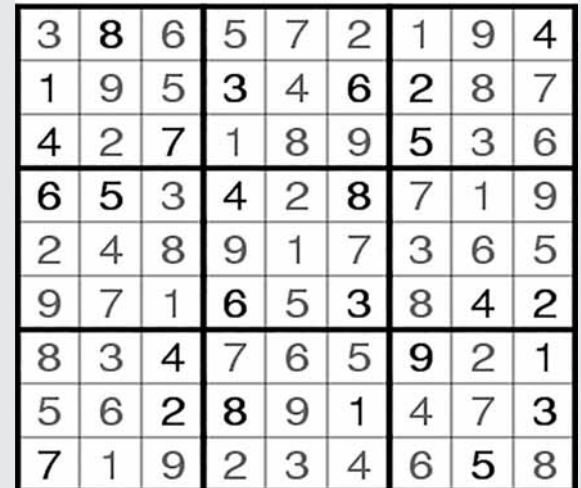
Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

If you've got something you're trying to study, Aries, this isn't the day to do it. Your concentration is likely to be off, and what you're reading will probably look like Greek to you. Unless it's really necessary, it would be best to put the books aside until tomorrow, since you probably won't absorb much today. Trying to read could give rise to the illusion that you've learned something. Be on the safe side and put it off!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Dark, depressing dreams could plague your sleep tonight, Taurus, probably alternating with silly ones that make you laugh out loud. You could wake in the morning totally confused by these images, and your tendency might be to dismiss them. Don't do this. Your dreams are trying to tell you something about yourself. Have you had your emotional ups and downs lately? Have you alternately laughed and cried over something? Think about it!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Have you been invited to a party that's supposed to take place today? If you think you haven't, Gemini, you'd better check your calendar again. All signs suggest that you could forget a lot of important things right now and one might be a social event, perhaps business related. This might not be one of your best days. Usually you tend to have a memory like an elephant. Just for the time being, keep your calendar handy!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Too much mental or physical exercise could have you feeling a bit burned out today, Cancer. You could be considerably slower on the uptake than usual, and those around you could be surprised that you, normally very energetic, seem to be moving like a snail. Spend as much time resting as you can, because you'll need to recoup your stamina. If you must work, concentrate on routine tasks requiring very



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Although your partner may be feeling very sensual at this time, Leo, you might not feel much like getting passionate. You've had a stressful few days and can barely move, so your response to sexual overtures is apt to be lukewarm at best. Your affection certainly hasn't diminished, but your partner could interpret your behavior that way. Whatever you decide to do, make sure your friend knows exactly how you feel and why you feel that way.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your home could be a gloomy place today, Virgo. A member of the household is likely to be away, and this person's presence is apt to be very sorely missed. The only thing you can do under the circumstances is make sure everyone keeps busy until the absent one returns. One way to distract the family is to get them to clean up the house in anticipation of a warm welcome!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

An older relative or neighbor may need your assistance today, Libra. This is apt to be a very inconvenient time for someone to ask for help, because you have plenty of chores of your own. Nonetheless, you'll go to the rescue because that's your nature. Take care to plan your time carefully, pace yourself, and try not to do too much at once. That way you'll live to help again tomorrow.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your creative talents could seem totally blocked today, Scorpio. You may have a project you really want to work on. You have the mental focus, but the creative element just might not be there. This could prove so frustrating that you want to throw something. Do this if you must (preferably a pillow). Still, the only answer might be to shelve your work until tomorrow. You should be back to normal by then.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This definitely isn't a good day to stay home and do household chores, Sagittarius. If you do, some sad and rather irrational thoughts may plague you throughout the day. No matter what the weather's like, it would be far better to get out and do anything that keeps your mind focused on something positive. Go shopping, attend a sports event, see a movie, or visit a friend. Whatever you do, get your mind off yourself. Go enjoy your day.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Some disappointing news could put you into a rather gloomy state at some point today, Capricorn. Someone close to you might suddenly have to leave town for several weeks and you'll be lonely without them. There isn't much point in dwelling on this, however. You'll just have to stay in touch via phone or email and look forward to the time when your friend comes back. You should be pretty busy during those days, anyway!



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

The fundraising activities of a group with which you're affiliated are going very well, Aquarius, but today you're likely to find that things seem to be stalled. Checks may not come in the mail, important people don't return your phone calls, or someone doesn't show up to do the job at hand. This situation is frustrating, but it probably won't last beyond today. By tomorrow you should all be your busy selves again. Hang in there!



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Career matters could move so slowly today that you just might be tempted to give up, Pisces. Don't even think that way! It's just one of those days when nothing seems to go right, even though basically everything should still be going very well for you. Don't expect much progress today, and certainly don't expect anything but gloom from colleagues. Put a calendar with cartoons on the wall so you can distract yourself with some laughs throughout the day.

Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Jordan	00962
Albania	00355	Kazakhstan	007
Algeria	00213	Kenya	00254
Andorra	00376	Kiribati	00686
Angola	00244	Kuwait	00965
Anguilla	001264	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Antigua	001268	Laos	00856
Argentina	0054	Latvia	00371
Armenia	00374	Lebanon	00961
Australia	0061	Liberia	00231
Austria	0043	Libya	00218
Bahamas	001242	Lithuania	00370
Bahrain	00973	Luxembourg	00352
Bangladesh	00880	Macau	00853
Barbados	001246	Macedonia	00389
Belarus	00375	Madagascar	00261
Belgium	0032	Majorca	0034
Belize	00501	Malawi	00265
Benin	00229	Malaysia	0060
Bermuda	001441	Maldives	00960
Bhutan	00975	Mali	00223
Bolivia	00591	Malta	00356
Bosnia	00387	Marshall Islands	00692
Botswana	00267	Martinique	00596
Brazil	0055	Mauritania	00222
Brunei	00673	Mauritius	00230
Bulgaria	00359	Mayotte	00269
Burkina	00226	Mexico	0052
Burundi	00257	Micronesia	00691
Cambodia	00855	Moldova	00373
Cameroon	00237	Monaco	00377
Canada	001	Mongolia	00976
Cape Verde	00238	Montserrat	001664
Cayman Islands	001345	Morocco	00212
Central African Republic	00236	Mozambique	00258
Chad	00235	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Chile	0056	Namibia	00264
China	0086	Nepal	00977
Colombia	0057	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Comoros	00269	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Congo	00242	New Caledonia	00687
Cook Islands	00682	New Zealand	0064
Costa Rica	00506	Nicaragua	00505
Croatia	00385	Nigar	00227
Cuba	0053	Nigeria	00234
Cyprus	00357	Niue	00683
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Norfolk Island	00672
Czech Republic	00420	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
Denmark	0045	North Korea	00850
Diego Garcia	00246	Norway	0047
Djibouti	00253	Oman	00968
Dominica	001767	Pakistan	0092
Dominican Republic	001809	Palau	00680
Ecuador	00593	Panama	00507
Egypt	0020	Papua New Guinea	00675
El Salvador	00503	Paraguay	00595
England (UK)	0044	Peru	0051
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Philippines	0063
Eritrea	00291	Poland	0048
Estonia	00372	Portugal	00351
Ethiopia	00251	Puerto Rico	001787
Falkland Islands	00500	Qatar	00974
Faroe Islands	00298	Romania	0040
Fiji	00679	Russian Federation	007
Finland	00358	Rwanda	00250
France	0033	Saint Helena	00290
French Guiana	00594	Saint Kitts	001869
French Polynesia	00689	Saint Lucia	001758
Gabon	00241	Saint Pierre	00508
Gambia	00220	Saint Vincent	001784
Georgia	00995	Samoa US	00684
Germany	0049	Samoa West	00685
Ghana	00233	San Marino	00378
Gibraltar	00350	Sao Tome	00239
Greece	0030	Saudi Arabia	00966
Greenland	00299	Scotland (UK)	0044
Grenada	001473	Senegal	00221
Guadeloupe	00590	Seychelles	00284
Guam	001671	Sierra Leone	00232
Guatemala	00502	Singapore	0065
Guinea	00224	Slovakia	00421
Guyana	00592	Slovenia	00386
Haiti	00509	Solomon Islands	00677
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Somalia	00252
Honduras	00504	South Africa	0027
Hong Kong	00852	South Korea	0082
Hungary	0036	Spain	0034
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Sri Lanka	0094
Iceland	00354	Sudan	00249
India	0091	Suriname	00597
Indian Ocean	00873	Swaziland	00268
Indonesia	0062	Sweden	0046
Iran	0098	Switzerland	0041
Iraq	00964	Syria	00963
Ireland	00353	Taiwan	00886
Italy	0039	Tanzania	00255
Ivory Coast	00225	Thailand	0066
Jamaica	001876	Toga	00228
Japan	0081	Tonga	00676

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

Friday, February 21, 2020

DR. MOHAMMAD AL HAJRY
Canadian Board of Otolaryngology
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics.
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
A rare Subspecialty in Microscopic Ear Surgery, Cochlear implant & Ear diseases

- ◆ Diagnosis/ Treatment of General Ears, Nose, and Throat conditions in adults & pediatrics
- ◆ Minimally Invasive Endoscopic sinus surgery including Balloon sinuplasty
- ◆ Minimally Invasive Microscopic Endoscopic Ear surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of Otolology and Audiology (Hearing loss, Tinnitus & balance disorders)
- ◆ Facial Plastic and reconstructive surgeries (Rhinoplasty, Otoplasty, fillers & Botox injections)
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of snoring & obstructive sleep apnea in clinic without surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of voice and swallowing disorders.
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of Head and Neck benign & malignant tumors.

Salmiya, Belajat Street, Tel: 1881122

DR. FAHAD S BUHAIMED
Consultant Cosmetic Dermatologist & Hair Transplant, NY

ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

- o Dermatology board certified.
- o Fellowship training program in cosmetic dermatology and hair transplant, New York, USA.
- o Member of American cosmetic dermatology Society.
- o Referee reviewer of International journal of Dermatology.

SPECIALIZED IN:

- o Dermatology & Cosmetic Treatments.
- o Laser Treatments.
- o Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- o Body & Face Contouring.
- o Injectable Fillers & Botox.

SHARQ, Ahmad Aliaher st., Building 68, Floor 11.
Tel.: (+965) 22060777.
@DrFahadS, @RenovaBB, @dardonabb
Email: drfahad@beautybeyond.com.kw
www.beautybeyond.com.kw

DR KHALED ALMERRI
Consultant Interventional Cardiology
Department: Heart & Vasoukar Center

Specialized in:

- 1- Diagnostic and therapeutic cardiac catheterization (Angiography and Angioplasty). Aortic valve implantation.
- 2- Diagnosis and treatment of coronary artery diseases
- 3- Diagnosis and treatment of heart failure, cardiomyopathies and valvular diseases.
- 4- Diagnosis and treatment of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- 5- Diagnosis and treatment of syncope, palpitations and cardiac arrhythmias.
- 6- Non-invasive diagnostic procedures echocardiography, exercise stress test, and 24 hour blood pressure and Holter monitoring

Dr. Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj
ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

- ◆ Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck surgery.
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
- ◆ Member of the British Laryngological Association.
- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society.
- ◆ Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.

Experienced In:

- Management of benign and malignant vocal cord lesions.
- Vocal cord augmentation.
- Diagnosis and treatment of spasmodic dysphonia.
- Adenotonsillectomy using latest techniques.
- Myringotomy and ventilation tube insertion.
- Surgery for the deviated nasal septum.
- Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- Diagnosis and treatment of allergic rhinitis.
- Tympanoplasty.
- Diagnosis and treatment of vertigo.
- Thyroid surgery
- Diagnosis and treatment of snoring.

2536 0000
www.royalehayat.com

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

Scope of Clinical Practice:

- ◆ General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- ◆ Single Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complicated)
- ◆ VATS Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Rotoscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon Insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Substities & Abdominal Hernias Surgery
- ◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
- ◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
- ◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

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

Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
Head of Cardiology departments at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

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Dr. Hani Haider
General Surgery Consultant

American Board Certified in General Surgery
Member of the Society of American Gastrointestinal & Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)
Higher specialization in Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgery & Organ Transplantation
Member of many prestigious surgical societies.

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Health & Science

Friday, February 21, 2020

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Classifieds

CHANGE OF NAME

Surname: SHAIK Given name: ABDULRASEED (wrongly recorded in my Passport bearing No: K2091614) Proddatur, Srinivasanagur Door No: 7/4621-a hereby state that my actual & correct name as per my Adhar & voter ID cards is surname: SHAIK Given name: ABDUL RASHEED S/o: SHAIK.MAHABOOB BASHA. (C 5644) 20-2-2020

I, Charesma Kotapati Passport No. K5706852, D/o Kotapati Lingamma Naidu, R/o D. No. 5-20, Medavada, Mappalli 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

STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm and Clouds will decrease gradually with moderate to fresh easterly wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 20 - 50 km/h causing rising dust over open areas with a chance for scattered rain.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold and Partly cloudy with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 35 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING	Fresh wind	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	25 °C	19 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	27 °C	20 °C
ABDALY	27 °C	17 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	28 °C	19 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	23 °C	18 °C
SALMIYAH	20 °C	16 °C
AHMADI	20 °C	18 °C
NUWAISIB	27 °C	20 °C
WAFRA	28 °C	19 °C
SALMY	27 °C	15 °C

SFC. CHART	20/02/2020 0000 UTC

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	02/21	Warm	25 °C	15 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h
Saturday	02/22	Warm	24 °C	10 °C	SE	12 - 35 km/h
Sunday	02/23	Warm and Clouds will increase gradually with a chance for scattered rain later on	26 °C	09 °C	SE	12 - 38 km/h
Monday	02/24	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered rain later on with a chance for	27 °C	12 °C	SE	15 - 45 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:04
Sunrise	06:23
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:15
Sunset	17:41
Isha	18:58

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	30 °C
MIN. Temp.	14 °C
MAX. RH	85 %
MIN. RH	23 %
MAX. Wind	SE 60 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Business

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2020

39 Yen's safe-haven status under siege as Japan economy stalls



40 Coronavirus blows large hole in Air France's 2020 earnings



41 'Fiscal hawks' now endangered as US shrugs at national debt



BEIJING: Restaurant workers wear protective clothing as they prepare food to sell on the street outside their restaurant in Beijing yesterday. China cut the benchmark lending rate yesterday, as the authorities move to lower financing costs for businesses and support an economy jolted by a severe coronavirus outbreak. —AFP

China cuts lending rate as economy struggles

Market expects more easing measures to combat virus impact

SHANGHAI/TOKYO: China cut the benchmark lending rate yesterday, as widely expected, as the authorities move to lower financing costs for businesses and support an economy jolted by a severe coronavirus outbreak. The epidemic has upended global supply chains and caused widespread disruption to businesses and factory activity in China, prompting authorities to deliver a steady stream of policy measures over recent weeks to cushion the blow to growth. The one-year loan prime rate (LPR), the new benchmark lending gauge introduced in August, was lowered by 10 basis points to 4.05 percent from 4.15 percent at the previous monthly fixing.

The five-year LPR was lowered by 5 basis points to 4.75 percent from 4.80 percent. All 51 respondents in a Reuters snap survey had expected a reduction in the LPR, with 38 respondents, or about 75 percent of participants, tipping a 10 basis points cut to both tenors.

The LPR cut followed a similar move in the central bank's medium-term lending rate on Monday. Investors are betting the authorities will roll out more monetary easing and fiscal stimulus in the near term to help smaller businesses that are struggling to tide over the crisis. Mayank Mishra, macro strategist at Standard Chartered Bank in Singapore, said the LPR cut may not be enough to overcome the economic impact of the virus.

"The Chinese authorities are sending a message that easing will happen, but it will happen at a measured pace. They do not want fuel expectations that they will be easing aggressively," Mishra said. "We expect more monetary easing in the form of 100 basis points in the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) and 10 basis points in the medium-term lending facility (MLF) in addition to what we've already seen." China's yuan weakened to a more than two-month low against the dollar after the LPR cut, mainly pressured by further easing expectations.

Jacqueline Rong, senior China economist at BNP Paribas in Beijing, said she had expected a deeper cut to one-year LPR especially as interbank market rates have already posted sharp declines in the past month. Banks are al-

ready setting lending rates well below the benchmark and if government subsidies are taken into account, some borrowers may not pay any interest at all, sources told Reuters. Some analysts say the minor cut to the 5-year LPR likely signalled that authorities wanted to avoid stoking a property bubble and causing more damage to the economy in the longer run.

Smaller firms squeezed

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) has pledged to use tools such as targeted reserve requirement cuts, relending and rediscount, to support key sectors affected by the outbreak, having already injected over \$200 billion in liquidity in a bid to help lower financing cost. China reported a dramatic drop in new cases in the province at the heart of the coronavirus outbreak yesterday, though the death toll so far at over 2,000 has made it one of the biggest global health emergencies in recent decades.

The world's second-biggest economy, already grappling with growth at its weakest in almost three decades as a trade war with the United States took its toll, had shown some signs of stabilization just before the epidemic hit. When compared with a year earlier, first-quarter growth could slump to 4.5 percent from 6.0 percent in the fourth quarter, according to the latest Reuters poll. Some analysts warn of even lower growth closer to the 3 percent mark, underlining the widespread business disruption caused by the virus.

The LPR is a lending reference rate set monthly by 18 banks. The PBOC revamped the mechanism to price LPR in August 2019, loosely pegging it to the medium-term lending facility rate. Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics, warned that policy easing steps will only be of modest help for small firms - a key part of the economy.

"While more easing is likely in the coming weeks, this alone won't change the fortunes of the millions of small firms suffering from the coronavirus outbreak," he said. "Surveys suggest that one-third of these firms may run out of cash in the coming two weeks unless activity normalizes." —Reuters

Morgan Stanley to buy E*Trade Financial

NEWYORK: Morgan Stanley said yesterday it would buy discount brokerage E*Trade Financial Corp in an all-stock deal worth about \$13 billion, the biggest deal by a Wall Street bank since the financial crisis. The deal will help Morgan Stanley boost its wealth management unit, a business that Chief Executive Officer James Gorman has been trying to build out to insulate the bank from weak periods for trading and investment banking. Morgan Stanley will get E*Trade's more than 5.2 million client accounts and \$360 billion of retail client assets as part of the deal. The brokerage's CEO, Mike Pizzi, will continue to run the business following the merger.

"E*Trade represents an extraordinary growth opportunity for our Wealth Management business and a leap forward in our Wealth Management strategy," Gorman said. E*Trade became popular nearly two decades ago by running commercials that blasted financial advisers for high fees. Its revenue growth has taken a hit in recent years from the emergence of digital upstarts called roboadvisers, falling commissions and lower interest rates. E*Trade shareholders will receive 1.0432 Morgan Stanley shares for each share as part of the deal. That translates to \$58.74 per share - a premium of 30.7 percent to the last closing price of E*Trade shares. Shares of E*Trade Financial were up 24.6 percent at \$56 in the premarket trade. —Reuters

Business

UK bank Lloyds says 2019 profit sinks on PPI scandal

Uncertainty over Brexit lingers

LONDON: Britain's Lloyds Banking Group yesterday posted a 38-percent slump in 2019 net profits, after taking a "substantial" hit from the notorious PPI insurance mis-selling scandal. Profits after taxation dived to almost £2.46 billion (\$3.19 billion, 2.95 billion euros) last year compared with £3.98 billion in 2018, LBG said in a results statement.

In total last year, the bank set aside £2.5 billion—nearly the same level as its net profit—to cover claims over the mis-selling payment protection insurance (PPI). Pre-tax profit meanwhile slid 26 percent to stand at £4.39 billion.

Most major British banks faced a deluge of compensation claims regarding the controversial insurance product, ahead of the official claiming deadline last August. "The group's statutory performance was impacted by a substantial PPI charge related to the deadline for claims submission," said Chief Executive Antonio Horta-Osorio. Lloyds was by far the worst affected British bank in the crisis—with its total bill reaching about £22 billion—but it took no new charges in the fourth quarter of 2019.

Nevertheless, Horta-Osorio added yesterday that last year it had "continued to make significant strategic progress while delivering solid financial results in a challenging external market".

He noted: "Underlying performance was re-

silient, reflecting the health of our customer franchise and the strength of the business model." The London-listed financial services giant, whose brands include Lloyds, Halifax, Bank of Scotland, Scottish Widows and MBNA, operates mostly in Britain and has more than 30 million commercial and residential customers.

'Uncertainty remains'

Horta-Osorio also sounded a cautious note yesterday over the outlook in the wake of Britain's departure from the European Union last month. "Given our clear UK focus, our performance is inextricably linked to the health of the UK economy," he said. "Throughout 2019, UK economic performance has remained resilient in the face of significant political and economic uncertainty, supported by record employment, low interest rates and rising real wages.

"Although uncertainty remains given the ongoing negotiation of international trade agreements, there is now a clearer sense of direction and some signs of an improving outlook."

Britain left the EU on January 31 but remains bound by its rules in a transition period that expires at the end of this year, to allow both sides to negotiate a new trading relationship. Back in 2011, British banks lost a high court appeal against tighter regulation of PPI, which provided insurance



LONDON: Signage for Lloyds Bank is pictured outside a branch in the City of London yesterday the eve of the bank's full year results. — AFP

for consumers should they fail to meet repayments on a credit product such as loans, mortgages or payment cards. PPI became controversial after it was revealed that many customers had been sold

it without understanding that the cost was being added to their loan repayments. British authorities subsequently banned simultaneous sales of PPI and credit products. — AFP

IMF: Argentina's debt 'not sustainable'

Buenos Aires: Argentina's debt is not sustainable, the IMF concluded Wednesday at the end of a week-long visit, urging the government to generate funds from private investors to address the issue.

President Alberto Fernandez's administration hopes to renegotiate \$195 billion of its \$311 billion foreign debt, including a deeply unpopular \$57 billion bailout loan from the Washington-based International Monetary Fund in 2018. Assuming power two months ago, Fernandez refused the final \$13 billion disbursement of the loan, leaving Argentina's exposure at \$44 billion.

"The Argentine authorities are moving to address the difficult economic and social situation facing the country," an IMF statement released after the meetings said Wednesday.

"They have implemented a set of policies to address the rise in poverty, while also taking steps to stabilize the economy." It added however that further efforts were needed to reduce inflation.

Argentina's ability to service its debt deteriorated markedly compared to the IMF's last analysis in July 2019, the fund said, when the amount owed was manageable. Since then, the peso had depre-

ciated by over 40 percent, international reserves declined by about \$20 billion, and real GDP contracted more than previously projected. Public debt rose to nearly 90 percent at the end of 2019 as a result.

"In light of these developments... IMF staff now assesses Argentina's debt to be unsustainable," the statement released after the talks said.

"A definitive debt operation—yielding a meaningful contribution from private creditors—is required to help restore debt sustainability with high probability," it said. It added that the IMF would "continue to engage closely" with Buenos Aires amid further discussions on the government's economic plans and policies.

As part of the process, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva will meet with Economy Minister Martin Guzman to discuss "the next steps of IMF's engagement with Argentina" on the sidelines of the upcoming G20 Finance Ministers meeting, it said. Fernandez tweeted following the IMF's visit that he was happy that it "understands the Argentine position regarding the debt process."

"If all parties show a will to reach an agreement, we can return to growth, while honoring our commitments," he said. Argentina's crisis was sparked by a sudden crash in the peso's value more than 18 months ago, a fall that continued last year. The country became a market pariah after defaulting in 2001 on \$100 billion in debt, something the Peronist Fernandez wants to avoid repeating. — AFP

Silicon Valley inventor of 'cut, copy and paste' dies

SAN FRANCISCO: Silicon Valley on Wednesday was mourning a pioneering computer scientist whose accomplishments included inventing the widely relied on "cut, copy and paste" command.

Bronx-born Lawrence "Larry" Tesler died this week at age 74, according to Xerox, where he spent part of his career. "The inventor of cut/copy & paste, find & replace, and more was former Xerox researcher Larry Tesler," the company tweeted. "Your workday is easier thanks to his revolutionary ideas. Larry passed away Monday, so please join us in celebrating him." A graduate of Stanford University, Tesler specialized in human-computer interaction, employing his skills at Amazon, Apple, Yahoo, and the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC).

The cut and paste command was reportedly inspired by old time editing that involved actually cutting portions of printed text and affixing them elsewhere with adhesive. "Tesler created the idea of 'cut, copy, & paste' and combined computer science training with a counterculture vision that computers should be for everyone," the Computer History Museum in Silicon Valley tweeted Wednesday.

The command was made popular by Apple after being incorporated in software on the Lisa computer in 1983 and the original Macintosh that debuted the next year.



MOSCOW: In this file photo, an employee typing on a computer keyboard at the headquarters of internet security giant Kaspersky in Moscow. Silicon Valley yesterday was mourning a pioneering computer scientist whose accomplishments included inventing the widely relied on "cut, copy and paste" command. — AFP

Tesler worked for Apple in 1980 after being recruited away from Xerox by late co-founder Steve Jobs. Tesler spent 17 years at Apple, rising to chief scientist. He went on to establish an education startup and do stints in user-experience technology at Amazon and Yahoo. —AFP

Yen's safe-haven status under siege as Japan economy stalls

TOKYO/SINGAPORE: The yen's status as a safe haven is coming under pressure as unease grows about the rising number of coronavirus cases in Japan, against the backdrop of a stuttering domestic economy. Japan's currency tumbled to a nine-month low against the dollar and faced a barrage of selling against other currencies on Wednesday, in what traders and analysts say points to a flight of large portfolio investors from yen markets.

That runs counter to the long-standing assumption that Japanese funds would repatriate their money during a true global crisis, pushing the yen higher. "You see any potential concern about the virus situation playing out in gold...and you're not seeing the same moves in the yen," said Shafali Sachdev, head of FX for Asia at BNP Paribas Wealth Management in Singapore. "Nearness to China and dependence on China in this current situation have not helped the yen as a risk-off," she said, adding that Japan's exposure to the virus outbreak and recent weak economic data had exacerbated the concerns. The yen was quoted at 111.36 to the dollar yesterday following Wednesday's decline of 1.3 percent, its biggest daily drop in five months. Japan's currency also nursed big losses against the euro, the pound and the Australian dollar. At the same time, gold, which normally moves in concert with the yen, rose 0.6 percent.

Analysts were quick to pin the move to large portfolio shifts out of yen-denominated assets - most likely by Japan's giant government pension funds - amid worries about its economy and the spread of the coronavirus. The outbreak started in China, but its

spread through a cruise ship moored in Tokyo means Japan now has well over half of the known cases outside China.

There are already fears it will cast a pall over the Olympic Games in Tokyo, due to begin late in July and bring a hoped-for boost to the national economy and morale. Should it start to spread through Japan's population, however, the fallout would almost certainly be enough to tip the world's third largest economy, which shrank unexpectedly hard last quarter, into recession. Some 3 trillion yen (\$27 billion) in net foreign bond purchases by Japanese investors in the first two weeks of February seems to underscore the lack of confidence in domestic investments.

The move lower in global interest rates has undermined the yen's attractiveness as a "funding currency," or one cheap to borrow for use in buying riskier investments. That weakens another string of the yen's safe-haven bow because the reversal of such trades in times of trouble was thought to be another factor to support its value. "If nobody is using yen as a funder anymore, maybe there is no reason for the yen to trade as a safe haven," said Brent Donnelly, spot FX Trader at HSBC.

"Price action in the past year or two has raised the question," he said, pointing out the yen's muted response in recent months to tension on the Korean peninsula, trade-war spats and January's U.S.-Iran flashpoint in the Middle East. "The price action overnight adds some urgency to the idea that we have crossed over into a new yen regime." — Reuters



YOKOHAMA: A passenger leaves after disembarking from the Diamond Princess cruise ship - in quarantine due to fears of the new COVID-19 coronavirus - at the Daikoku Pier Cruise Terminal in Yokohama on Wednesday. —AFP

DUBAI FESTIVAL CITY MALL CELEBRATES KUWAIT NATIONAL DAY

Dubai Festival City Mall is set to mark Kuwait National Day with a magnificent firework display and special projection on its Guinness record breaking attraction, IMAGINE on 25th February 2020. In celebration of the occasion, Kuwaiti Nationals will also receive special discounts at selected retail and F&B outlets across the mall.

The specially curated projection with the Kuwaiti National flag and anthem playing on the two-time record-breaking visual and sensory extravaganza, IMAGINE, is scheduled to run at 6:30PM, 7:45PM, 8:30PM and 9:30PM. Visitors of all ages are welcome to enjoy the fireworks that will

light up the sky at 8:30PM in Festival Bay. Visitors can also enjoy watching the traditional Harbiya dance performance at 6:35PM, 7:50PM, 8:35PM and 9:35PM.

Visitors can also watch the fireworks and the special Kuwait National Day projection while dining at any of the 15 waterfront restaurants in Festival Bay. In addition to the special national day projection, visitors can watch one of the popular IMAGINE shows every 30 minutes. Whilst at the mall with little ones, visitors shouldn't miss out on the family friendly activities on offer as part of the largest LEGO Festival in the Middle East. Each of the seven zones

offer exciting activities for kids and are themed from popular LEGO brands such as LEGO Duplo, LEGO Friends and LEGO City. In addition, visitors can stroll down the outdoor Asian market and try out delicious street food and shop from the diverse pop-up stores.

#FestivalCity #imaginedubai @dubaifestivalcitymall
 Website: www.dubaifestivalcitymall.com
 Facebook: www.facebook.com/dubaifestivalcitymall
 Instagram: www.instagram.com/dubaifestivalcitymall

Activity	Date	Time	Location
Kuwait National Day Fireworks	25 th February 2020	8:30PM	Festival Bay
Kuwait National Day IMAGINE Projection	25 th February 2020	6:30PM, 7:45PM, 8:30PM and 9:30PM	Festival Bay
Harbiya Dance Performance	25 th February 2020	6:35PM, 7:50PM, 8:35PM and 9:35PM	Festival Bay and Festival Square
LEGO Festival AED 30 per person to enjoy the 7) (zones)	Running until 14th March 2020	4PM TO 10PM Weekdays 2PM TO 11PM Weekends	NINJAGO Zone - Festival Bay Remaining 6 zones - indoor
IMAGINE Show: Pirates Tale, Star-dancer, A Child's Dream, Hathi's Garden and LEGO Ninjago	Daily	A show every 30 minutes after sunset	Festival Bay



Business

Coronavirus blows large hole in Air France's 2020 earnings

Major carriers forced to suspend thousands of flights to China

PARIS: French-Dutch airline Air France-KLM said yesterday the coronavirus has blown a large hole in 2020 earnings to date while separately unveiling lower profits for 2019.

"Assuming a progressive resumption of (full-scale) operations from April, the estimated impact of COVID-19 on operating income is for a 150 to 200 million euros hit between February and April," the group said in a statement. Air France-KLM said its forward guidance on the virus hit came on the heels of a 31 percent drop in net profit to 290 million euros (\$313 million), on the back of a falloff in freight and rising fuel bills.

The spread of the virus since the turn of the year has forced major carriers including British Airways, Air Canada, Air France-KLM, Lufthansa, American Airlines, United Airlines, Qantas, American Airlines and Delta to suspend thousands of flights to China. The outbreak could mean an overall \$4-5 billion drop in worldwide airline revenue, the International Civil Aviation Organization stated last week.

The UN body said that 70 airlines had scrapped all international flights to and from China with 50 others cutting services. Latest data from China indicate that more than 74,500

people have now been infected nationwide by the virus, which first emerged in central Hubei province in December, with the death toll standing at 2,118 — eight of them outside China.

'Severe effect'

China accounts for around 5.5 percent of annual business for Air France-KLM, and the virus has had a "severe effect", finance director Frederic Gagey told reporters. Against the virus backdrop, projected long-haul demand is also down, while the health scare has further hit cargo demand. According to the International Air

Transport Association, demand for air freight had already slipped 3.3 percent last year for a worst showing in a decade on Sino-US trade tensions. Air France-KLM, which said its operating result dropped 19 percent to 1.14 billion euros, had announced on February 6 that it would progressively resume daily flights to and from Shanghai and Beijing from March 16. The group, the first major carrier to release earnings since the severity of COVID-19 became clear, said yesterday it targeted a "return to normal schedule" from March 29, including onward flights to the virus epicentre of Wuhan. —AFP



ABK Platinum Sponsor of Al-Bayan Bilingual School National Day Celebrations



In a move to foster national sentiments amongst youth ahead of the National Day celebrations, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) sponsored the Al-Bayan Bilingual School (BBS) Carnival, which was held at the school's Hawally campus on Saturday 15th February. The annual carnival was organized by the school's Parents Teachers Association (PTA), to help fund the school's activities and programs for the new academic year.

Conscious of the role that schools play in shaping the views of students today, the PTA initiated the carnival

to reinforce the feeling of unity among students and their families, and reaffirm their commitment towards the country.

ABK believes that instilling a sense of community spirit in the students is very important as it promotes better integration in the society.

During the carnival, students and their families participated in a number of fun activities, and had the chance to attend various shows including a traditional storytelling, music band, light entertainment show, magic show, juggler, as well as a raffle and prizes.

Kickstarter is first major tech firm to unionize

SAN FRANCISCO: Employees of crowd-funding platform Kickstarter showed up to a freshly-unionized workplace on Wednesday after an historic vote establishing a "beachhead" for organized labor in the tech sector.

Workers at the Brooklyn-based firm voted 46 to 37 to unionize in a first for major internet firms long known for providing generous pay and perks to employees. "We are a union," Kickstarter United, which was a voice for the union effort, tweeted in a message on Tuesday.

"And to all tech and creative workers looking to fight for your rights, this is only just the beginning."

Kickstarter workers will be affiliated with a New York City local of the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU). "I congratulate the workers of Kickstarter, the first major tech company to vote for a union," tweeted Bernie Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist who is vying to be the Democratic Party contender in November's US presidential election.

"These workers are setting an example for the entire industry." The OPEIU last year adopted a resolution to organize tech sector workers, citing an "astronomical increase" in interest in unionizing. The union noted protests or petitions by employees at Amazon, Google, and video game studio Riot Games as signs that tech company workers are uniting to challenge decisions or conditions they find unacceptable in workplaces. "Engineers, web designers, programmers, developers and other tech workers are seeking a seat at the table to discuss the terms and conditions of their employment," OPEIU delegates said in the resolution.

Google workers have protested handling of sexual harassment complaints and vying for contracts with the US military. Amazon workers called on the company to do more to combat climate change.

Employees fired by Google late last year were dubbed the "Thanksgiving Four" on social media in an incident that highlighted deepening tensions at the firm, which said the workers violated data security policies. But Google was accused of persecuting them for trying to unionize staff.

The Kickstarter union certified by the National Labor Relations Board provides a blueprint for tech workers keen to organize, according to analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group. "This is going to open the door to unionization. Now, people see you can do it," he said. "It is in the union's best interest to go out and recruit now that they have a beachhead." — AFP

Business

'Fiscal hawks' now endangered as US shrugs at national debt

Analysts say there is no will in Washington to address debt and deficit

WASHINGTON: At their national convention in 2012, Republicans mounted a clock counting the growing US national debt on the wall, a warning of the looming financial catastrophe they said imperiled Americans. Eight years later, the clock has stopped under Republican President Donald Trump, and the "fiscal hawks" whose strident calls for action to contain the trillions of dollars in US government debt have either lost their influence, or are keeping quiet.

The latest sign of this shift away from fiscal discipline was on full display in the White House budget proposal released last week that abandons Trump's deficit cutting promises and relies on economic growth assumptions most economists dismiss as unrealistic to pay down the debt.

"The fiscal hawks are clearly an endangered species," Bill Hoagland, a former Senate budget staffer, told AFP. "I really can't pinpoint anybody that's willing to step up and clear the plate."

Though the budget proposal is unlikely to ever be implemented as Trump fights for reelection in November against Democrats who have their own radically different spending priorities, analysts worry that there is no will in Washington to address debt and deficit.

The Congressional Budget Office predicts the deficit will surpass \$1 trillion and government debt will reach 81 percent of GDP by the end of September. Economists warn those swelling lev-

els are increasingly risky and could leave the US unprepared to fight the next recession.

"Ultimately, interest (on the debt) could become the largest federal government program," warned Marc Goldwein of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. "Your debt cannot rise faster than the economy forever."

'Tidal wave of debt'

While they have remained silent under Trump, Republicans repeatedly hammered former Democratic president Barack Obama at every turn, from his plan to stimulate the economy out of recession in 2009 to his reform of the health care system. Former House Speaker Paul Ryan, one of Obama's most prominent opponents in Congress, once warned the president's fiscal policies would unleash a "red tidal wave of debt." Republicans blocked Obama's attempt to stimulate infrastructure spending, and put the debt clock front and center at their national convention ahead of the 2012 election, where voters ended up giving Obama a second term.

Trump's ascendance in 2017 appeared to spur a change of heart among those same lawmakers, who agreed to a massive tax cut for corporations and the richest Americans that has been credited with boosting growth but also piling on government debt. "The fiscal hawks that were the loudest and most vocal during the Obama administration have been largely silent,"



A clock counting the US national debt loomed over the Republican National Convention in 2012, but the party's interest in lowering the bill seems to have waned in the years since. — AFP

said Romina Boccia of Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington think-tank. The Republicans once most concerned with the budget now have trouble "squaring their support for the (tax reform) with cuts to the deficit."

Sending signals

Trump's \$4.8 trillion budget proposal does address the deficit, but abandons his pledge to

eliminate the budget gap in 10 years, pushing the goal back to 2035. And even the extended deadline achieves balance by projecting the US economy will grow by around 3.0 percent annually for years to come—a feat almost unheard of. The spending blueprint has no chance of getting through Congress unaltered, and Democratic and Republican lawmakers are seen as unlikely to take up a budget during election season. — AFP

Trump economist says 'uncertainty' from trade rows hit investment

WASHINGTON: A slowdown in US growth last year was at least partly the fault of President Donald Trump's global trade battles and the resulting hit to business investment, the administration's top economist said yesterday in an outlook for the coming years.

"Once we got renegotiation of trade agreements, we saw uncertainty in the market, and investment took a hit," Tomas Philipson, acting chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, said in a briefing with reporters about the CEA's annual Economic Report of the President. Philipson said the CEA had only done internal estimates of the impact but referred journalists to a Federal Reserve study that said trade uncertainty may have reduced growth in U.S. and world gross domestic products by as much as 1 percent.

Trump has blamed the Fed as the economy slowed from a 2.9 percent annualized growth rate in 2018 to 2.3 percent last year, and the central bank did trim rates three times to boost the economy. But policymakers cited trade-related risks as a chief reason for the rate cuts. Philipson agreed with Trump that it was necessary to confront China on trade but said it did cause short-term disruption.

"I don't know if we fully agree on the quantitative point, but on the qualitative

we certainly agree ... It is well known, if we have uncertainty, investment takes a hit," Philipson said. It was a rare public acknowledgement from the administration of the costs of a trade war characterized as largely beneficial to the US economy despite lingering questions about who pays the price of higher tariffs, whether global supply chains will be reorganized to the US economy's benefit and even whether China will deliver on commitments made under a Phase 1 trade deal.

Philipson said he expects investment to rebound this year "if uncertainty settles down, which we hope it will." The

CEA report, an annual exercise that is one part review of events and one part aspirational statement, outlined what will likely prove key talking points for Trump's reelection campaign: The economy now is doing better than it did under President Barack Obama; it only started doing better under Trump and is poised to thrive even more if Trump administration proposals are enacted.

Those conclusions are likely to get pushback from Democrats who note that the jobs recovery, for example, began under Obama and accelerated in his second term. A rise in the net worth of the poorest half of Americans, cited in the report and in Trump's recent State of the Union speech, has been largely driven by a rise in home ownership and home values that began late in Obama's term. — Reuters



WASHINGTON: The "phase one" trade agreement signed by the United States and China prevented some damaging tariffs from taking effect, but duties remain in place on about two-thirds of goods traded between the two economic powers. — AFP

Benefits of trade truce 'limited': Fed officials

WASHINGTON: While US trade tensions with China have receded, Federal Reserve officials worry the danger to the economy is not over, according to minutes of the last policy meeting released Wednesday. President Donald Trump last month signed a "phase one" agreement with Beijing which prevented some of the most damaging tariffs from taking effect, but punitive duties remain in place on about two-thirds of goods traded between the world's dominant economic powers.

The truce with China, as well as the new continental free trade pact with Mexico and Canada, "helped reduce downside risks and appeared to buoy business sentiment," central bankers said in the minutes from the January 28-29 policy meeting. But several officials cautioned that the impact of the deal with China "would be relatively limited." Uncertainty over trade policy "is likely to remain elevated, with the possibility remaining of the emergence of new tensions as well as the re-escalation of existing tensions," according to the minutes.

And officials noted that the China deal "would still leave a large portion of the tariffs in place and that many firms had already been making production and supply chain adjustments."

Trump's trade confrontations have included tariffs on steel and aluminum, on top of hundreds of products from China, drawing retaliation against US products and fueling a decline in American manufacturing last year. The frictions, marked by Trump's sharp policy gyrations and threats, have shaken the business sector, which have put investments on hold or shifted production to try to avoid excessive duties. US exports and imports declined in 2019. — AFP

Sports

Halep downs battling Jabeur on 4th match point in Dubai

DUBAI: Top seed Simona Halep needed four match points to see off Tunisia's Ons Jabeur on Wednesday, squeezing into the quarter-finals of the WTA Dubai Championships 1-6, 6-2, 7-6 (9/7). "I don't know how I was able to finish this," said Halep who had to save a match point herself before progressing. "It was up-and-down because she doesn't give rhythm. It was very weird, but I'm happy I could win."

The Wimbledon champion's win came after Karolina Pliskova and Garbine Muguruza re-established order among the top seeds after a run of upsets at the Aviation Club. World number three Pliskova strolled to a 6-1, 6-2 defeat of qualifier Kristina Mladenovic in barely an hour, before ninth seed Muguruza took almost two-

and-a-half hours to get past Russian Veronika Kudermetova 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

Three big names had exited the day before - defending champion Belinda Bencic, third seed Elina Svitolina and Australian Open winner Sofia Kenin. The tense Halep match resembled a Fed Cup tie, with rival groups of Tunisian and Romanian fans out-shouting each other. "It was like a football match or a Fed Cup match. I didn't really realise what was going on court," added Halep.

"Everyone was with a lot of energy so we had to give our best. I think it was a great match." Wildcard Jabeur, ranked 45, came from 4-2 down in the final-set tiebreaker, missing a match point of her own when she netted a forehand.

Halep, who lost the opening set in 26 minutes, eventually claimed victory when Jabeur drove long. "It was a very tough match, she played well," Halep said. "I wanted to give all I had and just wanted to win. I didn't give up, I'm proud I fought to the end."

In the quarter-finals, Halep faces Belarusian seventh seed Aryna Sabalenka who defeated doubles partner Elise Mertens of Belgium 6-4, 6-3. Pliskova pegged back Mladenovic after the Frenchwoman had earned only her first main-draw win of the season in the first round. "It's always a tough one against her. We played in Australia, so I knew what to expect," Pliskova said. "I was not playing amazing but still, even with a couple of mistakes, I didn't give up. The

score looked a little bit easier than it really was, we had a couple of tough games."

Muguruza went into her match two days after beating Kim Clijsters in the Belgian's first WTA match since 2012. "There's a lot of things that I could have done better," two-time Grand Slam champion Muguruza said. "But I'm excited that I gave myself another opportunity to be in the quarters." Last month's Australian Open finalist added: "I'm just happy that I get these tough matches. "Honestly, the difference is very, very small, I'm just pleased to go through." Muguruza will bid for a semi-final place on Thursday, taking on Jennifer Brady, a 4-6, 6-4, 6-1 winner against 2019 Roland Garros runner-up Marketa Vondrousova.— AFP



Kuwait Amir sponsors horses' breeders cup

KUWAIT: Under sponsorship of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Egyptian horses' breeders cup 2020 was held at the Arabian Horse Center (Bait Al-Arab), late on Wednesday. His Highness the Amir was represented at the event by Amiri Diwan Affairs Minister Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah. The Amir's representative was received at the center by the general director and president of the steering committee, Sheikha Sara Fahad Al-Duaij Al-Sabah, head of the board of trustees at the center Alaa Al-Roumi and members of the board. The competition kicked off with the National Anthem, a parade of the participating horses and proceeded with the examination of the results by the jurors. The Amir's representative handed over the awards to the winners. — KUNA



Crusaders reunion, Gatland's goals: Super Rugby talking points

WELLINGTON: Talking points ahead of this weekend's fourth round of the 2020 Super Rugby season:

Crusaders reunited

The Canterbury Crusaders will be fired up for today's clash with Otago Highlanders as scores of club legends look on. The reigning champions have chosen this week to mark Super Rugby's 25th anniversary and all the club's past players, more than 200 of them, have been invited to a post-match reunion in Christchurch. Losing a South Island derby in front of the players who helped Canterbury win 10 titles would be unthinkable for Scott Robertson's men, who will be desperate to put on a show for their predecessors. They will also be defending an unbeaten record against all comers in Christchurch that stretches back to May 2016. "It's a special week for us," Robertson said.

Gatland's goals

Former Wales coach Warren Gatland can tick off the first of his goals in charge of the Waikato Chiefs if they defeat the ACT Brumbies in Hamilton this weekend. Gatland has the Chiefs on top of the New Zealand conference, with three wins from three, including a shock victory over reigning champions Canterbury Crusaders. He revealed he has divided the season into blocks and has targeted wins in the first four matches to give his side a flying start. "Our whole focus has been about this first part of the season - part one was the first four games, and if we can win those it'll give us a great start to the season," he said. "Then we can have a rest in the bye week and then start thinking about the rest of the campaign."

Thorn not fazed

Queensland Reds coach Brad Thorn says he's seeing plenty of positives despite his team suffering three consecutive defeats to start their 2020 campaign. The Reds were edged narrowly by the ACT Brumbies in their season opener before another close defeat against the Golden Lions in Johannesburg. Their misery was compounded by slumping 43-27 to the Jaguares in Buenos Aires last weekend.

"I'm not fazed. We've got a few bonus points there," Thorn said of the Brumbies and Lions matches. "The hardest part is that big trip (to South Africa and Argentina) and it's done now and there's 13 rounds to apply ourselves and to get better and to grow our game and be positive. "Last year we dropped our first three as well and by mid-season we were equal with the (Melbourne) Rebels at the top of the conference." The Reds host Japan's Sunwolves tomorrow.—AFP

Sports

Inter seek to 'bounce back' against Sampdoria before Juve showdown

MILAN: Antonio Conte warned Inter Milan need to bounce back from recent setbacks against Sampdoria tomorrow to keep pace with leading duo Juventus and Lazio, before their clash with the Serie A champions in Turin next week. Inter dropped from first to third, three points behind champions Juventus, after losing 2-1 to second-placed Lazio last weekend, following an Italian Cup defeat to Napoli. "It was a painful result," said Conte of the loss in Rome's Stadio Olimpico. "We've now got back up with the desire to bounce back and move forward." Claudio Ranieri's Sampdoria are 17th, just one point above the relegation zone, and lost the reverse fixture in Genoa 3-1 in September.

Juventus can open up a six-point gap on Conte's side with a win at rock bottom SPAL, before hosting Inter in their Allianz Stadium on March 1. Lazio are just one point behind Juventus as they chase their first Scudetto since 2000, and can push their unbeaten run to 20 games at third-from-bottom Genoa. Maurizio Sarri's Juventus have lost their last two away matches and

need a win against SPAL before their Champions League last 16, first leg trip to French club Lyon. But despite their low ranking SPAL have shocked both Lazio and Atalanta this season. Sarri could rest goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny before their European game allowing veteran Gianluigi Buffon to line out for a record 648 Serie A games. Napoli travel to Brescia before hosting Barcelona in the Champions League next week in their Stadio San Paolo. Gennaro Gattuso's side have moved up to ninth, two points off the Europa League berths, after three wins in their last four games.

In the race for Champions League places, Atalanta are fourth, six points ahead of Roma, with the side from Bergamo hosting Sassuolo on a high after their stunning 4-1 European win over Valencia. Roma, in fifth, have earned just four points from seven games, and desperately need a result at home against lowly Lecce. "Not many people think we can qualify (for the Champions League) via the league but we still believe it's possible," said coach Paulo Fonseca.

"Right now the most important thing is that we get back to playing the way we were before, without adding any sort of pressure. "We must regain our swagger and believe." Hellas Verona, in sixth, occupy the final Europa League berth, four points behind the side from the capital and equal on 35 points with Parma and AC Milan. Verona host Cagliari, who have lost momentum and slipped to 11th, after a ten-match winless run going back to early December. AC Milan travel to 13th-placed Fiorentina, as Torino, just below the Tuscans, host Parma trying to avoid a sixth consecutive defeat.

Former Eintracht Frankfurt forward Ante Rebic has burst through with six goals in AC Milan's last seven games in all competitions. The 21-year-old joined the seven-time European champions on loan last September, but has only played 13 games, and scored for the first time with a brace against Udinese on January 9. The arrival of his childhood idol Zlatan Ibrahimovic last month has boosted confidence in the team, said the Croatian international.—AFP



Juventus' Italian coach Maurizio Sarri



Ron Jans

Cincinnati manager Jans resigns after MLS investigates 'racism'

NEW YORK: Dutchman Ron Jans has resigned his position as manager of MLS side FC Cincinnati in the wake of a league investigation into an alleged racist remark, the club announced. Jans departs only 12 days before the team opens its 2020 campaign March 1 at the New York Red Bulls. FC Cincinnati said the 61-year-old former manager of such Dutch clubs as Groningen and Zwolle was leaving as an MLS investigation was progressing after an MLS Players Association complaint of "extremely inappropriate comments." "As Major League Soccer's investigation unfolded and some themes emerged, Ron offered his resignation and we agreed that it was the best course of action for everyone involved with FC Cincinnati," club president Jeff Berding said in a statement. "We place the utmost importance on a strong culture within our club, beginning in our locker room, and that every person

connected with FC Cincinnati feels valued, respected and trusted.

"Racial and cultural diversity is a major part of what makes the game of soccer so special, and we place the highest priority on respecting every person involved in our game. This includes absolutely everyone associated with our club, from our locker room and front office, all the way through to our fans."

Jans, who stepped away from his coaching duties on Friday, went 1-5 with four drawn last year for FC Cincinnati after taking over the team last August following the firing of Alan Koch as manager last May. Yoann Damet, who served as an interim manager last year before Jans was hired, will again serve as an interim head coach while FC Cincinnati general manager Gerard Nijkamp conducts a global search for a new coach.—AFP

MotoGP world champ Marquez extends Honda contract till 2024

PARIS: MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez has extended his contract with Honda until the end of 2024, the Japanese team announced yesterday. "Honda Racing Corporation are delighted to announce six-time MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez has signed a four-year extension of his contract and will continue to race with the factory team until at least December 2024," the team said in a statement.

Marquez, 27, said he was "proud" to remain with the team who gave him his start in the sport. "Honda gave me the opportunity to arrive in the MotoGP class with a factory bike in 2013," he said. "Since the first year we have achieved suc-

cess together and I am very happy to continue being part of the Honda family." Since joining Honda after winning the Moto2 championship in 2013 Marquez has won six of the last seven MotoGP world titles.

All told, he has won 56 Grand Prix, with Honda. He signed the contract extension months after his younger brother Alex joined the team, as reigning Moto2 champion, replacing Jorge Lorenzo. The Marquez brothers will join the rest of the grid in Qatar next week for the final pre-season test ahead of the first race of the new season at Qatar's Losail International circuit on March 8.—AFP

Same again as world champion Hamilton sets test pace

MONTMELO: World champion Lewis Hamilton hammered out an early season warning to his rivals on Wednesday when he set the fastest time on the opening day of pre-season testing at Barcelona. Hamilton, who will attempt to equal Michael Schumacher's all-time record of seven world titles this year, clocked a best time of 1min 16.976sec off a total of 94 laps. He was the only driver at a chilly Montmelo to duck under 1min 17sec.

Worryingly for the rest of the field, Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas was second fastest in 1min 17.313sec. "It's been a good day and a really good start for all of us, considering we had a long break," said Hamilton. "So to come back and clock in over 170 laps just shows how hard everyone has been working over the winter."

Sergio Perez, in a Racing Point, was fourth

best at 0.399sec off the pace while Red Bull's Max Verstappen was fourth at 0.540 after putting in 168 laps, the most of any driver. "It's been a good day. It's always important to do as many laps as possible and today was a really good example of how you should do it, so I'm very happy," said Verstappen, who was third behind the Mercedes pair in the 2019 world championship. For Ferrari, Charles Leclerc replaced four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel for opening day duties after the German fell ill and returned to the team hotel. Leclerc was down in 11th place, more than 1.3sec behind Hamilton. "I got a call at 6:45am this morning while I was still in bed," revealed Leclerc, who was fourth in the 2019 standings. "It was a little last minute but that didn't change much, even if the mechanics had to change some settings.—AFP

Sports

Beilein resigns as Cavaliers coach after the 14-40 run

WASHINGTON: John Beilein, unable to spark the moribund Cleveland Cavaliers above the second-worst record in the NBA this season, resigned as coach of the struggling club on Wednesday. The 67-year-old American, who left the University of Michigan coaching post last May after 12 seasons to take charge of the Cavs, will be reassigned to a different role within the organization, the team announced.

"Over these last nine months, I have given my all to this organization, but after much reflection, I have decided that it is best that I step back and resign from my position as head coach of the Cleveland Cavaliers and assist the organization in a different capacity," Beilein said. Associate head coach J.B. Bickerstaff was elevated to replace Beilein as the full-time head coach, the league announced. The Cavaliers, who return to action Friday at Washington, were 14-40 at the NBA All-Star Game break, last in the Eastern Conference with only Golden State (12-43) owning a worse record. Beilein struggled to calm a locker room issue after claiming he misspoke when telling his team they were no longer playing like a bunch of "thugs". The Cavs snapped a 12-game home losing streak just before the

break but have lost five games in a row or more five different times this season. "This was a very difficult decision for me, but I want to be clear — this was my decision to step down and I truly appreciate the understanding and support of the front office during this time," Beilein said.

"I find losing very challenging and this year has taken a much bigger toll on me than I expected. I grew concerned for the consequences this toll could potentially take on my own health and my family's well-being down the road." Cavaliers general manager Koby Altman praised Beilein's impact as he looked to rebuild the club in the wake of LeBron James leaving for the Los Angeles Lakers in 2018 after lifting the club into the NBA Finals for four consecutive years. They went 19-63 last season.

"We understand and respect his decision to step down," Altman said. "I was excited about the development of our young players, who have all shown growth and maturity under coach Beilein. 'The NBA is a unique business that sometimes requires aggressive risk-taking on important long-term decisions to move a franchise forward and ultimately compete for championships.'" — AFP



OHIO: Head coach John Beilein of the Cleveland Cavaliers signals to his players during the second half against the Atlanta Hawks at Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse in Cleveland, Ohio. — AFP

NBA's LeBron joins MLB stars in ripping Astros as cheats

LOS ANGELES: NBA superstar LeBron James joined a growing chorus of Major League Baseball stars ripping the Houston Astros as cheaters Tuesday for a sign-stealing scheme in their 2017 World Series championship season. New York Yankees star Aaron Judge, Los Angeles Angels slugger Mike Trout and several members of the Los Angeles Dodgers—who lost the World Series to Houston three years ago—have spoken out about the high-tech cheating scheme exposed in an MLB investigation last month.

"Listen I know I don't play baseball but I am in Sports and I know if someone cheated me out of winning the title and I found out about it I would be F**king irate!" James tweeted. "I mean like uncontrollable about what I would/could do!" James also called for MLB commissioner Rob Manfred to listen to the criticism coming from stars across the league, many impacted by the cheating scheme. "Listen here baseball commissioner listen to your players speaking today about how disgusted, mad, hurt, broken, etc etc about this," James tweeted. "Literally the ball is in your court (or should I say field) and you need to fix this for the sake of Sports!"

James closed with the hashtag: "Just My Thoughts Coming From A Sports Junkie Regardless My Own Sport I Play." The findings of an MLB probe have led to the firings of three managers linked to the 2017 Astros, although no players have faced punishment and Manfred said the team would not be stripped of the 2017 crown. "I feel like every single guy over there needs a beating," Atlanta's Nick Markakis said of the Astros. "Just sick to my stomach to find

out," Judge said Tuesday.

The scandal, involving cameras in the outfield and a monitor near the dugout plus beating on trash cans to signal batters what type of pitch was coming, has been compared to the 1919 Chicago "Black Sox" match-fixing scandal or the 1990s steroids era in giving baseball another black eye. Dodgers star Cody Bellinger said he felt the Astros "stole" the World Series crown from the Dodgers, that Jose Altuve "stole" the American League Most Valuable Player Award from Judge in 2017 and owner Jim Crane's apology was "weak."

Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner objected to Manfred calling the MLB championship trophy, known as the commissioner's trophy, just "a piece of metal." "I don't know if the commissioner has ever won anything in his life. Maybe he hasn't," Turner said. "But the reason every guy in this room is working all off-season and showing up to camp early and putting in all the time and effort is specifically for that trophy. 'So for him to devalue it the way he did just tells me how out of touch he is with the players in this game. At this point, the only thing devaluing that trophy is that is says 'commissioner' on it."

Judge added he was "pretty mad, pretty upset" that the Yankees' seven-game American League Championship Series loss to Houston in 2017 could have been impacted by the cheating scandal. "No matter what anybody says, that impacts the game-going in there, knowing what's coming," Judge said. "That's more people on base, you're getting more walks, you're getting more hits." —AFP

Isolated and training in masks: Coronavirus hits China's Olympic hopes

HONG KONG: The coronavirus has destroyed the Tokyo Olympic dreams of some Chinese athletes and disrupted the preparations of others, forcing them to miss tournaments and train in strict isolation—sometimes in masks. Games organizers are adamant that the outbreak, which is centered on the Chinese city of Wuhan and has killed more than 2,100 people, will not derail one of the biggest events in the sporting calendar.

But it is likely to compromise the performance of the Chinese team, which numbered 416 at the Rio 2016 Games and has been top three on the medals table at every Olympics this century. There are no known cases among Chinese competitors, but the virus outbreak coincides with a critical stage in their build-up to the Olympics, which begin on July 24. In one stark example, China's women's football team resorted to doing stretching exercises in the corridor of a Brisbane hotel after they were quarantined ahead of an Olympic qualifying tournament.

China hopes that rival countries will open their doors to its athletes to compete in qualifiers as some nations, including Australia, have issued strict restrictions on arrivals from China. "There will be over 100 Olympic qualifying tournaments around the world between February and April," said Liu Guoyong, a vice-president of the Chinese Olympic Committee (COC), according to the Xinhua news agency. "The IOC has asked various international sports federations to provide all possible assistance and convenience to Chinese athletes."

Dreams over

Despite their disrupted build-up and missing star player Wang Shuang—who was not allowed to leave her home city of Wuhan, and was videoed training alone on a rooftop while wear-

ing a mask—China's women's football team managed two wins and a draw in Australia. They will face South Korea over two legs for a spot in Tokyo, but the "home" match will need to take place abroad. The Olympic qualifying tournament was moved from Wuhan at short notice because of the virus, which has obliterated China's sporting calendar and forced hundreds of millions of people indoors to stop it spreading. At least the women's football team's Tokyo hopes are still alive. The women's handball team's campaign ended when they withdrew from a qualifying tournament in Hungary next month, saying they could not organize training in the face of the deadly virus.

China were also forced out of a World Cup gymnastics meeting in Melbourne—which offers qualifying points for Tokyo—because of travel restrictions. Olympic qualifying tournaments in boxing, basketball and sailing have all been moved out of China. China topped the medals table when it hosted the 2008 Olympics, but fell to third, behind the United States and Britain, at Rio 2016. Tokyo was supposed to be the Games when China—spearheaded by decorated swimmer Sun Yang, who is awaiting a Court of Arbitration for Sport ruling over a missed drugs test—strikes back.

'Nobody can get out'

Liu, of China's Olympic committee, is confident that athletes will be able to prepare properly for Tokyo and state media has painted an image of them gamely ploughing on with their training routines. But the all-powerful badminton and table tennis squads have decamped to Britain and Qatar respectively, while the judo team missed the Paris Grand Slam in a blow to their Olympic build-up. — AFP

Sports

De Bruyne lifts Manchester City spirits after Euro ban

MANCHESTER: Manchester City cruised to a 2-0 win over West Ham on Wednesday as Pep Guardiola's side returned to action for the first time following the club's shock two-year ban from European competitions. Goals from Rodri and Kevin De Bruyne lifted City's spirits as they cemented their hold on second place in the Premier League.

The Champions League and Europa League suspension for alleged financial fair-play regulations drew a furious response over the weekend from City supporters who have long believed

UEFA hold an agenda against their Abu Dhabi-owned club. Yet the attendance at the Etihad Stadium for the visit of David Moyes' struggling side was disappointing, with approximately 10,000 empty seats greeting the two sets of players before kick-off. That may have been due, in part, to the fact the fixture was rescheduled from its original date 10 days earlier due to storms.

Live TV coverage and gridlocked early evening Manchester traffic also did not help supporters arrive in good time for a fixture in which their team was seeking to close the 25-point gap to leaders Liverpool. It was a curiously subdued atmosphere, therefore, rather than the expected frenzied demonstration of anti-UEFA rhetoric. There were a couple of home-made banners proclaiming "UEFA Cartel" and "UEFA Mafia", as well as chants of adulation praising City owner Sheikh Mansour and boss Guardiola. There were also taunts to UEFA that "we'll see you in court" and crude songs aimed at the governing body. But not until Rodri headed City into a 29th minute lead did City fans become truly animated as their team maintained their complete dominance against the visitors. It is fair to say, however, that there will be a very different atmosphere when City next play at the Etihad in the Champions League, with Real Madrid the visitors on March 17 in the last-16 second leg.

Combative attitude

City's chief executive Ferran Soriano was clearly in combative mood when discussing the approach to their latest confrontation with UEFA. "The fans can be sure of two things. The first one is that the allegations are false," said Soriano, who confirmed the club will take the matter to the



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (left) shoots to score their second goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and West Ham United at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. — AFP

Court of Arbitration for Sport. "And the second is that we will do everything that can be done to prove so." Guardiola was equally defiant, vowing to stay at the club and backing their decision to fight the ban. "It's not finished. The club believes it's unfair so we are going to appeal. We are going to fight like we have fought every single game," Guardiola told Sky Sports after the match. "We are optimistic that at the end the truth will

prevail and next season we will be in the Champions League. "No matter what happens I will be here next season." A second-half goal from De Bruyne at least ensured that City returned from the winter break, and five days of controversy, with the minimum of fuss. However, it promises to be events in European law courts, rather than football pitch, that has the greater impact on the club over the coming months.—AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

SPANISH LEAGUE

Real Betis v Real Mallorca 23:00
beIN sports

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Brescia v SSC Napoli 22:45
beIN sports

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Bayern Munich v SC Paderborn 07 22:30
beIN sports

FRENCH LEAGUE

OGC Nice v Stade brestois 29 21:00
beIN sports
FC Metz v Olympique Lyonnais 22:45
beIN sports

Mind the gender gap: Women cricketers bat for higher pay

NEW DELHI: India's women cricketers could be forgiven for feeling a little jealous during the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia, where the hosts are paid as much as the men and play in front of packed stands. While Australian women's cricket is on a roll, India's women lag far behind their vaunted men's cricketers, who are feted as demi-gods with endorsements and lifestyles to match.

In Australia, the final of the fifth edition of the Women's Big Bash League drew a sell-out crowd in Brisbane last year, underlining the growing appeal of women's cricket. The T20 World Cup final, at the 100,000-capacity Melbourne Cricket Ground, could attract a record attendance for a women's sporting fixture, exceeding the 90,185 at the 1999 football World Cup final in Pasadena, California.

Perhaps it's no surprise that Australia have won four T20 World Cup titles so far, and are hot favourites to make it five when the tournament starts today. Meanwhile in India, the world's largest cricket market and the sport's financial powerhouse, there's no women's version of the Indian Premier League, and few opportunities to play. A case in point is teenage bat-

ting sensation Shafali Verma, who cut her hair short and had to pretend she was a boy to play matches when she was younger.

Last year, a women's T20 Challenge involving three teams was played alongside the cash-rich, globally popular IPL. Indian cricket president Sourav Ganguly has vowed to push women's cricket during his tenure, but for now it's up to the players themselves to prove their worth - despite reaching the 50-over World Cup final in 2017. "There is definitely a big gap," Verma said. "The men get so much support and us, after doing so well, we should be supported more," she said. "But it again it boils down to playing well. If we play better, then we will slowly but surely get recognition, as does men's cricket."

India's top male cricketers, led by Virat Kohli, earn more than 10 times as much as the leading women on the annual contract list of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, the world's richest. On the female A-list, T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana and Poonam Yadav get \$71,500 each, while Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Jasprit Bumrah receive around \$1 million, not counting their lucrative endorsements.—AFP

Guardiola takes swipe at Barcelona over Man City's Euro ban

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola went to war with his former club Barcelona on Wednesday as Manchester City's manager defended his current employers in the wake of their European ban. Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu has "thanked" UEFA for banning City from the Champions League and Europa League for two years, a shock sentence handed out on Friday which the Premier League champions plan to appeal.

The Catalan club, where Guardiola remains a legend, have problems of their own after being accused of hiring a social media company to attempt to damage the reputations of figures such as the City boss and their own striker Lionel Messi. The reports, which Barcelona have vehemently denied, claim that the campaign was part of an attempt to strengthen the Barca board's position.

But Guardiola reacted angrily when asked about both incidents after Wednesday's 2-0 win over West Ham. "I don't know if they spied on me," he said. "If it happened, they know me so it is not necessary to spy on me. "And if they are happy we are suspended, I'd say to the president

of Barcelona, give us the (right) to appeal, you know. "He asks right now the people trust what they (Barca) have done, so that is what we're going to do. We believe that we are right and we are going to appeal and maybe it happens. "But don't talk too loud Barcelona, my advice: don't talk too loud.

"Because everybody's involved sometimes in situations. But we are going to appeal and hopefully in the future we can play the Champions League against Barcelona." Guardiola was talking for the first time since news broke on Friday that his club had been found guilty by UEFA of financial fair play irregularities that saw them hit with the two-year suspension. That, in turn, led to speculation that Guardiola, who is believed to have a break clause in his contract this summer, would be moved to quit the Etihad Stadium.

But, after City's first game since the ban, Guardiola was defiant in his insistence that he will not leave the club. "It is not finished because the club believes it is unfair and we are optimistic that in the end truth will prevail and next season, if we qualify for the Champions League, we will be there," he said.—AFP

Sports

Atalanta thrash Valencia on night to 'remember forever'

MILAN: Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini hailed a performance his club will "remember forever" after the Italian side crushed Valencia 4-1 on Wednesday to take a giant step closer to reaching the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time. Dutch wing-back Hans Hateboer scored twice on 16 and 62 minutes, sandwiching goals from Josip Ilicic and Remo Freuler.

"This is an evening that we'll remember forever," said Gasperini. "It's an amazing result, full of emotion." It was an extraordinary night for the side from Bergamo who travelled to the San Siro with over 40,000 of their fans as their home stadium 55km away does not meet UEFA regulations. Denis Cheryshev pulled one back for Valencia in the first leg of the last-16 tie at the San Siro, the same stadium where the Spanish side lost the 2001 final to Bayern Munich on penalties. Valencia, seventh in La Liga, had finished top of their group after away wins over Ajax and Chelsea but were missing several key players through injury and suspension. "It certainly complicates things a bit, it's a pretty overwhelming result, this 4-1," said Valencia coach Albert Celades. "In the end it doesn't reflect much what we saw on the pitch." Atalanta's run comes despite losing their opening three Champions League group games, before finishing second behind Manchester City.

"Three goals ahead is a nice reward," added Gasperini. "But there were a lot of dangerous situations, these are things we'll need to improve

in Valencia. "We are satisfied with this victory and above all with this advantage. "Yesterday I would have signed to go to Valencia in the return game with a three-goal lead." The tournament debutants dominated the first half with Mario Pasalic having their first chance on eight minutes, but Valencia goalkeeper Jaume Domenech pushed the ball over the bar at full stretch.

Hateboer opened the scoring just after quarter of an hour, though, meeting a low Gomez cross to poke past Domenech for his first goal of the season. Ferran Torres struck the post for Valencia on the half-hour mark, before Eliaquim Mangala missed a chance to connect with Goncalo Guedes' shot across the face of goal. Marten de Roon and Gomez both fired over before Ilicic collected Pasalic's pass and drilled a powerful right-footed strike into the top corner three minutes before half-time.

Gasperini's side put the result on the night beyond any doubt 12 minutes after the break as Freuler curled in a magnificent third from the edge of the box. Hateboer completed his brace five minutes later, ensuring that Atalanta's 12 goals in their first Champions League campaign have been scored by 10 different players. Maxi Gomez had a golden chance to pull a goal back on the hour mark for the visitors but his weak effort was brilliantly saved by Pierluigi Gollini in the Atalanta goal.

Cheryshev came off the bench and immediately scored in the 66th minute, pouncing on a



MILAN: Valencia's Spanish goalkeeper Jaume Domenech (right) jumps to deflects the ball under pressure from Atalanta's Colombian forward Duvan Zapata (left) during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match Atalanta Bergamo vs Valencia on February 19, 2020. — AFP

poor Jose Luis Palomino pass to give Valencia an away goal and a glimmer of hope to take into the second leg on March 10 at the Mestalla. "We had opportunities and we didn't finish them," said

Celades. "The result is clear enough today, but it's not impossible (to turn around). Let's see what happens at Mestalla, let's play well in our stadium." — AFP

Messi sees 'strange' things at Barcelona after social media row

MADRID: Lionel Messi said Wednesday it was "strange" to see Barcelona locked in a row over a company accused of criticising current and former players, including himself, on social media. Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu said on Tuesday the club had terminated its contract with PR company, I3 Ventures, who had been hired to improve the image of Bartomeu and the club's board online.

According to Spanish radio station Cadena Ser Catalunya, the company oversaw "dozens" of accounts attacking the likes of Messi, Gerard Pique, Xavi Hernandez, Pep Guardiola and Carles Puyol on Facebook and Twitter. Among the messages the report cited is one expressing anger towards Messi for his delay in signing a new contract and another questioning Pique's involvement in tennis' Davis Cup.

"The truth is that I find it strange that something like this happens," Messi said in an interview to be published on Thursday by Catalan newspaper Mundo Deportivo. "But they also said that there would be evidence. We will have to wait to see if it is true or not. We cannot say much and wait to see what happens with all this. It seems a strange issue," added the Barca captain. Bartomeu has met with senior players, including Messi, to explain the case.

"The president told us the same thing he said publicly, the same thing he said at the press conference. What was the situation, what had

happened. I can't say much more," Messi said. In a statement on Monday, Barcelona denied that it was behind the messages and Bartomeu reiterated that stance on Tuesday. "Barca has never hired a service to discredit anyone," he said. "Not a player, not a former player, nor any politician, manager, president or former president." Bartomeu added: "That is flatly false. We will defend ourselves where necessary on this issue, by all means."

Barcelona had already threatened legal action against any media organizations that "continue to implicate the club in this type of practice". "Let one thing be clear," Bartomeu continued. "To the question: Have we commissioned the monitoring of social networks? The answer is yes. "To the question: Have we commissioned to discredit people or institutions through social networks? The answer is no and we will take action against all those who accuse us of that." The controversy increases the pressure on Bartomeu and the Barcelona board ahead of presidential elections due next year, and following a period of political turmoil at the club.

The board were clumsy in their sacking of coach Ernesto Valverde last month, when an approach to Xavi Hernandez was leaked while Valverde was still in post. And two weeks ago, Messi engaged in a public spat with the club's technical secretary Eric Abidal, who claimed the players were the main cause of Valverde's removal. — AFP

Allegri undecided over future, eyes comeback

PARIS: Massimiliano Allegri is yet to decide where he will make his coaching comeback as he plots a return to the game next season, the Italian revealed in an interview with AFP yesterday, amid rumors of serious interest from Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester United. Allegri is possibly the hottest free agent in football after leaving Italian champions Juventus last summer with five Serie A titles in as many years and two Champions League finals under his belt.

And the 52-year-old, who also won AC Milan's last league title in 2011, confirmed his intention to end his break away from the game at the end of the current campaign. "In September I need to come back. If I don't I'll get too used to being on holiday and I'll never work again!" Allegri joked during the interview near PSG's Parc des Princes stadium. "I still have three more months of holiday and that's good for me."

However the 52-year-old denied having been contacted by PSG sporting director Leonardo about replacing current coach Thomas Tuchel, and he refused to be drawn over where he might end up, insisting that he doesn't know what he will do next. "I won't speak about my future, because there isn't anything to talk about for now, and also because it would be disrespectful to the other coaches to do so," Allegri said.

On Tuesday Allegri's agent Giovanni Branchini said that his client's future lay away from Italy after an entire career as a player and man-

ager in his home nation. Allegri revealed he was learning English but said that it was simply for "personal reasons" and in order to communicate better when away from Italy. Sources had previously told AFP that Allegri had turned down offers from big Premier League and La Liga clubs since leaving Juve, and media in England report that there is keen interest from Manchester United.

Allegri was in France to promote the French edition of his book "It's very simple", in which he outlines his football philosophy. He is unusual among Italian managers in that he eschews Italy's traditional strong focus on systems and tactics and emphasizes the importance of allowing top players to express themselves. "The job of the manager is to simplify everything that seems complicated," said Allegri.

"The first thing you need in order to win is great players ... Great players pass the ball, they touch the ball two or three times and that's it. They make easy things that other players find difficult.

"A great leader is someone who finds a quick solution to a problem, and one who transmits authority." Allegri has managed some of the game's biggest stars, including World Cup winners Gianluigi Buffon, Andrea Pirlo and Paul Pogba, but highlighted Cristiano Ronaldo as an example of the mental strength that separates the wheat from the chaff. — Agencies

Sports

Mourinho uses injury woes to escape inspection of Spurs style

LONDON: Jose Mourinho had his excuses ready-made for a 1-0 home defeat to RB Leipzig that leaves Tottenham needing to recreate their escape acts of last season to progress to the Champions League quarter-finals. Already without Harry Kane due to a long-term hamstring injury, the news that Son Heung-min could miss the rest of the season with a fractured right arm on Tuesday was a body blow to Spurs' chances of progressing. "It's like going to a gun fight without bullets, so we did what we could do," concluded Mourinho, who bristled at criticism of his set up.

As the Portuguese complained about his lack of resources, it was easy to forget that Leipzig were the novices at this stage of the competition. Tottenham progressed further in the Champions League for the past three years under Mauricio Pochettino, culminating in a rollercoaster run to last season's final. A similar run this season is hard to imagine with even Mourinho questioning how his side muddles through to the end of the season without their two top goalscorers.

"What I am worried with is not with the 1-0 because the 1-0 is an open result. The 1-0 you can perfectly go there and win the tie," added Mourinho. "What worries me is that these are our players for I don't know how many matches. We have to play in two days again. We could see Lucas (Moura) absolutely dead, (Steven) Bergwijn absolutely dead, (Giovani) Lo Celso dead." Given his paucity of options up front,

Mourinho needs to get the best from those he does have.

However, Dele Alli stormed off when he was replaced 20 minutes from time and slammed his boots down in the dugout. "I think he was angry with his performance, not with me," insisted Mourinho. "I think he understood why I took him off and the team improved." Mourinho needs to get Alli back onside and back to the form of his early weeks in charge at Spurs if they are to make it back into the competition next season. A run of three straight Premier League wins despite far from perfect performances has lifted Mourinho's men to fifth in the table. That could be enough for Champions League football next season due to Manchester City's two-season ban from European football by UEFA.

However, Tottenham have their fate to finish in the top four and guarantee another season of Champions League riches. They trail Mourinho's old employers Chelsea by just a point ahead of their trip to Stamford Bridge tomorrow. "The Chelsea players were watching this game on TV, with nice sparkling water with lemons and biscuits, enjoying the game and we play tomorrow at 12 o'clock," added Mourinho, again preparing his excuses.

Yet, patience is already wearing thin with Mourinho's tactics after another home game in which Spurs were happy to be dominated in possession and hoped to take their chance on the counter-attack. Manchester City and



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Portuguese head coach Jose Mourinho (right) shakes hands with Tottenham Hotspur's English midfielder Harry Winks after losing the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first Leg football match between Tottenham Hotspur and RB Leipzig at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in north London, on February 19, 2020. — AFP

Southampton were wasteful before falling to defeat in north London in recent weeks, but the hosts' luck ran out against a Leipzig side that showed why they are threatening Bayern Munich's grip on the Bundesliga.

"I don't know what they are doing," Spurs legend Glenn Hoddle told BT Sport. "I don't see

a team pressing together and I don't see a team with good movement when they've got possession. "They look like a team just hoping they play well and get a break." Mourinho is certainly hoping his injury list gives him a free pass even if it goes wrong in three competitions between now and the end of the season.—AFP

Mourinho takes Spurs to Chelsea as top-four battle heats up

LONDON: Jose Mourinho's return visits to Stamford Bridge have not always been the most cordial but tomorrow's clash between Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur promises to be especially charged. Since taking over at Tottenham in the wake of Mauricio Pochettino's sacking in November, Mourinho has engineered a revival at the club even if his side's limitations were cruelly exposed in defeat by RB Leipzig in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Yet it is Tottenham's Premier League position, not their Champions League campaign, that Mourinho will be judged on at the end of the season, and tomorrow's game gives Spurs a chance to nudge above Chelsea into the top four. That would be quite a feat. When he took over Tottenham were languishing in the bottom half of the table, 12 points behind Frank Lampard's side.

Tottenham have notched up a three-match winning run in the Premier League, albeit unconvincingly, featuring a scratchy win over Norwich City followed by fortuitous victories against Manchester City and Aston Villa. They have been helped too by the faltering form of Chelsea, whose 2-0 defeat by Manchester United on Monday means they have gained only six points from the last 18 on offer and whose home results are of particular concern. It is not only Tottenham who have closed in. While Mourinho's side are one point behind in fifth, Sheffield United are

two behind and Manchester United three.

Wolverhampton Wanderers and a resurgent Everton are also only six points behind fourth place. Mourinho on Wednesday lamented the strain on his squad, a situation not helped by the long-term absence of Harry Kane and now Son Heung-min who broke his arm in last week's 3-2 win at Villa, a game in which he scored twice. He also criticized the lunchtime kickoff for tomorrow's derby, especially considering his side played on Sunday afternoon and then again on Wednesday in the Champions League.

"The Chelsea players were watching this game on TV, with nice sparkling water, with lemons and biscuits enjoying the game, and we play tomorrow at 12 o'clock," Mourinho said when interviewed by BT Sports in the aftermath of the defeat by Leipzig. "Thanks for the choice. We cannot even sleep well until 10.30 or 11. We have to wake up at 7.30 for the game."

Sympathy will be in short supply across London though, where Chelsea's fans might still be rubbing their eyes in disbelief at the sight of Mourinho, once idolized at Stamford Bridge where he won three Premier League titles, in charge of Tottenham. If that idea still seems strange, the thought of him leading Tottenham to victory there will be particularly unpalatable.

Chelsea won 2-0 at Tottenham in December with Willian scoring twice and Spurs having Son red-carded. —Reuters

Neymar and PSG face fight to avoid new fiasco

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain travelled to Borussia Dortmund desperate to finally make their mark on the Champions League knockout stage but left on the receiving end of a defeat which threatens to derail yet another European campaign. The aftermath saw an unhappy Neymar pointing the finger of blame at his own club with coach Thomas Tuchel clearly in the firing line. The world's most expensive player scored a potentially precious away goal for the French club, but a brace by the exceptional Erling Braut Haaland gave Dortmund a 2-1 win to take to Paris for the return leg of their last-16 tie on March 11.

The danger is that a familiar story is unfolding for PSG, who had gone three and a half months unbeaten before their trip to Germany. Far too strong for their domestic rivals, but unable to cope with the step up in intensity at the business end of the Champions League. Humiliated by second-leg comebacks at this stage by Manchester United last year and Barcelona in 2017, beaten by Real Madrid in 2018, it is four years since the Qatar-owned club won a Champions League knockout tie.

Sporting director Leonardo recently tried to remove some of the pressure going into the Dortmund tie when he said: "This is not life or death, it's a game of football." However, an-

other exit at this stage would be immensely damaging for the PSG project. Would Kylian Mbappe and Neymar, the two most expensive players in world football, really stick around for another crack at the competition? Despite his goal, Neymar looked off the pace in Dortmund, short of match sharpness having missed his team's previous four games with a rib problem which he insisted was not serious.

PSG's desire to wrap the Brazilian in cotton wool for the last fortnight was understandable, after he missed the United tie 12 months ago with a foot injury and the second leg against Madrid in 2018 because of a similar problem. But it proved detrimental, according to the player himself. "The club decide, so sadly I had to respect their decision. But that ended up being bad for me and my teammates," he told Brazilian media after the game.

"I was genuinely injured, I had a fissure in a rib. But it was nothing that should have prevented me from playing.

"They postponed my return again, and then postponed it again and again. "I understand the club's fear, because I missed the last 16 in each of the last two years. I respect the decisions, but it can't be that way, because it is the player who ends up suffering.—AFP



SYDNEY: China's Wang Shanshan (left) and Thailand's Natthakarn Chinwong compete for the ball during the women's Olympic football tournament qualifier match in this file photo. The coronavirus has destroyed the Tokyo Olympic dreams of some Chinese athletes and disrupted the preparations of others, forcing them to miss tournaments and train in strict isolation-sometimes in masks. — AFP

Coronavirus hits Olympic hopes

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