

No coronavirus cases in Kuwait as MoH deploys firm measures

Iran reports fifth death • Kuwait suspends Iran flights, bans entry of Iranians, Chinese



By A Saleh and Agencies

KUWAIT/TEHRAN: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah has announced that his ministry is monitoring closely the latest updates about coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and has taken firm precautionary and preventive measures to counter the epidemic. In statements to KUNA, the minister asserted keenness to do all in power to maintain the country's health security and protect it against the new disease through enforcement of a multifaceted and watertight plan.

Sheikh Basel pointed out the ministry is in contact with the World Health Organization around the clock to get updates about the global situation of the COVID-19 outbreak. He added Kuwait is also contacting other Gulf countries to follow up on recommendations, relevant precautions and practical steps to curb the spread of the virus. The ministry is cooperating at the same time with all relative national bodies to take all precautionary measures to help keep the country free from COVID-19, the minister said.

The health ministry has confirmed that there are no cases of COVID-19 in the country, denying social media reports of cases at Farwaniya or Jahra hospitals. Spokesman of the health ministry Abdullah Al-Sanad also said in a statement that "reported warnings against eating food at restaurants and linking them to a possible coronavirus outbreak are baseless".

Continued on Page 24

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti passengers disembark from a plane yesterday after they were evacuated from Iran following the outbreak of the coronavirus there. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



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Local

In my view

Cyber security

By Fatima Nasser Al-Azmi

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Were you the victim of electronic hacking? Were you blackmailed by an encroachment on your privacy and personal data, or theft from your bank accounts? Or maybe some hackers impersonated you and took over your social media accounts?

The vast and quick development of information technology, and the use of networks make us prone to all of this, be it individually or jointly. Electronic hacking is of many types and advanced methods, while countries are exposed to having their security compromised by the violation of their systems and networks, and this will endanger their security with the illegal usage of data. So they are in need of several procedures to protect their systems against digital and electronic attacks that make them the target of their enemy. Cyber security is the measure developed countries are keen to have in order to protect their structures, systems and security apparatus, in addition to military establishments, people and infrastructure, as they are threatened with danger, as technology controls all aspects of life. You may remember the cyberattack against Venezuela's electricity grid, targeting the power distribution system that created a major power supply crisis. So we all are prone to such an electronic attack by Internet gangs.

Many questions come to mind with regards to cyber security and data security issues, as well as types of hacking and means of protecting ourselves and our smartphones from these attacks that may damage our reputation, and damage the country as a whole at a high cost. So we are in need of a strong system to confront these destructive attacks. Many questions came to my mind regarding cyber security, protection of the confidentiality of data against theft and blackmail, threatening of national security and other questions that I found complete and satisfactory answers for when I attended the second Kuwait hackers conference held under the slogan 'together... we build Kuwait cyber security'. Lectures and informative workshops were held that dealt with many important subjects with regards to cyber security. Greetings to the Kuwaiti youth who managed this conference - they are youth we are proud of, and an example that should be followed and who deserve support and encouragement. The participation of the state's official bodies was necessary due to the importance of the conference and its contents.

Kuwait participated in Gulf security drill in UAE



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Joint mobilization exercise - Arabian Gulf Security 2 - concluded on Thursday in the UAE in the presence of Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Dubai ruler, in addition to GCC interior ministers. Kuwait security forces completed their preparations to participate in the exercise out of the interior ministry's keenness to strengthen joint Gulf

police action and increase coordination and cooperation with member countries.

Kuwait's participation is a strong message to all about the shared goal and destiny of the Gulf, and that its security is an indivisible part of the Gulf security system. Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh said preparations for the Arabian Gulf Security 2 exercise reflected unity and security coordination with the presence of Gulf security forces in one place, adding the exercise

contributed to raising the level of field coordination and cooperation between participating Gulf forces.

Body found

Sea fire teams recovered a body, believed to be that of a fisherman who has been missing for 10 days. Police received a call about a body floating near Souq Sharq, so Shuwaikh sea fire station responded and handed the body to concerned authorities.

Operations recommence at Khafji in preparation for production resumption

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Khafji joint oil production operations have resumed as a prelude to resuming production, said informed sources, noting that the operations have started gradually pending achieving the targeted production in phases. "We have celebrated resumption of production, and operations are proceeding gradually," the sources added, noting that daily production is expected to reach 50,000 barrels today.

Campaigns on massage parlors

The Ministry of Interior's (MoI) residency investigations department decided intensifying inspection campaign on various spas and massage centers and forming a special committee to monitor them to prevent vice. The department's instructions pointed out that the Ministry of Health (MoH) had recently notified MoI of the detection of HIV cases, and related investigations showed that

most of those infected worked in spas. "Those arrested confessed that homosexual relations are practiced in spas for money, and this is how they got the virus," the department explained, noting that investigations also showed that customers of these spas belong to all age categories and marital statuses. "Married cases can spread this dangerous and infectious disease to their spouses and the entire society very quickly," the department warned. The department said spas have been remarkably mushrooming in various areas and have turned into brothels, especially since the majority of their staff members are "feminine-like males."

Neighbors fight

A Lebanese man was brutally beaten by his Yemeni neighbor, who broke his collarbone in a fight over a parking space in the building where they live. The victim presented a medical report with his injuries and filed a case at Maidan Hawally police station.

Modern kidney laparoscopy techniques used at Mubarak Hospital

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Head of Urology Unit at Mubarak Hospital Prof Adel Al-Hunayan said that more than 100 surgeries to remove kidney stones sized over 2 cm in diameter were conducted at the hospital during the past three years by using kidney laparoscope in the modern adjusted horizontal position. Hunayan said all patients recovered well, adding that Kuwaiti doctors are currently being trained on this technique in the presence of experts to contribute to providing the most modern care procedures and advanced treatment techniques that are on par with inter-

national developments in the field of laparoscopy. He said kidney laparoscopy at Mubarak Hospital began in the 1980s by Swedish consultants at the time, adding that the procedure was being done in two stages: a renal tube is inserted by intervention radiology the night before the procedure, then on the day of the procedure, the tube passage is widened so the laparoscope can be inserted.

He said this procedure was stopped during the 1990/91 Iraqi Invasion, before it was brought back at the end of 2005 by Dr Khalil Al-Awadhi. During the procedure, the patient is placed with his face down, he said, adding that this is a big challenge for the patient and doctor especially in cases of overweight patients or those with heart problems. This changed in 2017, when Dr Hunayan perform an operation while the patient was laying horizontally on his back, enabling doctors to carry out renal, bladder and ureter laparoscopies at the same time. "The new procedure reduces time and guarantees removal of most stones with little to no complications," he added.



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Local

Kuwaiti society signs with UNHCR to aid refugees in Yemen, Iraq

Kuwait continues humanitarian aid effort

KUWAIT: Kuwait's endeavor to aid all societies experiencing tough situations through financial and other means of support to alleviate them from further suffering is duly noted on a weekly bases. Local organization like the Kuwait Relief Society (KRC) and Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) are amongst the most active in this field of humanitarian works as they take action in aiding a number of refugee groups in the region and respond to the natural catastrophe that hit Albania in recent months.

The KRC took a major step in their continuous efforts by donating \$1.33 million for refugees in Yemen and Iraq through a first of its kind agreement with the UNCHR. Head of the KRC Jamal Al-Nouri gave a state-



Kuwait Relief Society trucks ready to distribute aid in northern Syria.

(canned food, flour, and water), which took off from Turkey's southern province Hatay. The convoy was managed by Atta Society office in Turkey and head of KRC office in Syria Waleed Al-Swaylem along with others, in helping transport and distribute the supplies in Syria, as part of an agreement to build a school that will provide education for 480 students of the refugees in the area.

A two-day fundraising campaign was organized through joint efforts of the KRC and the KRCS to collect donations for the Syrian refugees in neighboring countries who are suffering from winter's harsh season. The donation drive is incumbent upon the venerable Kuwaiti charity given the misery Syrians have had to withstand in recent years. KRCS Secretary General Maha Al-Barjaes said, pointing out that more than 2,000 Syrian refugees will be the beneficiaries of this

humanitarian initiative.

Following an earthquake that struck Albania last November, "the State of Kuwait is fully prepared and committed to providing additional aid to the Albanian government," Kuwait's Ambassador to Belgium, EU, and NATO Jassem Al-Budaiwi told the International Donors' Conference on Albania, which took place in Brussels. Kuwait is prepared to sign an additional loan for the 'Vlora River' rehabilitation project affected by the earthquake, which initially was \$40.8 million, to an additional \$22.3 million, he added. "Kuwait puts into consideration these measures in order to assist friendly countries in their time of need and help guide them towards a new level of stability both through urban and human development," he said, as Kuwait increases its annual contribution to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund from \$300,000 to \$500,000. — KUNA



A child is seen at the site where KRCS distributed relief aid to Syrian refugees in Lebanon.



Fundraiser held for Syrian refugees

ment at His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's UN building saying the donation aims to provide financial assistance to 5,235 families. The agreement will financially supports 763 families in Iraq and 4,472 in Yemen, which will provide for 35,000 individuals, said Nouri.

KRC also sent an urgent aid convoy to the recent settled refugees in northern Syria containing 27 trucks loaded with winter equipment and food supplies

Burgan Bank continues its support to KACCH

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank reiterated its support to the Kuwait Association for Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) by presenting its annual donation to the association this season. Maintaining its strong 19 year-long partnership, the financial aid ensures access to optimal healthcare within pediatric facilities at various health institutions for the children and their families.

This partnership is part of Burgan Bank's strategic vision to actively support and give back to the local community in line with the bank's values. Today, corporate social responsibility has become a national duty and a human value for the advancement of society,

achieving sustainability, and raising the level of awareness and culture of individuals on humanitarian issues.

KACCH is a non-profit organization that operates child life programs supported by child life specialists and play leaders across seven government hospitals in Kuwait. KACCH staff work closely with nurses, doctors, and other healthcare professional to reduce the negative impact of hospitalization and create a happier experience for sick children and their families.

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



Kuwait commends role of UN Human Rights Council

GENEVA: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN and international organizations' headquarters in Geneva Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim commended yesterday the role and efforts carried out by the UN Human Rights Council worldwide. This statement came in preparation for the council's meetings between February 24 and March 20, featuring the participation of 30 UN humanitarian rights experts discussing over 100 reports. Ghunaim affirmed that the council's meeting touched on important human rights matters that need to be thoroughly addressed by the international community. He indicated that the State of

operating in illegal Jewish settlements would be discussed.

Kuwait, said Ghunaim, is interested in following on international reports highlighting the plight of the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar as well as the situation in Yemen, Iran, Libya, South Sudan, and in other region suffering from human rights violations. He added that international accords on children and the disabled rights would also feature during the upcoming meetings along with efforts to counter racial discrimination. The Kuwaiti diplomat also noted that discussions on the environment, protection of cultural rights, defending



Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim

human rights during and after crises, the rights for food and privacy in the digital age would also be on the agenda. The annual report of the council will be presented during the course of the event. The UN Human Rights Council was established in 2006 gathering some 47 states under its umbrella. The entity adopts its resolutions via a majority of votes with no member having the ability to veto. — KUNA

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A solar eclipse seen in Kuwait in this December 26, 2019 file photo. — Photo by Jassem Al-Haidari (KUNA)

Housing minister receives investigation report on Mutlaa City project accident

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KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works, State Minister for Housing Affairs Dr Rana Al-Fares is seen during a tour inside a smart home.

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and State Minister for Housing Affairs Rana Al-Fares said she received a report from a committee investigating a fatal accident that left a number of construction workers dead at the Mutlaa City project, noting that the report is currently being examined to prepare another more detailed report explaining the circumstances behind the incident and identifying those who caused it.

Speaking to reporters during a ceremony to inaugurate a smart home project in Jaber Al-Ahmad City which was developed by National Technology Enterprises Company - a subsidiary of Kuwait Investment Authority - in partnership with the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, Fares said "the government is keen on holding those who caused the accident accountable regardless of their positions, and is continuing efforts to complete the project and hand housing units to citizens in the shortest time possible". She said those involved in the incident will be dealt with decisively to safeguard the rights of the country and people.

About the smart home project, Fares said it is considered the "most modern project" the authority has

worked on to date, adding that it includes more than 20 smart applications that contribute to reducing energy by more than 40 percent. She indicated that the project is being implemented according to the instructions of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to harness technology to preserve energy. Fares said the public will be allowed to see the project in preparation for it to be applied in many cities and areas without any additional cost.

Meanwhile, CEO of NTEC Anas Mirza said the 'smart homes' included in the project use efficient energy generation systems, high quality air conditioning, and water recycling that help save 40 percent of energy and 50 percent of water consumption. He added that the cost of construction and introducing technology systems will not exceed the cost of building traditional homes.

Enertech CEO Abdullah Al-Mutairi said the house includes many solar energy technologies and smart thermostats with several sensors placed in rooms to control temperatures. Air conditioning is automatically controlled to save energy, while the house is supported with lighting systems to illuminate any corner the resident approaches, which turn off after they leave.



KUWAIT: On the occasion of the national celebrations, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate held a musical celebration at Jumeirah Hotel recently. Governor Mahmoud Bushehri welcomed the large number of people in attendance at the event, which featured performances from folk band Al-Maas, Kuwaiti singers Sulaiman Al-Ammari and Mutref Al-Mutref, and Saudi singer Fuad Abdulwahed.

Local

local spotlight

Democracy in Kuwait



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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More than 50 years have passed since the beginning of parliamentary life in Kuwait. In this period, citizens have lived the experience of democracy, which may be short compared to Western countries, but it has been rich, with both felicitous and unsuccessful practices. But, last week's incident led some of us to rethink what we have learned from this experience as a whole, its defects and means of reform in order to preserve our democracy.

Unfortunately, the National Assembly witnessed fighting and chaos, and everyone has been shocked by the low level of dialogue and curses. I know that many parliaments in the world may have animosity among deputies, but we are a small country and events such as these are never acceptable.

After this unfortunate incident, some people and dailies started to speak up openly about the importance of evaluating our democratic experience and the need to reconsider a new democratic mechanism. I believe that the defect is not in what some claim is the one-vote system. Or that changing the number of votes or number of districts will fix the situation. The problem goes deeper than that. The most prominent example was the rejection by some people to establish an independent citizenship commission that Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem called for, which is a national demand to clear the society of fraudulent citizenship and preserve national identity.

The solution now lies with a proportional representation system or proportional list of candidates in each of the constituencies. The list system combines individual and group work with electoral programs and consists of people who are able to define specific platforms of action plans. Also, this will stop sectarianism and enhance the democratic experience in Kuwait.

MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain has submitted a proposal to amend the electoral system by adopting proportional lists. The proposal stipulates: "Kuwait is divided into five electoral constituencies; each constituency will elect 10 members, and nomination will be based on lists. The number of candidates in any of them in general or supplementary elections may not exceed the number of members to be elected."

The amendments aim to ensure the success of the largest number of candidates agreeing on a unified electoral program that serves different segments and groups of society, with each candidate in the list reaching the largest possible number of the total voters to obtain the largest number of votes. I think the problem lies in the parliamentary system that makes an individual think that passing laws should proceed according to their personal ideas or that of their close circle or group, and that passing laws can be by their sole desire and not the nation they represent.

The current electoral system still depends on individuals facilitating wasta and services and gaining loyalties in order to satisfy the voter, to the point that offering reform electoral programs has become impossible. Therefore, it is time to develop an engine of modern democracy that adopts the list system, which is a universally-known system whose effectiveness is proven.

Ooredoo Kuwait supports entrepreneurs in Al-Souq Murouj

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait, partnered with Al-Souq Murouj for the fourth consecutive year to organize the Murouj Market, a monthly weekend market for local entrepreneurs and businesses. The market, which was held at Murouj Complex, included an Ooredoo dedicated booth, local farm produce, artisanal food products and crafts, with a 'street food' section aimed at highlighting the culinary diversity of Kuwait's local

Kuwait Embassy honors Canadian veterans of Liberation War



OTTAWA: Kuwait's Ambassador to Canada Reem Al-Khaled and Kuwait's Embassy staff in a group photo with honored Canadian veterans of the Liberation War. — KUNA

OTTAWA: Kuwait Embassy in Ottawa hosted a celebration to honor a number of Canadian veterans who took part in Kuwait Liberation War in 1991. The function, attended by Canadian Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defense Lawrence MacAulay, coincides with the celebrations marking Kuwait's 59th National Day and 29th Liberation Day. Kuwait's Ambassador to Canada Reem Al-Khaled presented orders, shields and certificates of appreciation to a number of Canadian veter-

ans during the celebration and then delivered a speech to the gathering. On behalf of the leaders and people of the State of Kuwait, Ambassador Khaled renewed gratitude to the global coalition, including a 4,000-strong Canadian force, for their role in liberation from the Iraqi invasion. She spoke highly of "the great sacrifices offered by the Canadian forces which will remain in our memory forever."

She also appreciated Canada's participation in the UN peace keeping force which signals the country's

commitment to the world peace and security. Meanwhile, MacAulay thanked Kuwait and Ambassador Khaled for the kind initiative to honor the Canadian veterans. "It is a kind gesture to honor the veterans despite the elapse of 29 years, which reflects the noble attitude of the political leaders and people of Kuwait," he pointed out. On the sidelines of the celebration, a photo gallery was organized to feature the sacrifices offered by forces of the global coalition during the Liberation War. — KUNA

'Made in Qatar' sponsors honored

KUWAIT: With the presence of Qatar's minister of commerce and industry Ali Bin Ahmad Al-Kawari and his Kuwaiti counterpart Khaled Al-Roudhan, Qatar Chamber held a special ceremony to honor the sponsors of 'Made in Qatar 2020' expo recently held in Kuwait. The ceremony was also attended by Qatar Chamber Chairman Sheikh Khalifa Bin Jassem Al Thani and the deputy chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Abdul Wahab Mohammad Al-Wazzan.



Qatar Chamber Director Saleh Bin Hamad Al-Sharqi addresses the audience.

Speaking on the occasion, Qatar Chamber Director Saleh Bin Hamad Al-Sharqi stressed the Qatar Chamber's first exhibition was held in Kuwait coinciding with Kuwait's national celebrations, "which is a special occasion for us, and upon which we extend our heartiest congratulations to Kuwait, its leadership and people, wishing them all happiness and prosperity." Sharqi then invited Kawari and Al Thani to the podium to hand accolades to the honorees and sponsors starting with Roudhan on behalf of the exhibition's patron His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Honorees also included Abdul Aziz Bin Nasser Al Khalifa, CEO of Qatar Development Bank; as the expo's strategic partner, the head of Qatar Petroleum's Public Relations Department Rashid Hamad Subaih, QNB Corporate Business Manager Khaled Ahmad Al-Saadah, Qatar Industrial Manufacturing Company CEO Abdurrahman Al-Ansari, Baldna Company's Marketing Manager Marwan Dimas, Ooredoo Kuwait CEO Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al Thani and Kuwait's daily Al-Jarida's Editor-in-Chief Abdullah Bin Ghanem Al-Mohandadi.



Mijbil Alayoub

food community. The market also offered a section dedicated for children's activities. It is held once a month on weekends, until March 2020.

Commenting on this sponsorship, Ooredoo Kuwait Senior Director of Corporate Communications Mijbil Alayoub said: "We are happy to be supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs through this engaging project. This sponsorship comes in tandem with our social responsibility strategy, which in turn is based on our core values of caring, connecting and challenging."



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan is honored during the event.

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Prince Harry, Meghan to stop using 'royal' brand

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IDLIB, Syria: Children watch as a Turkish military convoy that crossed into the Syrian territory via the Kafr Lusin border passes near this northwestern city as it heads towards the south of the Idlib province yesterday. — AFP

UN fears 'bloodbath' in Syria

Fleeing civilians trapped near Turkish border

GENEVA: The United Nations has warned that fighting in northwest Syria could "end in a bloodbath" and called again for a ceasefire, while Moscow denied reports of a mass flight of civilians from a Russian-led Syrian government offensive. Syrian troops backed by Russian air power have been battling since December to eliminate the last rebel strongholds in the region in a war that has killed an estimated 400,000 Syrians, displaced millions more and left much of the country in ruins.

The latest offensive in the regions of Aleppo and Idlib has uprooted nearly 1 million people - most of them women and children - who have fled clashes to seek sanctuary further north, near the Turkish border. The UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said 60% of the 900,000 people trapped in a shrinking space after fleeing are children.

"We call for an immediate ceasefire to prevent further suffering and what we fear may end in a bloodbath," OCHA spokesman Jens Laerke told a news briefing in Geneva. "The front lines and relentless violence continue

to move closer to these areas which are packed with displaced people, with bombardments increasingly affecting displacement sites and their vicinity." At a university building in the town of Azaz in northwest Syria, people fleeing Idlib have poured in every day to shelter from the violence and bitter cold.

Souad Saleh, 58, is staying in a room with her family and dozens of other people. "We want to go back home but we can't. We left things behind because the warplanes were above us and houses were collapsing," she said. The escape was exhausting. "Everyone was crying," the grandmother recalled, bursting into tears. Hayat Al-Fayad, 50, said her village in Idlib had emptied out since her family ran from the bombing some two weeks ago. "The entire village fled," she said.

Other families are sleeping outside by roads and in olive groves, burning garbage to stay warm. Some children have died from the cold, while some families have at least reached tent camps for displaced people. Turkey, which currently hosts 3.7 million Syrian refugees, has said

it cannot handle a new influx and has warned that it will use military power to repel Syrian advances in Idlib towards the Turkish border and ease a humanitarian crisis.

Russia denies emergency

Russia's Defense Ministry said reports of hundreds of thousands of Syrians fleeing from Idlib towards the Turkish border - in an area where Turkish forces maintain forward observation posts - were false, urging Ankara to enable Idlib residents to enter other parts of Syria. Turkey and Russia back opposing sides in Syria's conflict, but have collaborated towards a political solution.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's onslaught in the northwest has upset this fragile cooperation, causing Ankara and Moscow to accuse each other of flouting de-escalation agreements in the region. Turkish and Russian officials have failed to find a solution to the clashes in several rounds of talks, and a flare-up on the ground on Thursday which killed two Turkish soldiers brought the total Turkish fatalities in Idlib this month to 15 troops.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan emphasized the necessity to control Syrian government forces and to ease a humanitarian crisis in Syria's Idlib region during a phone call with Russia's Vladimir Putin. Speaking to reporters earlier, Erdogan said the French and German leaders had proposed a four-way summit with Russia in Istanbul on March 5, but that Putin had not yet responded. He repeated that Turkey was not withdrawing its forces from Idlib.

Erdogan further said Turkey was continuing work to set up housing for Syrian migrants in a 30-35 km "safe zone" inside Syria along the border with Turkey. Earlier on Friday, the Kremlin said it was discussing the possibility of holding the summit with Turkey, France and Germany mentioned by Erdogan. The German and French leaders called Putin on Thursday to voice alarm about the humanitarian situation. French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel also held a phone call with Erdogan, who asked Paris and Berlin for concrete support in the crisis. — Reuters

Bicycle racing and dancing: Afghans mark truce start

JALALABAD: Hours after a historic truce took hold across their country, jubilant Afghans who have suffered decades of non-stop conflict took to the streets to celebrate what they desperately hope is a first step towards peace. Men were seen holding up signs for peace near the capital Kabul, dancing in celebration in the east, and mingling with Taliban fighters in the southern city of Helmand.

In Jalalabad, the capital of eastern province Nangarhar, cycling enthusiasts donned lycra shorts and shirts for a road race - something previously hard to imagine in a city that has been beset by attacks. Race organizer Fazli Ahmadi said about 60 people representing nine provinces came out for the event, where they wound through the city's dusty streets on their bikes. "Our goal of coming together is to mark the reduction in violence and to convey its message to our people," Fazli said.

Warring parties have agreed what they are calling a one-week "reduction in violence" that is expected to set the conditions for Washington and the Taliban to sign a deal on February 29 in Doha. The accord could, ultimately, pull US troops out after more than 18 years and launch war-weary Afghanistan into an uncertain future. A successful week would show the Taliban can control their forces and demonstrate good faith ahead of any signing.

Even in a country that has been torn apart by violence, Jalalabad has suffered more than



JALALABAD: Men cycle during the contest for Peace Cup on the first day of reduction in violence between Afghan government and Taliban yesterday. — AFP

many places, facing continual attacks and suicide bombs from the Taliban and, in recent years, the Islamic State group. Yesterday's bicycle race - dubbed the Peace Cup - had been planned in anticipation of the first day of the partial truce.

'Peace is our wish'

Other spontaneous celebrations broke out yesterday across Afghanistan - though with the country still deeply patriarchal they mainly consisted of men, with women remaining largely behind closed doors. In Gardez, the capital of Paktia province south of Kabul, hundreds of people poured into the main square to support the partial truce. "They were calling on the Taliban and the government to extend the truce and work for permanent peace in the country," said Abdullah Hasrat, a spokesman for the local governor.

Crowds held up signs with messages such as: "Peace is our wish" and "All obstacles in the way of peace should be removed". In Kandahar in the south, considered the Taliban heartland, and in Jalalabad, dozens of celebrating people danced the attan - a traditional Pashtun dance - in the streets during the night. "I am very optimistic for the first time about the outcome of the talks" between the US and the Taliban, said Saeed Ahmad, a police officer in Helmand province, which neighbors Kandahar.

Meanwhile, in the city of Helmand, Taliban fighters massed openly and mingled with civilians while carrying flags and weapons, apparently without fear of being targeted in a US drone strike. In the northern province of Kunduz, 28-year-old Afghan soldier Reza Sharifi said he was hopeful a deal between the US and the Taliban would be struck. — AFP

Over a year of protests in Arab world and Iran

PARIS: Algeria's year-old anti-government movement is among several to have rocked the Middle East and North Africa in the past year, in an echo of the region's 2011 revolts. Here is a snapshot of the turmoil that started in December 2018 in Sudan.

Sudan: President ousted

Anti-government protests erupt in late 2018 against a government decision to triple bread prices. They intensify in early 2019. On April 6, thousands of demonstrators begin a sit-in outside the army headquarters in Khartoum. On April 11, the army says it has removed president Omar Al-Bashir from power, ending his 30-year rule. Protests continue, demanding a civilian government. On June 3, armed men in fatigues disperse the sit-in as part of a days-long crackdown that leaves scores dead. After weeks of negotiations, protest and military leaders on August 17 sign an accord on transitioning to civilian rule with democratic elections in 2022. More than 250 people are killed during the months of demonstrations, according to doctors linked to the protest movement.

Algeria: Bouteflika quits

Demonstrations start on February 22 in key cities against ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's plans to run for a fifth term after 20 years in power. After

the army withdraws its support, Bouteflika resigns on April 2. The protest movement persists, demanding an overhaul of the entire political establishment. Presidential elections on December 12 Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Bouteflika's former prime minister, wins the presidential election, amid record abstention. Demonstrations continue despite his call for dialogue.

Egypt: Protests quashed

In September, rare protests break out in Cairo and other cities calling for the removal of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, the former army chief who took power in 2014. Authorities quickly snuff out the small-scale demonstrations and embark on a crackdown. Rights groups say around 4,000 people - including lawyers, activists, professors and journalists - were detained.

Iraq: Government resigns

Hundreds of people begin demonstrating in Baghdad and cities in the south on October 1 against unemployment, corruption and poor public services. The protests explode into violence, with thousands defying security forces. After a two-week pause, demonstrations resume on October 24, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi's government. Anger is also directed at Iran, accused of propping up the administration. On December 1, parliament accepts the prime minister's resignation. A successor is named two months later. The scale of the protests drops but they continue, demanding an overhaul of the ruling system. Since the unrest began, more than 550 people have been killed and 30,000 wounded. — AFP

International

Global watchdog places Iran on terror financing blacklist

FATF move will worsen Iran's financial isolation

PARIS: The global dirty money watchdog placed Iran on its blacklist on Friday after it failed to comply with international anti-terrorism financing norms, a move that will deepen the country's isolation from financial markets. The decision came after more than three years of warnings from the Paris-based Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) urging the Islamic Republic to either enact terrorist financing conventions or see its reprieve from the blacklist lifted and some countermeasures imposed.

"Given Iran's failure to enact the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions in line with the FATF Standards, the FATF fully lifts the suspension of counter-measures and calls on its members and urges all jurisdictions to apply effective counter-measures," the group's 39 members said in a statement after a week-long plenary session. These would entail more scrutiny of transactions with Iran, tougher external auditing of financing firms operating in the country and extra pressure on the few foreign banks and businesses still dealing with Iran.

"The consequence of (Iran's) inaction is higher costs of borrowing and isolation from the financial system," a Western diplomat said. The United States commended the task force's action after what it said was Tehran's failure to adhere to FATF's standards. Iran "must face consequences for its continued failure to abide by international norms," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

Iran's central bank chief dismissed FATF's decision. "(It) is politically motivated and not a technical decision," the state news agency IRNA quoted Abdolnasser Hemmati as saying. "I can assure our nation that it will have no impact on Iran's foreign trade and the stability of our exchange rate." The FATF appeared to leave the door open for some engagement with Iran saying in its statement: "Countries should also be able to apply countermeasures independently of any call by the FATF to do so." "It's a middle solu-

tion. A sort of a fudge to leave the door open for the Iranians," said one of the diplomats.

Foreign businesses say Iran's compliance with FATF rules is essential if it wants to attract investors, especially since the United States reimposed sanctions on Tehran in 2018 after quitting a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and other big powers. Iran's leaders have been divided over approach to the FATF. Supporters of cooperation say it could ease foreign trade with Europe and Asia, offsetting US sanctions. Hardliners argue that passing legislation to join the FATF could hamper Iran's support for its allies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Maximum pressure

Washington has since pushed a policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran, saying a broader deal should be negotiated to encompass nuclear issues, Iran's ballistic missile program and Iranian support for proxy forces around the Middle East. France, Britain and Germany have tried to salvage the nuclear accord but have faced growing pressure from the United States to join its efforts to isolate Iran. "The United States was pushing for the toughest position (by FATF), while other countries like China and Russia preferred something more flexible," said a European official. "The Europeans were looking for something in between."

US sanctions have crippled Iran's economy, decimating its oil exports and largely sealing it off from the international financial system. "Until Iran implements the measures required to address the deficiencies identified with respect to countering terrorism-financing... the FATF will remain concerned with the terrorist financing risk emanating from Iran and the threat this poses to the international financial system," the FATF said.

Iran's action plan to meet with the FATF requirements, implemented in 2016, expired in January 2018. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif this



Tehran: A woman checks the merchandise of a street vendor in the Iranian capital Tehran yesterday. —AFP

week appeared resigned to the FATF blacklisting, accusing Washington of using its maximum pressure campaign to exert influence at the FATF. In another important decision on Friday, the FATF granted

Pakistan an extra four months to meet anti-terrorism financing norms, keeping Islamabad for now on its "grey list" of countries that do not adequately comply with its rules. —Reuters

Kazakhstan police detain 200 protesters

ALMATY: Police in Kazakhstan detained around 200 people yesterday as two opposition groups called for anti-government demonstrations in the oil-rich Central Asian country. An AFP correspondent saw police detain around 30 activists from the unregistered Democratic Party as they attempted to hold a protest in the largest city, Almaty yesterday. Eyewitnesses said police also detained up to 70 people en route to the city square where the protest was held.

Police later detained scores more as they arrived for a separate rally called by the banned Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan movement. Wheelchair user Erik Jumabayev was among the movement's supporters detained by riot police, who scooped him into an ambulance that then drove away. Authoritarian Kazakhstan has long faced criticism from local and international rights groups for its restrictive laws regulating demonstrations.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev pledged to reform laws governing freedom of assembly shortly after succeeding long-ruling Nursultan Nazarbayev as president last year. But there is little sign of any change on the ground, with dissent still crushed in systematic fashion. Police have also stepped

up detentions of protesters on the eve of demonstrations. Prominent Democratic Party activist and filmmaker Zhanbolat Mamay was one of dozens of activists who were detained ahead of yesterday's demonstrations.

Mamay was arrested on Friday night and sentenced to three days' detention for calling for the unsanctioned rally. The protesters shouted "Freedom to Mamay!" at the Democratic Party's demonstration yesterday and Mamay's pregnant wife, journalist Inga Imanbay, was among the activists detained. She was later released. Mamay told AFP by telephone Friday that "at least 10" members of his group had received sentences of up to five days in detention earlier this week - a measure he said was intended to prevent the Democratic Party holding a conference.

Banned

The Democratic Party is a new group created last year in a country where there is no established political opposition. Mamay said the group plans to register as a party, but complained that its activists across the country are already experiencing surveillance and other forms of pressure from authorities.

Authorities have launched regular crackdowns on the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan movement, led from abroad by former energy minister and banker Mukhtar Ablyazov. Ablyazov in 2017 announced the group's intention to topple the Kazakh regime. A Kazakh court banned the group as extremist in 2018 and



ALMATY, Kazakhstan: Protesters react from inside a police car after they were detained by Kazakh police yesterday. —AFP

the country's state prosecutor on Friday warned people not to participate in yesterday's protest.

Ablyazov - a long-time opponent of Kazakhstan's regime who fled the country in 2009 - has said the extremism ban is simply a pretext to stop the group's activities. Now based in France, he thanked the state prosecutor for giving the group "an advertisement" ahead of attempted demonstration. Kazakhstan is in the process of changing its legislation on public assemblies, and a draft of the new law has been released for public discussion.

Kenya comedy scene booms

NAIROBI: Whenever a more risqué line shocks his audience into silence, Kenyan comic Brian Onjoro knows he can rescue his set with a sure-fire punchline: the country's leaders. "Comedians should run for office. We already have a bunch of clowns!" he tells the crowd at Kez's Kitchen before riffing about whether Kenya's politicians are on drugs.

He said when his mother notices his red eyes from smoking cannabis: "I told her I'm not high - I'm presidential!" Onjoro is the face of the capital's booming comedy scene - he co-founded the Nairobi Comedy Club three years ago to mentor other aspiring comics. Two other clubs, the Karura Comedy Club and the Standup Collective, were founded a year later: they jointly held the city's first comedy festival in December. Comedians from Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania came to swap jokes and tips.

All three clubs hold open mic nights and professional shows. So far, Onjoro's got 10 experienced comics on the books, and 10 junior ones he found through the open mic nights. Anyone is welcome. "I'm not going to tell you you are not funny. Just go there and grab a mic and just you know, death by fire," Onjoro said. It is not easy. Yesterday, Nairobi restaurant Kez's Kitchen was packed with customers expecting a night of live comedy. But three of his five supporting acts showed up too late to perform.

George Waweru opened with a crack about the recently deceased former president Daniel arap Moi, known for presiding over vast corruption and the torture of political opponents. "They say the good die young," Waweru tells the crowd. "Moi was 95. You do the math." Comedian Maina Murumba wryly references their struggle to hit the big time. Comedy does not pay - fees are low and equipment costs are high. "By the year 2056, the world will be completely cashless," he says, to laughter. "Not to brag, but I've been completely cashless since 1992."

Then Onjoro, a bundle of nervous energy, is up. He must extend his set to fill the gaps but he is already stretched: comedy is a niche night out in Nairobi so many of the audience are regulars. Comics must constantly refresh and rehearse their material to avoid repeating jokes. Some jokes meet mixed reactions. Onjoro likes to dance over the line of acceptability - he is not so much poking at taboos as reaching for the gelignite. Punchlines about HIV, skin tone or sex in a wheelchair provoke with both groans and uncertain laughs from the well-heeled and politically savvy crowd.

A table of women at the front roll their eyes when he jokes about stabbing a female missionary. But the audience roars at a routine playing on foreigners' outdated stereotypes. He mimics a foreign reporter breathlessly narrating his own cannibalization by famine victims, then Onjoro - a scriptwriter with a shock of short dreadlocks - tells how he seduced a visitor from London by impersonating a tribal warrior over Skype. "By the time she took her bra off, I was a Zulu!" he yells. The crowd loves it. —Reuters

News in brief

Sudan rebel leader sworn in

JUBA: South Sudan rebel leader Riek Machar was sworn in as first vice president yesterday, formally rejoining the government in the latest bid to bring peace to a nation ravaged by war. It is the third time that bitter foes Machar and President Salva Kiir will attempt to rule together and the pair have many differences yet to iron out as they form the unity government that is a cornerstone of a September 2018 peace deal. "For the people of South Sudan, I want to assure you that we will work together to end your suffering," Machar said after taking the oath. "By forming this government, it gives us hope that there is a new momentum to end the suffering of the people of South Sudan and a way to a sustainable peace." Machar embraced and shook hands with Kiir after being sworn in. The rebel leader returns as first vice president. Four other vice presidents from the government and other opposition groups who will also form part of a bloated government. —AFP

Alcohol-related deaths in US

NEW YORK: Alcohol-related deaths in the United States rose sharply from roughly 2012 through 2016, with the biggest increases among white and Latino women, according to a new study by researchers who called the trend "an urgent public health crisis." They also said the trend appears to have continued beyond 2016, but did not offer a theory for its causes. The findings, published on Friday in JAMA Open Network, was based on death certificate data dating from 2000. It showed declines in alcohol-related deaths among some groups during the early part of this century, but those promising trends flipped dramatically in recent years. For example, while the alcohol-related death rate among men declined by an average of 0.6% per year from 2000 to 2005, it rose 4.2% per year from 2012 to 2016. —Reuters

Murder case - 'rough sex'

LONDON: Men accused of murder should not be allowed to use rough sex as a legal defense, women's rights advocates said on Friday, after the killer of a British backpacker was jailed for life in a case that drew fresh scrutiny on the issue. Grace Millane, 22, was visiting New Zealand when she was murdered. Her attacker pleaded not guilty to murder, saying she died accidentally during consensual sex, but a jury rejected his defense and convicted him in November. Women's rights campaigners called for a ban on the "rough sex" defense, saying the normalization of violent sex in popular culture meant men facing criminal charges for harming women were increasingly claiming that the violence was consensual. Research by the British campaign group We Can't Consent to This found men avoided charges of murder in more than one in three of 60 killings of women and girls where the defense was used. —Reuters

Thai court dissolves key party

BANGKOK: A stridently anti-military Thai party was dissolved Friday and its key members banned from politics for a decade over a \$6 million loan by its billionaire founder, a withering blow to the kingdom's pro-democracy movement. The ruling could edge the politically feeble kingdom-whose economy is shrinking-closer to the street protests that have scored much of the last 15 years of Thai history. The Future Forward Party (FFP), fronted by the charismatic auto-parts scion Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, emerged from nowhere in March last year to become Thailand's third biggest party in the first elections since a 2014 coup. The party's radical agenda-calling for full democracy, an end to conscription and the removal of the army from politics and business-won it 6.3 million votes and pitched it against the powerful, conservative military. —AFP

Hardline Guards make early gains in Iran poll

DUBAI: Candidates affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guards looked on course to win a parliamentary majority yesterday, reportedly leading in the race in Tehran and towns and villages elsewhere, after a vote stacked in favor of the anti-American hardliners. An Interior Ministry official said a list of candidates affiliated with the Guards led in the capital. Lists linked to hardliners captured 83 seats in towns and villages across the country following Friday's vote, according to a Reuters tally.

A clean sweep for hardliners would confirm the political demise of the country's pragmatist politicians, weakened by Washington's decision to quit a 2015 nuclear deal and reimpose sanctions in a move that stifled rapprochement with the West. However, Iranian authorities have yet to announce the turnout in the race for the 290-seat legislature - a litmus test of the popularity of hardliners closely associated with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran's rulers, under intense US pressure over the country's nuclear program, need a high turnout to boost their legitimacy, damaged after nationwide protests in November.

Such a result would help the Guards, already omnipresent in Iranians' daily lives, to increase their substantial influence

in political, social and economic affairs. The demonstrations, which called for regime change, were met with a violent crackdown overseen by the Guards which killed hundreds and led to the arrest of thousands, according to human rights organizations. Iranians long for stability after a succession of political and economic crises.

Mounting US pressure

In the latest challenge for Khamenei, Iran announced the detection of 10 new cases of coronavirus, one of whom has died. The new infections bring the total cases of new coronavirus in the country to 28, with five deaths. Khamenei faces mounting pressure from the United States over Iran's nuclear programme and discontent over mismanagement of the economy is unlikely to ease as sanctions squeeze the Islamic Republic. President Donald Trump raised the stakes in his standoff with Tehran when Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, was killed in a US drone strike at Baghdad airport in January.

The spokesman for the watchdog Guardian Council, Abbasali Kadkhodai, predicted that the turnout would be around 50%, telling state television on Friday that the Iranian nation had disappointed its enemies by voting in large numbers. Turnout was 62% in the 2016 parliamentary vote and 66% of people voted in 2012. Large gains in Friday's vote may also hand hardliners another bonus - more leeway to campaign for the 2021 contest for president, a job with wide day-to-day control of government. —Reuters

International

Emboldened by 'heroes' and hate music, white extremists on the rise

'White race' perceived to be under threat from migration, globalization, Islam

PARIS: They may lack centralized organization or even a common goal, but white supremacists encouraged by the exploits of extremist "heroes" canonized on social media pose an ever-growing security threat, analysts say. After nine people in Germany were killed by a gunman with "a very deeply racist attitude," the country's interior minister on Friday warned that the far right still posed a "very high" security threat.

The shootings on Wednesday at a shisha bar and a cafe in the city of Hanau were the latest in a growing list of attacks in the West attributed to self-appointed defenders of a "white race" perceived to be under threat from migration, globalization and Islam. From Christchurch to Pittsburgh, Halle to El Paso, militants have been emboldened by a narrative of hatred spread on the internet with an ease that observers find worrying.

Internet a 'facilitator'

"This digital ecosystem is fuelling a cumulative momentum, which serves to lower 'thresholds' to violence for those engaged in this space, both in the United States and elsewhere," Graham Macklin, assistant professor at the Center for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo, said in a recent article. One attack "encourages and inspires another, creating a growing 'canon' of 'saints' and 'martyrs' for others to emulate," he wrote—noting that Norwegian neo-Nazi Anders Behring Breivik, who massacred 77 people in 2011, had become "an aspirational figure" for many.

According to the Soufan Center, a global security think-tank, white supremacy has entered a phase of globalization driven by niche websites popular among neo-Nazis, such as Gab and 8chan, and even the so-called "white power" music scene. "White supremacy extremists rely on a diverse set of techniques to radicalize potential recruits," it said in a recent report, with attackers "lionized" on such platforms "as heroes, martyrs, 'saints,' commanders' and other honorifics."

White extremists do not share a single, common goal—some seek self rule, others the expulsion of minorities—but all believe their "race" to be under threat. "Many adherents to transnational white supremacy extremism hold millenarian and apocalyptic beliefs about an imminent race war, with some ardent believers in the end of time and influenced by elements of Christian identity," Soufan said.

Some believe their governments are conspiring with minority populations to bring about their demise—the so-called Great Replacement theory, based on the title of a 2011 book by French writer Renaud Camus. Anais Voy-Gillis, an extreme right specialist at the French Institute of Geopolitics, said: "The current context, with notably the migrant crisis of 2015, has surely contributed to the radicalization of many people who are now ready to cross over to action." Not only fringe sites are used to spread messages of fear, hate, and racial superiority. The gunman who attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, last March, killing 51 Muslim worshippers,

live-streamed his attack live on Facebook. A few months later, an anti-Semitic attack in the east German city of Halle, which claimed two lives, was posted on the streaming platform Twitch. "There are many radical groups in the world and the internet is a facilitator for them to get together nationally and even internationally," Voy-Gillis said.

'Exporter' of white supremacy

In Europe, a well-organized coordination of far-right efforts seems unlikely, for now. Last June, a French parliamentary committee conducted an analysis of far-right groups in the country, including attempts to make contact with like-minded organizations elsewhere in Europe, notably in Germany, Greece, Belgium, Italy, Britain, Spain and Austria. At the time, the boss of France's DGSJ domestic intelligence service Nicolas Lerner told investigators the chances were "extremely limited" that these movements would have the ability to work together at a European level. But within a country's borders, the threat is real. German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said Friday that right-wing extremism was the "biggest security threat" facing his country, as he announced a more visible police presence and bolstered surveillance at mosques, train stations, airports and borders. In the United States, an FBI report last November showed that 65 percent of "lone wolf" perpetrators of terror attacks were white.

Nearly a fifth (19 percent) of 52 such attacks com-



HANAU, Germany: Videograb taken from footage made available on YouTube shows Tobias R, a man suspected to have killed nine people at a shisha bar and a cafe in this western German city late Feb 19, 2020 before apparently killing himself. —AFP

mitted in the United States between 1972 and 2015 were motivated by ideologies "advocating for the superiority of the white race," it found. It was the same percentage as attackers motivated by radical Islamist doctrine. "For almost two decades, the United States has pointed abroad at countries who are exporters of extreme Islamist ideology," Russell Travers, acting director of the National Counterterrorism Center, said in November. "We are now being seen as the exporters of white supremacist ideology; that's a reality with which we are going to have to deal," he said. —AFP

Sanders warns Russia, as Trump scoffs amid new meddling charges

WASHINGTON: Bernie Sanders on Friday warned Russia not to meddle in the Democratic presidential race, as Donald Trump angrily dismissed assertions that Moscow was again seeking to boost his election chances. Trump has come under fresh fire for removing US intelligence chief Joseph Maguire, replacing him with a loyal partisan with no direct experience in the field, days after Maguire's staff told lawmakers that Russia was again interfering in a US election to support Trump.

Sanders, a self-described socialist who is leading the race for the Democratic nomination to challenge Trump in November, told reporters that US officials briefed him "about a month ago" of efforts to interfere in the 2020 race. "Unlike Donald Trump, I do not consider (Russian President) Vladimir Putin a good friend. He is an autocratic thug who is attempting to destroy democracy and crush dissent in Russia," Sanders said in a statement. "I don't care, frankly, who Putin wants to be president," he added. "My message to Putin is clear: stay out of American elections, and as president I will make sure that you do."

His comments came moments after The Washington Post reported that US intelligence told Sanders that Russia was seeking to help his campaign. The form of assistance was unclear but Sanders has suggested that Russia could be behind belligerent online remarks by his professed supporters that have drawn condemnation from other candidates. "They're trying to cause chaos, they're trying to cause hatred in America," Sanders told reporters in California. An exhaustive report by former FBI chief Robert Mueller found that Russia backed Trump's 2016 campaign, including by manipulating social media, but did not find that the campaign colluded with Moscow. Trump has showed irritation at any suggestions he won because of Russia. Speaking at a rally in Las Vegas, Trump said he had heard a "rumor" that "Putin wants to make sure I get elected." "Wouldn't he rather have, let's say, Bernie?" he said.

He earlier tweeted that accounts of Russian support were a "hoax" and "misinformation campaign" by Democrats "who still have been unable to, after two weeks, count their votes in Iowa," which held the first contest among candidates. In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the allegations were "like the usual paranoid announcements, which unfortunately will multiply as we get closer to the election." "Of course, they have nothing to do with the truth," he said.

'National security crisis'

President Vladimir Putin, however, acknowledged when he met Trump in July 2018 that he supported the populist billionaire's campaign, seeing him as friendlier to Moscow than rival Hillary Clinton. Trump was later impeached in a separate scandal over holding back military aid to Ukraine, which is fighting Russian-backed separatists, to pressure the Kiev government to dig up dirt on a Democratic candidate. Former CIA director John Brennan, who served under presidents Barack Obama and George W Bush, said the United States had entered "a full-blown national security crisis."

"By trying to prevent the flow of intelligence to Congress, Trump is abetting a Russian covert operation to keep him in office for Moscow's interests, not America's," he wrote on Twitter. Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren said the 2020 election revelations showed the "enormous" challenge. "It should worry all of us that we now live in an America where one political party seems to think that foreign interference helps them in an election," she said at a CNN forum with voters in Nevada.

Senator Chris Van Hollen denounced both Trump's appointment of a "novice" new intelligence chief and the Senate's blocking of election reform bills backed by Democrats. "Our intel agencies say Putin is interfering in our election to help Trump," he wrote on Twitter. "What's the definition of treason?" Representative Eric Swalwell, who serves on the House intelligence committee, tweeted simply: "Agent for Russia." —AFP

Prince Harry, Meghan to stop using 'royal' brand

LONDON: Prince Harry and his wife Meghan will no longer use the "Sussex Royal" label when they begin their new life outside the royal inner circle in the spring, their spokeswoman said Friday. The couple will formally step down as senior royals from March 31 and will no longer carry out duties on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II after that date. "The Duke and Duchess of Sussex do not intend to use 'SussexRoyal' in any territory post Spring 2020," said the spokeswoman. They will also not use the name for their new non-profit organization, due to be announced in the coming months, she added.

Filipino-Americans 'fired up' as Tagalog added to Nevada poll

LAS VEGAS: Manny Pacquiao, dinners and prayer services: Activists are using every tool possible to get the booming Filipino-American community in Las Vegas to the polls for Saturday's Democratic nomination vote. Overlooked in the past, Filipinos have rapidly become the western desert state's largest Asian-American community - almost 200,000 by some estimates, in a state of three million people - forcing candidates to take notice.

For the first time, the Tagalog language will be used on voting cards along with English and Spanish at the Democratic caucuses. "We're proud that they are recognizing us," said Margie Gonzales, a Filipina community leader. "It means a lot - it means recognition." Gonzales, who chairs the county's Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) commission, has also begun training politicians to speak a few Tagalog words.

"When you start knocking on doors, it helps if you greet a Filipino family opening the door in Tagalog," she said. "That's a way to make that person smile - you feel welcome." Feeling welcome is key for a minority community in which immigration and xenophobia are major concerns. Like Latinos, Filipino-Americans tend to vote Democrat. "When Trump talks about not bringing in relatives and things like that, that same thing applies to Asians," said Tick Segerblom, a commissioner for Clark County, where Las Vegas is located.

'Squeak of a mouse'

"So Trump has really been a boon as far as organizing Asians." But traditionally Filipino-Americans have not voted in large numbers. To counter that, Gonzales and her fellow activists introduced a tradition commonly found during election campaigns back in the Philippines - the Kamayan, a large communal feast. These typically see politicians mingle at long tables covered in banana leaves, with a whole roast pig on the menu.

The feasts hosted in Las Vegas by Gonzales so far

Terrorists are 'generally Muslims': Ryanair CEO

LONDON: Muslim men should be profiled at airports as terrorists will "generally be of a Muslim persuasion", Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary said in an interview published yesterday, sparking accusations of racism. "Who are the bombers?" the budget airline's controversial chief executive said while discussing airport security in the interview with the Times newspaper.

"They are going to be single males travelling on their own... If you are travelling with a family of kids, on you go; the chances you are going to blow them all up is zero."

"You can't say stuff, because it's racism, but it will generally be males of a Muslim persuasion. Thirty years ago it was the Irish." A spokesman from the Muslim Council of Britain accused O'Leary of "Islamophobia". O'Leary was "encouraging racism", Labor MP Khalid Mahmood told the newspaper. "In Germany this week a white person killed eight people. Should we profile white people to see if they're being fascists?" The Ryanair CEO is known for his controversial views and has floated proposals to charge fliers to use the toilet during Ryanair flights and a "fat tax" on obese passengers. —AFP



LAS VEGAS: Elizabeth Warren supporter Ninna Diaz poses with material she will distribute while out knocking on doors of registered Democrats and Independents to make sure people are registered to vote on Friday. —AFP

have not endorsed specific candidates. A grand Kamayan is planned once the Democratic Party settles on a nominee - but that has not stopped those in the race from reaching out. Democratic candidate Tulsi Gabbard, who is Hawaiian, has made inroads, as have Pete Buttigieg and Elizabeth Warren. "This is an overlooked and often ignored community and I feel like Elizabeth Warren celebrates our existence and doesn't use us as props," said Filipina campaign volunteer Ninna Diaz, 27.

The community is "definitely taking notice," she added. More recently, Gonzales has conducted Tagalog-language caucus training for campaigns including that of Bernie Sanders. "The mere fact that a lot of politicians are calling me and other Filipino-American leaders, it shows you that we are becoming

important," she said. "They are paying attention to us, because they know now that we vote." She added: "Our voice used to be like the squeak of a mouse... But we are getting fired up now."

In a sign of the group's growing visibility, Segerblom and others are leading a campaign to rename a stretch of eastern Las Vegas, which is home to many community restaurants and stores, Little Filipinotown. But Gonzales turned to one of the most visible icons of all - global boxing superstar and Philippines Senator Manny Pacquiao, who was in Las Vegas for a fight in 2014. "We were able to get to his suite - he posed with us, holding our banner," said Gonzales, who now uses the image to boost voter registration drives. "It gets the Filipinos excited - in fact, even non-Filipinos!" —AFP



LONDON: In this file photo taken on Oct 15, 2019, Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex attend the annual WellChild Awards. —AFP



ROME: In this file photo taken on March 30, 2019, a Ryanair plane taxis on the tarmac at Fiumicino airport. —AFP

International

'Traumatized' Africans stranded in coronavirus-hit China cry for help

Death toll mounts in China amid lockdown

MUKONO: When Margaret Ntale Namusisi's three daughters called her in Uganda to say they were being quarantined at their university in Wuhan, China, because of the coronavirus outbreak, she sent money and told them: "Run very fast and do shopping." Valeria, Veronica and Vivian did just that. But nearly one month on, with no help from their government, they are now under lockdown in a crowded apartment with orders to stay indoors with the windows closed. Food, funds and morale are running low.

"They are traumatized," said Namusisi, who wakes up at 3 am every day to talk to her daughters over the Chinese messaging service WeChat. "They ask, has Uganda given up on us?" Countries across the world have flown their nationals home from China's quarantined Hubei province, the centre of the outbreak of the virus that since January has infected more than 74,000 people and killed over 2,100.

But no sub-Saharan African country has done so, leaving thousands stranded. "We've gone to parliament, we've gone to the ministry of health, we've gone to the ministry of foreign affairs and taken them our petition to bring back our children," said Namusisi, nearing tears. Reuters spoke to families from Cameroon, Uganda, Senegal and Ethiopia with similar tales of frustration. Many have set up associations to pressure their governments to act, through letters and petitions.

Governments across Africa have said they plan to send money to students to help with expenses. Cameroon said it was sending about \$82,000 to help its citizens stuck in Hubei. However, many including Senegal and Uganda, say they do not have the resources to look after coronavirus patients at home and their nationals would be safer in China where authorities have reported a dramatic drop in new cases in Hubei.

But while Uganda said last week that it would send \$61,000 to students stuck in Wuhan, the Namusisi sisters have received nothing so far. They survive on one meal a day of noodles or rice, their mother said. Other foods are

now too expensive: one kilo of beef costs \$13, one tomato a dollar. They are not alone. Dagmawi Demelash Mengistu, a business student from Ethiopia, said his school has provided latex gloves and masks, but his government has not responded to students' calls to be flown home.

He too is locked inside, short of food and money. "We have seen one plane come for four students in Wuhan to evacuate them, just one plane," said Mengistu who is part of a student association that has asked the Ethiopian embassy to fly them home. "Ethiopian airlines haven't stopped flights from China ... so that is a shot to the gut when you see they are still continuing flights but cannot take their citizens out." Ethiopian authorities did not respond to requests for comment.

A lighting strike

Many African nations are nervous about a little-known virus breaching their borders. Ebola killed over 11,000 people in West Africa between 2013 and 2016. An ongoing outbreak in Democratic Republic of Congo has killed over 2,300. Health officials say those epidemics have prepared countries to keep coronavirus from spreading and the World Health Organization says 24 African nations can test for potential cases.

Airport screening and monitoring procedures have already highlighted possible coronavirus cases across the continent. The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week called on governments to bring Africans home. But this has provided little comfort for those stranded in China or their families back home who have received little or no communication from their governments.

Roger-Michel Kemkuining, a Cameroonian, found out that his student son Pavel had contracted coronavirus from a statement posted online by Yangzte University, where Pavel was studying. The statement, seen by Reuters, said the university had informed the Cameroonian embassy and the parents, but that was news to Kemkuining.



WUHAN, China: This photo taken on Feb 20, 2020 shows two staff members crossing an empty road as they deliver vegetables to a hospital in this city in China's central Hubei province. — AFP

Cameroon's health ministry spokesman, Clavere Nken, confirmed that the family had found out via social media. He said he had since spoken to them by phone. Yangzte University did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Pavel is the only known African to test positive

for coronavirus. He has recovered and was released from hospital on Feb 10 but remains in isolation, he said. For his father, the situation still rankles. Seeing the statement was "like a lightning strike," he said at his home in Yaounde. "I was really dejected." — Reuters

Sealed in: Chinese trapped at home feel the strain

BEIJING: During weeks holed up in her grandmother's apartment with 10 relatives and eating a restricted diet, Chinese teenager Li Yuxuan says tempers have frayed. Li and her family are among the millions of people across China's Hubei province, epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, who are subject to official orders to stay at home amid attempts to contain the spread of the disease. Officials and volunteers have sealed off buildings, erected barricades and stepped up surveillance to ensure compliance with the ban on movement, measures that are taking a toll on many in the community.

"Every day there's fighting. Every day we sigh. Every day I'm scolded," Li, 19, told Reuters by WeChat from the apartment in Ezhou, a city near the provincial capital of Wuhan. Li said the family had eaten the same combination of white rice, cabbage and peanuts for three weeks, since gathering to celebrate the Lunar New Year last month, stinting on portions due to limits on the numbers of people from each household allowed out to shop.

Cities and villages across China have taken measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, which has infected more than 76,000 people in the country, killing 2,345, but the protocols in Hubei are the most extreme. The province, which is home to 60 million people, announced a "sealed management" policy a week ago that effectively prevents residents from leaving their homes, further isolating a population that has been living under a transport lockdown since late January.

"We bought vegetables today, but I don't know when we will go out again," Li said by WeChat on Friday, adding the family could now only buy food at the gate of their compound. Officials have promised to ensure sufficient food and medicine for residents and have also warned against hoarding or price-gouging. "Sealed management will continue so that no one will go outside, but they must still be able to buy their daily necessities," Wuhan's newly appointed Communist Party chief, Wang Zhonglin, said last Sunday.

Community enforcement

Hubei's sealed management policy depends heavily on residential committees, a network of volunteers who carry out government and Communist Party orders at the grassroots level in coordination with private employees of residential compounds. One day last week, before her compound in Jingzhou city was completely sealed, 31-year old Vicky Yi said she was stopped at the gate by a volunteer when she tried to go out for groceries.

Minutes later, an elderly woman walked past out of the compound. Yi argued with the volunteer to let her out. He eventually yielded. "These people in the compound, when they get even a little bit of power, they will use all their energy to try to get in your way," she said. "It's like the Stanford prison experiment," she added, referring to the 1971 psychology experiment to investigate perceptions of power that assigned a group of the university's students to be either prisoners or guards. The Jingzhou government could not be reached by Reuters for comment.

Online videos have shown police and volunteers using force to penalize residents for even gathering in groups. In one that went viral, and which caught the attention of the official People's Daily, volunteers flipped over a table where a family was playing mah-jong, and hit one of the players. "There are some things, no matter how pressing the epidemic is, that should not be done," the People's

Daily noted on social media of the incident, and the Xiaogang city government issued an apology.

Public health concerns

Non-residents are also caught in the Hubei net, with many who were in the province to visit relatives over Lunar New Year now stuck far from their homes and livelihoods. "The rent, the water bill, the electricity bill, I still have to pay them," said 28-year old Cao Dezhao, who owns a small IT business in Jinan, in eastern Shandong province, but is stuck in Wuhan after he came to visit his in-laws. "I could be bankrupt at the end of this epidemic."

Experts say that essential needs, including monitoring of mental health, should be ensured for people under quarantine or containment measures. "You have to address the basic rights and well-being of people: can they get their food and water? What is their mental health status?" said Rebecca Katz, director of the Center for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown University.

Hundreds of official 24-hour telephone hotlines for psychological support have been launched since the beginning of the outbreak, but many are overwhelmed. Wuhan, the Hubei city hardest hit in the epidemic, says it will ensure food and other necessities through group orders as supermarkets stopped selling to individuals. Some communities have arranged for vendors to come to their compounds gates. Hubei has said drugs and other necessities must be delivered to residents.

But Song Chunlin, whose daughter has psoriasis, a painful chronic skin condition, said she has been unable to receive delivery of the medication her daughter needs in the village where her parents live in Yichang, in western Hubei, while she herself has not been able to receive her allergy medication. The Yichang government did not respond to an emailed request for comment. "I'm really in a difficult situation," Song said. — Reuters



HONG KONG: This picture taken on Feb 20, 2020 shows a newly-completed mask made out of patterned material at a shop. — AFP

DIY virus protection: Hong Kongers making own masks

HONG KONG: With chronic face mask shortages in the midst of a virus outbreak, Hong Kongers have started making their own - with a pop-up production line and seamstresses churning them out on sewing machines. In one of the most densely populated cities on earth, face masks have become hot property as people scramble for protection against the new deadly coronavirus. Long queues - sometimes thousands strong - routinely crop up outside pharmacies when supplies are in, and there is anger at the government's failure to have stockpiled.

Some are turning to DIY solutions - albeit of questionable quality. Judy, a 73-year-old out shopping in the district of Wanchai, was spotted in a homemade mask. "I found the material - my handkerchief, and some non-woven fabric - and I combined them and used some wire for the top, and some elastic," she told AFP, declining to give her surname. While Hong Kong's economy reels, business has been brisk on one street in the working-class Sham Shui Po district that boasts many fabric and tailoring shops.

A colorful array of cloth masks hangs outside many of the cramped storefronts as shoppers haggle over the din of whirring sewing machines. Elase Wong, a tailor, said she was giving away her face mask sewing design. "Some people couldn't buy any masks... So if they can make them themselves, that would be great," she said. "I hope everyone can achieve self-sufficiency."

Pop-up assembly line

The cost of masks has skyrocketed with scarcity and the government resisting price controls or rationing, as in nearby Macau and Taiwan. A set of 50 simple surgical masks can sell for up to HK\$300 (\$40), while the top of the range N95 variety is going for as high as HK\$1,800 a box. A film director surnamed Tong was this week putting the finishing touches to a face mask assembly line in an industrial building. "I was shocked by the price of face masks," he said.

"I did some research and realized that masks are not that difficult to make. Why do people have to bear such a high cost? Because there is no production line in Hong Kong". With the help of an investor he managed to import a machine from India, and plans to ship more. Currently in the testing phase, the device will produce 60-80 surgical masks per minute from Saturday in a dust-free room. Tong said the masks will be sold online for HK\$1-2 each, limited to one box per person.

The administration of chief executive Carrie Lam says it is doing all it can to secure new supplies of face masks amid a global shortage. Output has been ramped up on a prison labor production line and there are plans to set aside HK\$1.5 billion to support the creation of domestic factories. The lack of stockpiles has sparked criticism of Lam, even from among her pro-Beijing political allies. — AFP

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Washington Watch

How Israel/Palestine played out in US politics this week

Dr James J Zogby

Earlier this week, a comment by Senator Bernie Sanders about Israeli policy and Palestinian rights and the resulting condemnation of his remarks by a pro-Israel group of Jewish Republicans opened a window into this issue's state of play in both American and Israeli politics.

Appearing on a televised CNN Town Hall, Sanders was asked by an audience member to comment on "How do US-Israel relations look in your administration?" Sanders, making his strongest remarks to date, said, "To be for the Israeli people and to be for peace in the Middle East does not mean that we have to support rightwing, racist governments that currently exist in Israel." He went on to speak about Palestinian suffering, noting the severe restrictions placed on civilians in Gaza and Gaza's 70 percent youth unemployment. He concluded that US policy "cannot be ... just pro-Israel and ... ignore the needs of the Palestinian people." The CNN audience vigorously applauded Sanders' strong comments.

The Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC) is a group funded by Sheldon Adelson - the billionaire who is closely linked to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Donald Trump) immediately denounced Sanders issuing a statement calling it outrageous that "a mainstream US political party candidate for president would call the Israeli government racist". The RJC statement went further, saying:

"Sanders says he supports the Israeli people, just not their democratic government. As it happens, the policies that Sanders calls racist are supported by all the major contenders to be the next Israeli prime minister and by the vast majority of Israeli voters, because they defend the basic national security needs of the Jewish state."

What I found intriguing about this exchange was the fact that the RJC's effort to rebuke Sanders ended up shining a light on the nature of what has become Israel's dominant political culture. Instead of contesting the charge that the policies of the Israeli government are racist, the RJC justified them by saying that these policies are supported by the vast majority of the Israeli people and all of the major candidates to become Israel's Prime Minister.

As if to establish the validity of Sanders' criticism, in recent weeks Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continued Israel's suffocating choke-hold on the people of Gaza, denied West Bank Palestinians the right to export produce to the outside world, announced over 4,000 Jewish housing units that, when built, will close Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank, imposed new restrictions of Palestinian residents in Jerusalem, and declared his intention to annex "the Jordan Valley, the northern Dead Sea and all the... Jewish communities large and small, in Judea and Samaria."

And to put icing on the cake, Netanyahu continued to Arab-bait his political opponents in the Blue and White bloc by telling Israeli voters that "a vote for Benny Gantz (of Blue and White) is a vote for the Arabs". Instead of distancing himself from Netanyahu's commitments to annex Palestinian lands and expand settlements, Gantz's response has been to embrace these very same positions. He went further by taking a harder line on Gaza, and then made it clear that Arabs "won't be a part of my government".

So, the RJC is right. While there may be some differences between Netanyahu, Gantz, and other Israeli leaders in contention for the premiership, in their racist disregard for Palestinian rights, they largely agree. And because the "vast majority of Israeli voters" keep supporting these parties and, according to polls, support their policies that demonstrate contempt for Palestinian rights, it appears that the other RJC indictment of Israel's political culture is also on target. What this exchange also brought home is the extent to which a deep partisan divide has developed on issues related to Israel/Palestine here in the US. Among Democrats and independents, Sanders not only can call the Israeli government racist, press for greater recognition of Palestinian suffering, and propose that aid to Israel be conditioned on Israel's human rights policies - he can get loud audience approval for these critical comments.

Sanders, once alone, among Democratic candidates willing to take a tough position on Israel, has this year, been joined by a few other leading Democratic candidates, including Senator Elizabeth Warren, and Mayor Pete Buttigieg. They know that there is strong voter support for this position and very little support for a headline pro-Israel view. There is interesting evidence for the lack of Democratic voter tolerance for strident pro-Israel policies, in the strange behavior of a pro-Israel "dark money" group - Democratic Majority for Israel (a group funded by a collection of AIPAC donors and board members).

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

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



Men and youths dance as they celebrate the first day of 'reduction in violence' agreed between the Taliban, US and Afghan forces in Kandahar province yesterday. — AFP

In Afghan exit, Trump looks to declare victory

US President Donald Trump is often criticized as a bull in a china shop when it comes to foreign policy, but the US deal with the Taliban will let him declare victory on a key election promise. "The credit goes to the president," a senior administration official told reporters this month, ahead of the announcement Friday of a partial truce and plans for subsequent inter-Afghan peace talks and a US troop withdrawal. There is strong support in the United States for an exit from Afghanistan after nearly two bloody decades that left the Taliban nowhere near defeat and US forces exposed to seemingly pointless casualties.

Critics say that an end to the war launched in 2001 would come despite, rather than because of, Trump's often erratic policy making. But supporters and the president himself will make a strong case ahead of the November election that he has delivered on his core promise of ending an unpopular foreign entanglement. "Even if not genuine, the president will call this a victory and withdraw some US troops to show he is a winner and his base will clap," said Robert Guttman, a government professor at Johns Hopkins University.

Disruptor-in-chief

Just as he has done at home, the Republican leader

has sought to disrupt or simply tear up the status quo on the international scene. He has heaped scorn on America's deepest alliances with the Europeans and NATO. He has praised US rivals and foes in Russia and China. And with all the boldness and razzmatazz of his New York real estate days, he has sought to pull off diplomatic deals that his predecessors found impossible - with decidedly mixed success.

Trump apparently thought his personal touch could unlock the nuclear standoff with North Korea, but three meetings with dictator Kim Jong Un barely moved the needle. He thought a campaign of "maximum pressure" could make Iran desperate to negotiate, crippling the economy with sanctions, withdrawing from a huge international deal on managing Tehran's nuclear ambitions, and even ordering the killing of the country's most influential military leader. But there too, the standoff continues.

A promise to end America's "stupid, endless wars" has also seen turmoil. A small deployment in Syria was ordered out, only to be left in, while rocking the fragile balance of power in a way that hugely benefited the Syrian government and its chief backer Russia. In Iran, Trump has publicly wavered, at one point saying he sent bomber planes only to call them back at the last moment. But in Afghanistan, he may have found his mark.

Devil in details

The announcement of a deal by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the Taliban is a milestone. A one-week truce is to be followed by a signing on February 29 in Doha to set the conditions for a broader peace process and US pullout. The potential for things to go wrong remains - in part due to Trump's unpredictable nature. It was just last September that Trump astonished many in Washington and around the world by tweeting that he'd invited the Taliban to the US presidential retreat at Camp David, but then canceled the extraordinary meeting.

News of the failed Camp David gambit outraged many in Washington, who saw Trump trying to set up a PR coup, using America's deadly enemies as props. Officials say Trump's abrupt decision to temporarily kill the negotiations was in fact what persuaded the Taliban that they'd need to work harder to persuade the US side of their seriousness. "It was President Trump's tweet and the subsequent standard he took," the administration official said. "That's my explanation for why we've done what we've done." Guttman said: "With Trump, nothing is also never certain and also not ever 100 percent true." But he has a good story to tell on the re-election trail. "Trump will call it great win and a foreign policy great deal no one else could have done except for himself," Guttman said. — AFP

Cancer drug shortages leave Mexican kids fighting for life

Five-year-old Dhana Rivas is fighting for her life on two fronts, fending off the acute lymphoblastic leukemia eating away at her frail body while her family simultaneously battles the shortage of cancer drugs plaguing Mexico. Recurrent drug shortages during much of her short existence means the frequency of life-saving chemotherapy has slowed. The shortages are partly a consequence of government policy and President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's efforts to revamp the healthcare system by tackling waste and corruption.

In August, authorities shut down seven Mexican factories producing methotrexate - a major element of the anti-cancer cocktail. Breaks occurred in Dhana's chemotherapy in September and October of 2018, and again the following February, for lack of medicines. This was the case at the government clinic in her native Chiapas, in the south of the country. But following a transfer to Mexico City's Federico Gomez Children's Hospital designed to increase her chances of survival, nothing has changed. "The new government promised that there would be no more interruption of treatment," Dhana's father Israel Rivas told AFP. "That's not the case".

And the situation is worsening. "There was not a single chemotherapy possible in January," Rivas says, his voice faltering. Dhana isn't alone. The parents of other young cancer patients have made contact with Rivas via

social media. Together they raised the alarm over the lack of methotrexate, vincristine and other cancer medicines in hospitals around the country. "In Federico Gomez, there are 530 children affected, but in Mexico as a whole there are many more," said Rivas.

He says he has received messages from parents living across the country, in Tijuana, Oaxaca in the south, Puebla in the center, Merida in the east, Guadalajara in the west, and Acapulco and Minatitlan in the south. According to the Health Ministry, some 7,000 minors fall ill with cancer every year. Catching and treating the cancer early gives them a 57 percent chance of survival, doctors say, but only if the right medicines are available. The medical team looking after Dhana believe they can maintain her treatment for just another month.

Cancer doesn't wait

For Crisanto Flores, father of three-year-old cancer patient Cristal, the lack of medicines is inconceivable. Of modest means, he was forced to move to Mexico City so that his daughter could receive treatment. And in January, the family went through one of the most critical moments of his daughter's illness when the main treatment needed for Cristal's therapy was unavailable. Flores knows that time is not in his daughter's favor, and his only recourse is to team up with other parents to try to put pressure on the government.

"If the vincristine isn't available, the illness will gain ground," he said. His little girl has already lost the sight of one eye. Another anxious parent, Esperanza Soto, is desperately hoping that the shortages don't affect her four-year-old boy, Hermes Soto, who is just two months away from beating cancer. "We only have three cycles of chemotherapy to go," she says. Emmanuel Garcia in Baja-California and Alejandro Barbosa in the western

state of Jalisco live nearly 2,000 km apart.

Both are battling to obtain the same medicines. "In Jalisco, there are three public hospitals affected by the shortage of medicines. We buy them from distributors certified by the government who bring them from abroad, which is very costly," said Barbosa. The price of vincristine has soared because of the shortages. In less than a year, it has risen by more than \$23 to \$118. Garcia has also signed up to the parents' pressure group since December. He says there are 81 sick children who, like others in Mexico, have suffered several interruptions to their chemotherapy treatment, despite a short respite when the hospital in Tijuana received a delivery. "And what about the others in southern Mexico?" he asked.

Shortage without end

In a desperate bid to make themselves heard, the parents staged a demonstration and briefly blocked access to Mexico City's international airport. The day after, Lopez Obrador was forced to address the subject, but without proposing a solution. "We will never run out of medicines," he promised, without further details. Some demonstrations bringing together a few families have taken place in recent days, but with little response.

In Merida, the capital of the southeastern state of Yucatan, Flor Gonzalez, whose child Remi suffers from cancer, spends her days waiting. "Doctors are applying incomplete treatments," she said, relating the case of a child who had relapsed due to the use of a replacement drug. In Mexico, more than 26.4 million children have no access to any type of social security. A "popular insurance" scheme in place since 2003, but cancelled in 2020, was one of the few programs allowing children to seek treatment. For Dhana and the other cancer-stricken children, the countdown has started. — AFP

China's couriers take hands-off approach amid virus

China's armies of racing, swerving motorcycle deliverymen have been hailed as saviours during the coronavirus crisis, keeping shut-in citizens fed and stocked up. But it's come with major adjustments for couriers like Gao Yuchao. A Shanghai driver for leading meal take-out service ele.me, Gao's job has changed: His temperature is taken several times daily at restaurants and delivery points, he wears not one but two masks for protection, and frequently disinfects his delivery box.

Gone is the routine hand-off to hungry customers - ele.me and other platforms have moved to "contactless" delivery to guard against infection, dropping parcels off outside gated communities due to paranoia over the virus. "We're not safe for them. It's understandable that some people have courier-phobia," said Gao, 30. "It's more protective and hygienic for everyone."

Tens of millions have been effectively quarantined in the virus epicentre in central China, but communities across the country also have adopted strict curbs on movement and access to arrest the contagion's spread. The economy has been impacted across the board, including hugely popular food-delivery platforms. Yet despite reduced volumes, uniformed drivers have remained among the most visible sights on otherwise

emptied streets. State-controlled media have praised them as "heroes" keeping the economy - and people - on life support.

Hands-off approach

In the city of Wuhan where the virus first emerged and which remains under strict quarantine, couriers have reportedly pitched in to take hospital staff to work or deliver medical supplies and groceries, drawing nationwide kudos. Ele.me rival Meituan launched no-contact delivery in Wuhan on January 26, later rolling it out across the country. McDonald's, KFC, and Starbucks are among the major players to follow suit. Couriers arrive at predetermined locations then step back as customers pick up their dinner.

Delivery riders typically provide a card listing the temperatures of all those involved in cooking, packing, and delivery, and stating whether the courier's equipment had been disinfected that day. The anxiety is sometimes palpable. Gao says some customers, hearing his footsteps, have shouted at him to leave the food and back off. Some couriers were reportedly diagnosed with the virus in parts of the country, sparking fear among delivery company workers and their customers.

Buying habits also have changed, with customers shifting from prepared take-out meals to groceries and hygiene supplies. E-commerce giant JD.com has said sales of rice, dairy and fresh produce have surged, and that shipments of sterilizing alcohol leapt 20-fold since the virus outbreak exploded in late January. Meituan has said sales of staples like rice, flour, cooking oil, and produce have soared while face masks have become the platform's



Medical workers wear protective clothing as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus as they pick up packages from a courier outside the Peking University People's Hospital in Beijing on Friday. — AFP

best-seller. A Beijing official said approximately 20,000 people were delivering an average of more than 400,000 orders daily in early February. In big cities like Shanghai, many restaurants remain closed to normal business, offering only takeout to prevent gatherings of people, and visitors to many communities pass entrances lined with bags of foods or large bottles of water waiting to be claimed. Millions are beginning to trickle back to work in major cities after being stranded in hometowns during the Lunar New Year holiday, and Gao said things were slowly returning to normal. "Now the situation is getting better. Anyway, I need to get out and make money." — AFP

Business

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RIYADH: Governor of the Bank of Japan Haruhiko Kuroda speaks to journalists during the G20 finance ministers meeting in the Saudi capital Riyadh yesterday. —AFP

Saudi hosts G20 financial leaders

G20 officials: Let's come together to tax tech giants

RIYADH: Finance ministers and central bank governors from G20 nations meet in the Saudi capital yesterday for a two-day gathering to discuss the global economy and the risks from the coronavirus epidemic. Aside from an action plan to shield the world economy from the impact of the outbreak, financial leaders from the world's top 20 economies are also expected to discuss ways to achieve a fairer global taxation system for the digital era.

"Finance ministers and central bank governors will discuss global economic outlook and possible policy responses to support growth and safeguard against downside risks," G20 organizers said in a statement. "In addition, they will discuss the priorities of the Saudi G20 Presidency under the theme 'realizing opportunities of the 21st century for all...' including the tax challenges arising from the digitalization of the economy."

The meeting in Saudi Arabia, the first Arab nation to hold the G20 presidency, will be chaired by the kingdom's finance minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan and central bank governor Ahmed Al-Kholifey. The meeting comes amid growing alarm over the new coronavirus as Chinese authorities lock down millions of people to prevent the spread of the disease, with major knock-on effects for the global economy. The impact of the epidemic may be short-lived but it comes as the global economy remains "fragile", IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva told a gathering in Riyadh on Friday.

Georgieva said the economic impact could see a "V-shaped" trajectory, with a sharp decline in China's GDP followed by a sharp recovery. She warned the situation could have more dire consequences for other countries as the impacts spill over. The virus has now claimed 2,345 lives in China, cutting off transportation and forcing businesses to close their doors. China has said it will not be sending any leaders from Beijing for the Riyadh gathering but the Chinese ambassador in the kingdom will instead lead a small delegation.

"We have been closely watching the developments of the virus and assessing its potential effects on economic growth," a senior US Treasury official told reporters. "We expect ministers and governors will discuss the global economic outlook, particularly as it relates to the coronavirus outbreak." The G20 organizers will also host a ministerial-level symposium on international taxation, focused on the challenges arising from the digitalization of the global economy.

The symposium will be attended by US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin along with a host of other financial leaders. The Saudi presidency will see it host world leaders for a summit in Riyadh from November 21 to 22. It will hold more than 100 events and conferences in the run-up to the summit, including ministerial meetings, organizers say. Human rights groups have urged G20 member states to

exert pressure on the kingdom over its intensifying crackdown on dissent, which has seen women activists, journalists and political dissidents jailed.

Taxing tech giants

Leading world economies must show unity in dealing with aggressive "tax optimization" by global digital giants like Google, Amazon and Facebook, G20 officials said yesterday. Global rules are being developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to make digital companies pay tax where they do business, rather than where they register subsidiaries. The OECD says this could boost national tax revenues by a total of \$100 billion a year.

The call for unity appeared mainly directed at the United States, home to the biggest tech companies, in an attempt to head off any stalling on the rules until after the American presidential election in November. "There is no time to wait for elections," German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz told a tax seminar on the sidelines of a meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bankers. "This needs leadership in certain countries," Scholz said looking directly at US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, sitting next to him at the seminar.

The taxing of digital firms and the effect of the coronavirus outbreak on the global economy are among the hot topic for G20 financial leaders, from the world's 20 largest economies,

during their talks in Riyadh this weekend. The OECD wants to set a minimum effective level at which such companies would be taxed and seeks agreement by the start of July, with an endorsement by the G20 by the end of the year. "A coordinated answer is not the better way forward, but, given the alternatives, the only way forward," OECD head Angel Gurría told the seminar.

But the OECD efforts were stalled late last year by last-minute changes demanded by Washington, which many G20 officials view as reluctant to deal with a potentially politically tricky matter before the presidential election. Mnuchin said OECD countries were close to an agreement on the minimum tax level, which he said would also go a long way to resolving the issue of where tax is paid. "I think we all want to get this done by the end of the year, and that's the objective," Mnuchin told the seminar.

Several European countries, including France, Spain, Austria, Italy, Britain and Hungary either already have a plan for a digital tax or are working on one, creating the risk of a highly fragmented global system. "You cannot have in a global economy different national tax systems that conflict with each other," Mnuchin said. Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg said on Feb 14 he would be ready to pay more tax in Europe and would welcome a global OECD solution that would make the levies uniform. —Agencies

stc and Tmkeen sign strategic partnership

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Youth Empowerment Organization (Tmkeen). The partnership between stc and Tmkeen aims to educate, inspire and support local entrepreneurs, as well as small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

The Company said in a statement that the partnership includes a first of its kind agreement covering all Tmkeen activities during 2020. This will serve as a gateway for young talented entrepreneurs who are looking to establish and launch their own projects, or those who are looking to enhance and expand their current business operations.

On this occasion, engineer Maziad Alharbi, CEO of stc, said, "The strategic partnership stems from our commitment to sustainably enable the digital transformation and support innovation in local SMEs. We are pleased to have partnered with a renowned organization like Tmkeen in all the initiatives they have organized for the year and share our market knowledge and experience to help them achieve their objectives."

He added, "stc has always supported and stood by the talented, creative and innovative concepts presented by the younger generation. We believe that it is of great importance to highlight their potential and provide them with the proper guidance to achieve positive outcomes for the Kuwaiti society and economy as a whole. Our



partnership with Tmkeen reflects the role that the private sector should play in supporting the growing SMEs sector and drive towards diversifying the structure of the Kuwaiti economy."

Alharbi continued "We are pleased to collaborate with Tmkeen in sponsoring this year's Youth Empowerment Symposium. The Symposium will provide entrepreneurs with a platform to illuminate their path towards growth as they enter the business world. This initiative falls in line with the core values of stc's CSR agenda while providing a great service to young local entrepreneurs."

In his role, Founder and CEO of the Youth Empowerment Organization, Ali Al Ebrahim, said, "We are pleased with our partnership with stc and have witnessed the support of the Company's team in paving the path towards our united goal in developing a platform to sup-



port the younger generation. We stand by our commitment in utilizing our resources and expertise to add value to the initiatives brought onto our platform by entrepreneurs and SMEs, contributing to the development of their success."

He added, "The youth's ability to create and innovate, coupled with a strong foundation built on strategic guidance to take a concept to market, is the backbone of a more modern and flexible economy. We strive towards providing a variety of services that enhance operations and promote growth through best practices to assist in their success."

The strategic partnership between stc and Tmkeen aims to empower the young generation to lead a new era of entrepreneurship development, growth and productivity, while establishing entrepreneurship programs that educate, inform and inspire the youth by creating a bridging link

between global and local leaders with the Kuwaiti youth.

It is worth mentioning that Tmkeen is an independent, private non-profit organization (NPO) and non-governmental organization (NGO). It is a national initiative that is delivered from the youth to the youth, in a professional setting with a global outreach towards entrepreneurship advancements around the world.

In 2012, the Youth Empowerment Symposium was launched as an annual seminar, which later grew to become the starting point of the Youth Empowerment Organization in 2014. To find out more about stc's sponsorships, promotions and events, follow stc's official social media platforms, visit one of stc's branches, download the stcmobile application, visit www.stc.com.kw or contact the customer service center by dialing 102 for around the clock assistance.

Business

Feuding European Union fails to plug Brexit hole in a new budget

Rich, poor nations deeply at odds over size, priorities

BRUSSELS: European Union leaders fell out yesterday over their next long-term budget after fraught talks over a gaping Brexit hole in their joint coffers, with poorer countries demanding more aid and their "frugal" peers determined to rein in spending. Brexit has left the EU short of some 75 billion euros and the 27 remaining EU countries failed to agree on the overall size of the bloc's 2021-27 budget or how to spend it.

"We have to acknowledge that the differences are too big still to find agreement," German Chancellor Angela Merkel told reporters after two days of talks in the EU's hub, Brussels. Setting the budget has always been a tug of war, but was fiercer than ever this time because Britain's exit from the bloc last month came amid costly new challenges, from climate change to managing migration and a growing digital economy.

The standoff has exposed rifts between countries in the north and south, between east and west, and between more developed and less advanced economies. Net payers dubbed the "Frugal Four" - Austria, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands - dug in their heels, demanding that the budget be capped at 1% of the bloc's economic output. Beneficiaries of the generous handouts opposed deep cuts in development aid and farming subsidies compared to those they get under the current 2014-20 plan.

"Nobody was really pleased," said Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic of Croatia, one of the countries seeking more aid. The feud also underlined the fact that, following the turmoil of Brexit that brought them together, the bloc still has many issues that divide it. "These divisions are there. We don't need Britain for that. They were playing out during the financial crisis a decade ago, during the migration crisis, we're now seeing them on budget issues," French President Emmanuel Macron said.

'Frankenstein proposal'

After nearly 30 hours of complex negotia-



BRUSSELS: Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin leaves at the end of the special European Council summit in Brussels. — AFP

tions, the leaders were no closer to a deal than when they first convened on Thursday with a proposal to set the budget at 1.074% of the continent's gross national income, or some 1.09 trillion euros (\$1.2 trillion). A new blueprint of 1.069% equally failed to impress and was dubbed by one EU official as "a Frankenstein proposal".

The "frugal four" stood firmly against a scheme that would allocate one-third for development aid to help poorer regions grow and another third on support for farmers, a key priority for Paris. Germany, the EU's powerhouse and biggest net contributor, was upset about taking the brunt of the

Brexit shortfall and coming out worse off than France.

Berlin, Vienna and others wanted to see more focus on border management following Europe's migrant crisis of 2015-16, tackling climate change, beefing up security and modernizing the bloc's economy through digital investment. There will have to be a further summit - or summits - to get a deal over the line but no date was set for now. Without an agreement by the end of the year, the bloc will have to freeze much of its projects from 2021. "In the past it has always taken two or three meetings to reach a result," Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurtz said. — Reuters

Macron to farmers: France stands firm on EU budget

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron yesterday told farmers that France stood its ground in opposing cuts to agricultural subsidies and would continue to do so, a day after an EU summit on the bloc's next budget ended in deadlock. European Union leaders failed on Friday to agree on a next seven-year budget, as a funding shortfall created by Britain's departure sharpened debate over spending priorities.

Like his predecessors, Macron has called on Europe to maintain a large budget for its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), of which France is the main beneficiary. Inaugurating the annual Paris farm show yesterday, Macron said France would resist efforts to cut the CAP envelope. "On the CAP we defend an ambitious budget. CAP cannot be the adjustment variable of Brexit. We need to support our farmers," Macron said.

"If we do not have a deal, we keep the current system. We are protected by the fact that without a deal, we keep the system as it is. We did not yield to those who wanted to reduce the (CAP) budget," he added. Macron has had an uneasy relationship with farmers, a powerful lobby in the EU's biggest agricultural producer.

He initially won plaudits for legislation aimed at sharing profits more fairly along the food chain. But the effects have yet to be felt widely at farm level, while Macron's determina-

tion to phase out weedkiller glyphosate has fuelled farmers' resentment at being cast as polluters. In the aisles of the agricultural show, Macron tried to reassure farmers that glyphosate would not be scrapped in cases where there were no alternatives, while rules on safe distances for pesticide spraying would be adopted progressively.

"We are behind our farmers and peasants. They feed us everyday. We must be proud of French agriculture. I know I can count on our farm world to successfully transform, keeping a strong agriculture while managing to reduce pesticide use," he said. There were glimpses of recent tensions with a heated exchange with a woman about pension reforms, but hefty security kept protesters, some sporting T-shirts with "Peasants without President" at a distance.

As part of the customary presidential visit to the show, which attracts around 600,000 visitors over 10 days, Macron tasted French specialties like Charolais beef and was offered a jersey from the soccer team Olympique de Marseille. He posed in front of "Ideale", an imposing Charolais-breed cow chosen as the mascot for this year's event. Macron began his visit with a tribute to former French President Jacques Chirac, a popular figure in the farming world and enthusiastic visitor to the Paris show, who died last year. — Reuters

ManageEngine to host 9th Middle East User Conference in Dubai



Raj Sabhlok, President, ManageEngine

ManageEngine organizes yearly user conferences for its customers in the Middle East to discuss the company's road map and share knowledge and IT best practices. "Our user conferences have a lot to offer our customers," said Sabhlok. "They get to meet the people behind the products they use, gain valuable insights that help them use those solutions optimally, and network with their peers."

Customers get the opportunity to share how they use our products, discuss the challenges they face, and provide input we use to develop even better products." Mohammad Hennawi, IT Systems Manager, NAFFCO, said, "We have attended over six conferences hosted by ManageEngine. This year we look forward to seeing the recently launched enterprise service management (ESM) capability in ServiceDesk Plus and new cloud solutions."

The two-day conference will offer detailed walk-throughs and live demonstrations of all major ManageEngine solutions, including ServiceDesk Plus, OpManager Plus, Applications Manager, Desktop Central, Mobile Device Manager Plus, the company's AD management suite, Site24x7, and Log360. One-on-one sessions with domain experts will also be available to ensure customers have the opportunity to get their questions answered. Participants can also take part in training sessions to increase their knowledge of the products, and they can take a test to get certified as a product associate by ManageEngine.

DUBAI: ManageEngine, the IT management division of Zoho Corporation, yesterday announced that it will be hosting its ninth Middle East User Conference in Dubai on February 24 and 25 at the Address Dubai Marina. At the conference, ManageEngine will be launching a privileged session management solution for enterprises.

In explaining the market's need for this type of product, Rajesh Ganesan, vice president said, "In order to strengthen IT security, many enterprises are adopting privileged access management solutions into their IT workflows. With comprehensive auditing capabilities, our solution offers complete visibility into all privileged accounts and helps enterprises manage privileged user sessions in real time, preventing any internal/external risks."

The two keynote speeches of the conference will be delivered by Raj Sabhlok, president, and Rajesh Ganesan, vice president. Sabhlok will share his insights into the dilemma organizations face when undertaking digital transformation projects, and identify top IT initiatives to tackle these challenges. Ganesan will highlight ManageEngine's role in digital transformation and discuss how ManageEngine helps businesses unleash their IT's potential.

Shopify joins nonprofit behind Libra currency



SAN FRANCISCO: Online commerce platform Shopify on Friday said it has joined the nonprofit association behind Facebook's planned Libra cryptocurrency. Canada-based Shopify signed on as a member of the Libra Association after a string of companies dropped out in the face of criticism by regulators worried the borderless digital money is a threat to national sovereignty.

"We spend a lot of our time thinking about how to make commerce better in parts of the world where money and banking could be far better," Shopify said in a blog post. "We're excited to be part of the Libra Association and look forward to how the project may improve commerce everywhere." Shopify planned to work with the association to build a payment network that makes money easier to access by businesses and consumers no matter their locations, according to the post.

Libra, a high-profile project of social network giant Facebook, is tentatively scheduled to launch this year but has been battered by severe criticism from some of the world's most influential financial authorities. Libra is to be managed by a Geneva-based independent association linking several companies and non-profit groups. As a multinational commerce platform used by more than a million businesses in approximately 175 countries,

Shopify "brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the Libra project," said Libra head of communications Dante Disparte.

"Shopify joins an active group of Libra Association members committed to achieving a safe, transparent, and consumer-friendly implementation of a global payment system that breaks down financial barriers for billions of people," Disparte added. Late last year, the online payment companies PayPal and Stripe, as well as Visa, Mastercard and others, withdrew from the project amid growing pressure from American and other regulators.

Regulators have cited the potential for illicit uses of the currency and have underscored the tattered reputation of California-based Facebook in matters of privacy and data protection. Countries and central banks — for now the only entities legally permitted to issue currency — have also expressed concern about a blow to their sovereignty. Late last year, French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire bluntly expressed his concerns, saying, "Libra is not welcome on European soil." — Agencies

CELEBRATING
Kuwait

CELEBRATING KUWAIT

ABK extends its congratulations to HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the Kuwaiti government and its people, on the occasion of Kuwait's National and Liberation days.

On this occasion, ABK will be closed for business starting Tuesday 25 February 2020 and will resume its regular working hours on Sunday 1 March 2020.

During this period, ABK's online services and Call Center will be available.

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Business

South Africa lobster catchers suffer in coronavirus fallout

Fishermen struggle to make ends meet

CAPE TOWN: The lobster catchers of South Africa's Western Cape have become an unexpected casualty of the coronavirus after China halted imports of the West Coast rock lobster last month as part of measures to contain the outbreak. "I am stuck now because they are putting our catches aside now, the factory doesn't want to take our fish, there is no market for our fish," said Lorraine Brown, 60, as she waited for the day's catch to arrive at Witsand's slipway, used by the Ocean View fishing community, some 40 km from Cape Town.

"We don't know where we stand. They say you can catch, but your crayfish must stand in the water. For how long are they going to keep it in the tanks, and what money are we going to benefit if the crayfish must all die?" she said. Before China halted seafood imports on Jan. 25, Brown could earn 340 rand (\$22) per kg for live exported lobster. The price has now slipped to 120 rand per kg on the local market, too little to make ends meet, she said.

First detected in China, the coronavirus epidemic has killed more than 2,000 people and infected tens of thou-

sands more as its pernicious tentacles disrupt global aviation, shipping trade and tourism sectors. China has halted live animal trade over fears the trade could help spread the



Lobster exports to China halted

disease, South Africa, which has no confirmed coronavirus case, has been hit hard by the suspension of lobster exports to China - which last year bought 95% of its total

allowable west coast lobster catch of 1,084 tons. The West Coast Rock Lobster Association, which represents offshore and near-shore rights holders, said the outbreak has had a "serious impact" with direct financial losses to rights holders estimated in excess of 257 million rand (\$17 million). "But, then there is the secondary effect on the people working the factories processing less lobster, the people catching it will be taking out less fish... so our fishing communities will have less money," said the association's chairwoman, Shamera Daniels.

There were almost 50 tons of live crayfish at risk of dying, being frozen and sold at a significant discount, she said. The industry was in discussion with the government about possible interventions, Daniels said, such as extending the fishing season should China's trade restrictions persist. Ocean View's fishermen said their survival was at stake. "We are basically the worst off because of the coronavirus," said fisherman Charles America. "The effects might be economic or financial in the upper echelons of the industry, but down on the ground here it is survival, pure survival." — Reuters

Zain launches DOB service in partnership with beIN CONNECT



KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of Direct Operator Billing (DOB) service in partnership with beIN MEDIA GROUP, the leading sports and entertainment content provider. The DOB service allows Zain customers to easily and securely subscribe to beIN CONNECT via their phone bill to enjoy exclusive local and international sport content on their smart devices wherever they are.

Zain's partnership with beIN MEDIA GROUP comes under the umbrella of the company's strategy that closely focuses on enriching its digital partnerships ecosystem. This strategy aims at expanding the portfolio of innovative services and solutions Zain offers to meet the needs and aspirations of its customers, as they are considered the largest family of subscribers in the Kuwaiti market, while offering them an added value on both personal and professional levels.

Zain customers can now subscribe to beIN CONNECT via the Direct Operator Billing service, where they can enjoy easy and secure daily, monthly, or yearly subscription plans without the need to use bank cards. The subscription fee would simply be added to the postpaid customer's bill or deducted from the prepaid customer's balance. The company is keen on offering a selection of flexible options to suit its customers' unique needs and aspirations.

Commenting on the partnership, Modhey Al Sabah, Zain Kuwait's Chief Government Affairs and Business Development Officer, said: "we are proud to launch this new digital service in collaboration with beIN MEDIA GROUP, the global leader in sport and entertainment content, to offer our customers an easy and secure way to enjoy exclusive sport content on their smart devices wherever they are.

This is especially true as we know how passionate our customers are about sports. This collaboration comes as part of our commitment to expand our digital partnerships ecosystem with the biggest regional and international companies to offer our customers the latest services and meet their aspirations". On the partnership with Zain, Mohammed Al Subaie, Executive Director of Commercial Affairs at beIN MEDIA GROUP, said: "We are delighted to have secured a partnership with Zain Kuwait. Direct Operator Billing (DOB) allows Zain customers to easily and securely access and subscribe to world-class content available on beIN CONNECT. With the ability to watch content on-the-go and on mobiles or tablets, beIN CONNECT also provides users with the flexibility to subscribe for a day, a month or a year. Due to its thrilling content and ease of use, beIN CONNECT continues to grow throughout the MENA region - offering the latest sports and entertainment content."

beIN CONNECT features exclusive and comprehensive access to the world's best and biggest sports championships with a panel of the world's most passionate, dedicated and established pundits and presenters. The service features HD quality with Dolby Audio, presenting content in vivid quality and in rich, clear and powerful sound. beIN CONNECT supports the most popular smart devices and operating systems for a chance to enjoy content anytime anywhere.

By signing such digital partnerships, Zain seeks to meet its customers' needs and aspirations through the offering of the latest innovative services and technologies. The company is always keen on offering the most advanced tools to enhance its customers' experience, and offer them an unmatched telecommunications experience on its largest network in Kuwait.

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology to enable an easier and more flexible life. The company places itself as an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait. The DOB service is enabled by Digital Virgo, the France-based specialist in telecom payments, monetization and digital marketing and one of beIN payment partners in the region.

Argentina economy shrank 2.1% in 2019

BUENOS AIRES: Recession-hit Argentina's economy shrank by 2.1 percent in 2019, the state statistics institute said Friday. The institute said the economy contracted by 0.3 percent in December compared to the same period in 2018. Argentina has been in recession since mid-2018 as poverty and unemployment are on the rise and inflation surpassed 50 percent over the last year.

Already in 2018, GDP had dropped by 2.5 percent. The news comes at a time when Argentina is attempting to renegotiate almost \$200 billion in debt in order to stave off a damaging default. The International Monetary Fund ended a week-long mission to the South American country on Wednesday, after which it said Argentina's total debt of \$311 billion, worth more than 90 percent of its GDP, was "unsustainable."

Center-left President Alberto Fernandez said after taking over from market-friendly Mauricio Macri in December that Argentina would not be able to pay its debts if it did not return to growth. In December, the hardest-hit sectors were financial services, which shrank almost 10 percent compared to the previous year, and construction, which was down by eight percent. On the other hand, the fishing industry grew by 13.5 percent. — AFP



Al Mulla Automobiles hosts Kuwait Green Building Council

KUWAIT: Al Mulla Automobiles in partnership with the Kuwait Green Building Council hosted the "Green Talks" at the Mercedes-Benz boutique in the Avenues, with the theme of the talks entitled "Towards Sustainable Transportation". The event was the inaugural event for Al Mulla Automobiles program entitled "Mercedes-Benz Keynotes" in which it looks to collaborate with local groups and entities to highlight a variety of subject matters ranging from entrepreneurship to sustainability.

The 4th iteration of the "Green Talks" series took place Monday, February 17, 2020 at the Mercedes-Benz Boutique in the Avenues mall. The speakers included, Michael Ruehle, General Manager - Mercedes-Benz Kuwait, Mrs. Sandra Draskovic, General Manager - Kuwait

Green Building Council, Talal Al-Wazzan CEO, Meshal Esbaitah COO - Imdad Kuwait, Jassim Al-Awadhi, Founder - Kuwait Commute. Guests included members of the Kuwait Green Building Council, Al Mulla management and thought leaders in the fields of environmental sustainability.

The Kuwait Green Building Council (Kuwait GBC) is a national, non-profit organization that is committed to developing a sustainable property sector for Kuwait by encouraging the adoption of green building practices. The Kuwait GBC was formed as an initiative in 2009 with organizations and businesses from different industries in Kuwait, and legally established as a company in 2017. It is uniquely supported by both private and public sectors in Kuwait, united in one common goal to provide leadership and to advance green building principles for protecting the environment and ensuring sustainability.

"Green Talks" is a seminar style event specifically geared towards environmental awareness; green building practices, sustainability and resilience, with all-round well-being in mind. This event aims to engage Kuwait community with the green building trends, economic, environmental and social sustainability, and importance of being environmentally conscious. Commenting on the occasion, Michael

Ruehle, GM - Mercedes-Benz Kuwait stated: "We were excited to host and participate with the KGBC for the Green Talks initiative and use this opportunity to showcase the work being done by Daimler AG towards sustainability, and to highlight the plug-in and hybrid vehicles coming to Kuwait in the near future. We look forward to building on the success of this initiative and hosting a series of talks in the future covering a wide range of subjects as part of our dedication towards engaging with the public at large."

Also commenting on the occasion, Khaled Al-Mashaan CEO of ALARGAN and Chairman of KGBC stated: "We were happy to partner with Al Mulla Automobiles Co for this edition of KGBC Green Talks as we believe it's important to raise awareness on CO2 emissions and sustainability in transportation as a whole. We look forward to more collaborations of this kind in the future."

Al Mulla Automobiles Co looks forward to growing and expanding on its community outreach programs through a variety of initiatives. For more information and queries related to Mercedes-Benz Kuwait passenger cars and vehicles, please contact our customer service on 1-887-888, follow us on Instagram @mercedesbenzkuwait or visit our website at www.kuwait.mercedesbenzme.com.

Wells Fargo to pay \$3 bn to settle fake accounts scandal

NEW YORK: Wells Fargo has agreed to pay US regulators \$3 billion to settle three investigations into the bank's damaging fake accounts scandal, the Department of Justice said. The fine settles criminal and civil liability in the case in which the nation's fourth largest bank between 2002 and 2016 pressured employees to meet unrealistic sales goals that led to creating millions of accounts or credit cards without consent.

Wells Fargo admitted it collected millions of dollars in fees and interest, harmed the credit ratings of certain customers, and misused personal information, the Justice Department said in a statement. "As a result of the wrongful sales practices, which went on for years, Wells Fargo earned millions of dollars in fees and interest that it should not have collected," US Attorney for the Central District of California Nick Hanna said at a press conference in Los Angeles.

"Wells Fargo traded its hard-earned reputation for short-term profit and harmed untold numbers of customers along the way," he added. Hanna said \$2.5 billion of the settlement would go to the federal government while the rest will be returned to investors. He declined to say if future prosecutions would occur in the case, but noted the investigation is continuing.

"The conduct at the core of today's settlements - and the past culture that gave rise to it - are reprehensible and wholly inconsistent with the values on which Wells Fargo was built," the bank's chief executive Charlie Scharf said in a statement after the settlement's announcement. "While today's announcement is a significant step in bringing this chapter to a close, there's still more work we must do to rebuild the trust we lost."

A culture of sales
The allegations stem from a shift in Wells Fargo's strategy in 1998 to emphasize increased sales. The Justice Department said that move led bank employees to resort to unlawful means to sell financial products - including

fraud, identity theft and the falsification of bank records. Within Wells Fargo, the practice was referred to as "gaming," the Justice Department said.

Employees went as far as "forging customer signatures to open accounts without authorization, creating PINs to activate unauthorized debit cards, moving money from millions of customer accounts... opening credit cards and bill pay products without authorization," prosecutors said.

Bank executives were aware that this was going on, and an internal investigator in 2004 referred to it as a "growing plague." In 2005, another internal investigator said the problem was "spiraling out of control." Nonetheless, it continued. "Today's announcement should serve as a stark reminder that no institution is too big, too powerful, or too well-known to be held accountable and face enforcement action for its wrongdoings," Andrew Murray, US Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, said in the statement.

Prosecution deferred
Under the terms of the Justice Department agreement, Wells Fargo acknowledged the allegations and agreed not to commit similar offenses for three years, in exchange for prosecutors waiving filing charges. The San Francisco-based bank set aside \$3.9 billion at the end of June last year to settle legal disputes, including those related to its business practices.

US authorities last month fined John Stumpf, who served as Wells Fargo's chief executive from 2005 to October 2016, \$17.5 million and banned him for life from the banking sector. Two CEOs and other senior executives at the bank have lost their jobs amidst the probe into the scandal and outrage over claims the bank was slow to correct it. Scharf, who took over as CEO last October, has promised to revive the bank, whose 2019 results were hit by the scandal. The bank already has paid out \$4 billion in financial penalties related to its business practices. — AFP



Green Building Council, Talal Al-Wazzan CEO, Meshal Esbaitah COO - Imdad Kuwait, Jassim Al-Awadhi, Founder - Kuwait Commute. Guests included members of the Kuwait Green Building Council, Al Mulla management and thought leaders in the fields of environmental sustainability.



Mohamed Naser Al Sayer wins Service Hero 2019

KUWAIT: Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons received the prestigious Service Hero Award 2019 for Toyota after securing First Place in the category of new car sales in Kuwait region. Service Hero announced annual customer satisfaction winners based on the results of the Service Hero Index, the only entity in the region that awards winners based solely on consumers' ratings. In 2020 Service Hero is celebrating its 10 years anniversary of a unique concept solely focused on collecting the voice of customers on service standards and creating a list of service providers ranked by category.

Representing AL SAYER Abdullah Al Shuwaie Group Manager at Toyota Group Service Division received the award from Faten Abu-Ghazaleh, President of Service Hero. According to Martin Aherne Business Director Toyota Sales said "we are in challenging times, customers are more informed, they want more options and expect an exceptional level of customer service. As a result, it is more important than ever to keep our customers at the center of everything we



Abdullah Al Shuwaie with the Award

do so that they remain loyal to our Toyota brand".

Service Hero's Customer Satisfaction Index measures each industry category across up to eight service dimensions, which are reliability, speed, product quality, staff attitude, value for money, location, call center, and website quality. These dimensions are assessed on a 'before and after experience' basis to evaluate the difference between customer expectations of service and actual satisfaction with the service.

What's On



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.

uled 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.

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.

Kuwait National Day Fireworks
25th February 2020 8:30PM at Festival Bay

Kuwait National Day IMAGINE Projection
25th February 2020 6:30PM, 7:45PM, 8:30PM and 9:30PM at Festival Bay

Harbiya Dance Performance
25th February 2020, 6:35PM, 7:50PM, 8:35PM and 9:35PM at 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 at Festival Bay. Remaining 6 zones - indoor.

IMAGINE Show: Pirates Tale, Star dancer, A Child's Dream, Hathi's Garden and LEGO Ninjago, A show every 30 minutes after sunset at Festival Bay daily.



CBK celebrates national anniversaries with medical emergencies staff

In appreciation of the efforts they exert at all times, The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently visited the medical emergencies staff at Adan Hospital Ambulance Center to celebrate the national anniversaries with them.

various sects, namely those safeguarding the lives and safety of citizens and residents. In this regard, CBK's Deputy Director for Corporal Communication Affairs, Amani Al-Wer'a said that the corporal communications team visited medical, nursing and technical staffs at the medical emergencies department to celebrate the national anniversaries with

them as a token of appreciation for their efforts. "CBK's sharing of the national anniversaries' celebrations with various NGOs reinforces patriotism in the souls of citizens and comes to express love and loyalty to our beloved home country, Kuwait", Al-Wer'a underlined.

ABK wishes everyone in Kuwait Happy National and Liberation Days

ABK announced that during the National and Liberation Days holiday, its branches and the Head Office will be closed on Tuesday 25th February 2020 through to Thursday 27th February 2020. The Bank will resume its regular working hours on Sunday 1st March 2020. ABK's online services and Call Center will be available 24 hours a day during the holiday and can be reached by contacting a customer service agent via 'Ahlan Ahli' at 18998999.

Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and to the Kuwaiti government and its people.



Gulf Bank's National Day song a hit

Gulf Bank's song for the National holidays has reached more than one million views across various social media channels. In celebration of the upcoming national holidays, the song's lyrics also include the Bank's national holiday slogan, which translates to "Hold our flag high." The song also features Gulf Bank's new limited edition prepaid card, which features a unique Kuwaiti flag design that the Bank had launched to mark this special occasion.

Commenting on the record number of views that the song has reached to date, Ms. Najla Al-Essa, the Assistant General Manager of Marketing at Gulf Bank, said: "This year, we wanted to launch a song for the youth, by the youth. That is why we partnered with a wonderful team of Kuwaiti content creators, headed by artist Daffy, to create a song that would resonate among people of all cultures in Kuwait. We would like to thank everyone who participated in creating this song, which has now reached over one million views across various social media channels, and we look forward to always providing the best for our beloved Kuwait."



Najla Al-Essa

The song, a contemporary mix sung by Kuwaiti artist Daffy, was received very positively among young listeners, who shared the song widely with their friends and peers. The music video features a traditional sailboat, a symbol referring to Gulf Bank's logo. The music video also combines modern elements of art with Gulf Bank's heritage and Kuwaiti history. The video, which featured old sailors and pearl divers among glittering oysters and pearls, gives viewers a glimpse of an important time period in Kuwaiti history. To further encourage viewers to share the song and for the first time in Kuwait, the song was also posted on the popular video-sharing social networking service TikTok, inspiring both adults and children to show off their best dance moves as they attempted the song's dance challenge.

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank had released a limited edition prepaid card in celebration of the upcoming National Day holidays. The new and exclusive prepaid card, whose design reflects the Kuwaiti flag, is designed to echo the sentiments of Kuwait's National & Liberation Day holidays and is available for free to all Gulf Bank's customers.

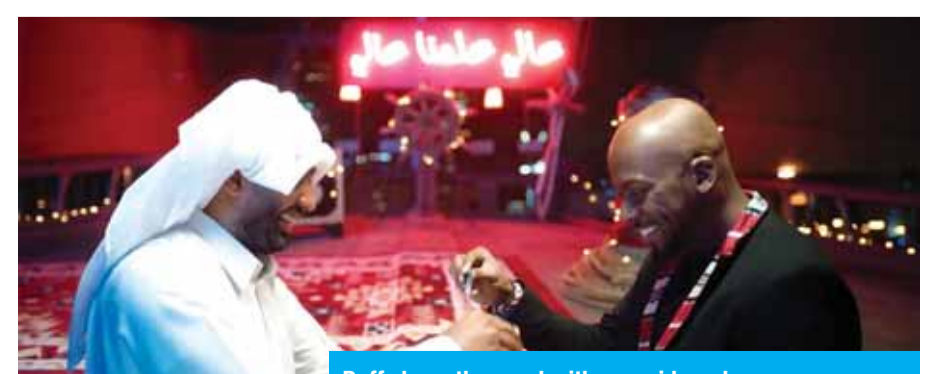


ABK platinum sponsor of Al-Bayan Bilingual School National Day celebrations

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 com-

munity 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 story-telling, music band, light entertainment show, magic show, juggler, as well as a raffle and prizes.



Daffy buys the pearl with prepaid card

Health & Science

Bumblebees remember objects they see, recognize them by touch

WASHINGTON: Think about a time you've looked for an item on a high shelf or in a cluttered bag: You can identify it by touch alone based on your mental recollection of what it looks like. Scientists reported recently that this ability to recognize objects using different senses has now been shown to exist in insects, namely bumblebees.

Studying their sesame seed-sized brains, which contain about a million neurons as opposed to the 100 billion or so in ours, helps us understand how these fundamental processes work, said Cwyn Solvi, the lead author of a paper describing the finding in the journal Science.

So-called "cross-modal object recognition" had previously been shown in only a few species. It works across vision and touch in humans, apes, monkeys and rats. Dolphins can visualize objects that they echo-sense, and some fish can build up a

picture based on their electric sense. To test whether the same could be true of invertebrates, Solvi and colleagues at Queen Mary University of London set up experiments involving sugar water, a positive reward, and bitter tasting quinine, that were used to fill up either small cubes or spheres.

About 40 bees were set loose in a dark and windowless room with the objects, learning through touch which shape contained the reward and then consistently re-visiting only objects of that shape. Then the test was repeated with the lights on so that the bees could see.

This time there was a plexiglass layer placed on top of the shapes that prevented the bees from differentiating the objects by touch. The insects still went to the objects associated with the reward, which they could access via a small hole through the plexiglass layer. To validate the findings, the tests

were later repeated in the reverse order, and with the shapes containing the sweet and bitter solutions switched up. "The bees have some unified internal representations of objects in the world," Solvi told AFP. "They have this perspective of the world which is more whole rather than just responding like a machine, without any awareness whatsoever."

She added that while it doesn't mean bumblebees experience consciousness exactly as we do, it does show there is more going on in their heads than they have ever been given credit for. The study is only the latest to explore the intelligence of the pollinating insects. Honey bees have been shown to perform sophisticated dances to one another that signal the angular direction and distance of pollen and nectar, with the intensity of the dance linked to the profitability of the food source. — AFP

France begins shutting down oldest nuclear plant

FESSENHEIM: French state-owned energy giant EDF yesterday began shutting down the country's oldest nuclear power plant after 43 years in operation. EDF said it had disconnected one of two reactors at Fessenheim, along the Rhine near France's eastern border with Germany and Switzerland, at 2:00 am (01:00 GMT) in the first stage of the complete closure of the plant.

The second reactor is to be taken off line on June 30 but it will be several months before the two have cooled enough and the used fuel can start to be removed. The removal of the fuel is expected to be completed by the summer of 2023 but the plant will only be fully decommissioned by 2040 at the earliest.

Shutting down Fessenheim 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 earlier this week. France will still be left with 56 pressurized 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. The government confirmed in January that it aims to shut down 12 more reactors nearing or exceeding their original 40-year age limit by 2035, when nuclear power should represent just 50 percent of France's energy mix. But at the same time, EDF is racing to get its first next-generation reactor running at its Flamanville plant in 2022 — 10 years behind schedule — and more may be in the pipeline. — AFP



Security company comments on ISS World attack

LONDON: The attack on ISS World is yet another example of the new targeting and tactics that ransomware gangs have shifted toward in the past year - a change highlighted in the 2020 SophosLabs Threat Report, a leading UK-based IT security company said. "No longer are these crooks content

with small opportunistic payouts from consumers, but are rather hoping for large, sometimes multi-million dollar ransoms," said John Shier, senior security advisor, Sophos. "While the root cause of this attack and the attacking group are still unknown, it is important to remember that these companies become targets because they are in some way vulnerable."

"Whether this is due to too many exposed services, unpatched systems or weak authentication, these criminals will find that weak link. Think of it as an unwanted, criminal pen test," he indicated. "We urge all companies to invest the resources necessary - time, people and technology - to shrink their attack surfaces. This applies not only to prevention of threats but also detection and remediation of extant threats in their IT systems."

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Lifestyle

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2020



The owner of a falcon holds the bird of prey in front of the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital in the Emirati capital. — AFP photos



A falcon is examined at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital in the Emirati capital.



Margit Gabriele Muller (left) responsible for veterinary operations at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, performs a simple surgery on a falcon in the Emirati capital.

UAE FALCON HOSPITAL A WINDOW INTO EMIRATI TRADITION

Eid Al-Qobeissy's two birds perch majestically in the waiting room of Abu Dhabi's falcon hospital, awaiting a routine check-up ahead of their hunting trip to Azerbaijan. Like other well-travelled residents of the United Arab Emirates, the falcons will make the journey with their devoted owner on a well-worn route from a country where the creature is both a national symbol and treasured tradition.

"Falcons have a very special place in the heart of the Emiratis," said the hospital's director Margit Muller. "Here, falcons are not considered birds, they are considered children of the Bedouins because, historically, falcons were used to hunt meat, allowing the Bedouin's family to survive in this very harsh desert life." In 2010, UNESCO added falconry to its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

the cabins of the UAE's main carriers, but for falcons exceptions are made.

Abu Dhabi's Etihad permits falcons in the cabin or as checked baggage, and Dubai's Emirates allows birds to travel alongside their owner to certain destinations in Pakistan. "The most popular destination for falconers travelling with their falcons in the passenger cabin is Pakistan," an Emirates spokeswoman told AFP.



The owner of a falcon awaits with his bird of prey at the reception room.

"This has been a hobby of mine since 2007," said the 26-year-old, gently stroking one of the prized birds of prey, which wear leather hoods to keep them calm and quiet. After waiting in the pristine white-marbled reception area of the animal hospital, the falcons will undergo blood tests in order to complete paperwork for the trip. They are among about 11,000 falcons the hospital treats annually, a number that has more than doubled in the past 10 years.

Talons and training

The Abu Dhabi facility is the world's largest falcon hospital, frequented by falconers from across the Gulf region. As well as check-ups and routine trimming of talons, it also conducts complicated surgery and offers a training program for veterinary students from more than 40 countries to learn about avian medicine.

"The very complicated procedures are either broken legs or broken wings, or when a falcon has a really messy accident that results in big injuries," Muller said. "Very long surgeries... can take up to three or four hours. That is the longest we can keep a falcon under anaesthesia." Opportunities to take a falcon hunting are limited in the UAE, where it is only permitted in designated reserves. That means that for many birds, the hospital is an essential stop-off before heading to popular overseas hunting destinations including Morocco, Kazakhstan and Pakistan.

Emirati falconers are only legally allowed to own captive-bred birds, which must have their own passports that comply with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for transport. Animals other than guide dogs are not usually allowed in

Girl power

While the hospital has its own program and facilities to breed falcons that can be purchased, most of the birds are imported to the UAE from breeders in the Americas and Europe. "They stay with the falconer for as long as they live," Muller said. "They will not be released because they are captive-bred falcons." Muller added that the most sought-after and expensive falcons are females, which can carry up to five times their own body weight. They are also considered the most beautiful.

"The female is usually one third bigger than the male, and more powerful," she said, adding that captive-bred female falcons can cost upwards of 100,000 euros (\$108,000). For falconer Salem al-Mansouri from Abu Dhabi, the tradition is much more than an expensive pastime—it is a symbol of Emirati culture. "Falcons were used to hunt, and you can say that it was the only method for hunting for survival, especially when travelling long distances hundreds of years ago," the 30-year-old told AFP. "We inherited it from our grandfathers and fathers, who taught us, and now we teach the next generation." — AFP



A falcon is examined at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital.



A falcon is examined at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital.



The owner of a falcon awaits with his birds of prey at the reception room.



Falcons await with their owners in the reception room of the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital.

Eilish breaks record with James Bond theme

Teenage pop star Billie Eilish scored another record on Friday as her new single enjoyed the biggest opening week of all time for a James Bond theme in the British charts. "No Time To Die" landed straight in at number one, according to the Official Singles Chart, becoming the 18-year-old's first British chart-topper. The single, co-written and produced by the US star and her brother Finneas, earned 90,000 chart sales and 10.6 million streams, making it the biggest opening week for a single so far this year.

The ballad has the grungy melancholic feel that has propelled Eilish to star status and caps a remarkable few weeks for the teenager. Last month, Eilish was the breakout star at the Grammys, sweeping five awards including the "big four" prizes: Album of the Year, Song of the Year, Record of the Year and Best New Artist. She also won best international female solo artist at this week's Brit Awards, and performed her Bond song during the ceremony. The Los Angeles-born singer, who only turned 18 in December, is the youngest artist to record a Bond track.

The 25th installment of the British spy saga, due out in April, sees Bond drawn out of retirement in Jamaica by his old friend and CIA agent Felix Leiter. Rami Malek, who won a best actor Oscar for his depiction of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury in "Bohemian Rhapsody", plays the villain. — AFP

US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish collects her International Female Solo Artist award during the BRIT Awards 2020 ceremony and live show in London. — AFP



BTS releases new album with 4 million pre-orders

K-pop superstars BTS released their new album "Map of the Soul: 7" Friday, breaking records even before it came out as the country's most pre-ordered album ever and its lead single making its debut on video app TikTok. BTS-or Bangtan Sonyeondan, which translates as Bulletproof Boy Scouts-have gained a huge global following, becoming the first K-pop group to top charts in the US and Britain with a string of sold-out shows in Los Angeles, Paris and London's Wembley Stadium. Their latest effort was given a simultaneous worldwide release online at 6 pm South Korean time (0900 GMT).

Just 30 minutes later, the video for its lead single "ON"—a song about the artists' aspirations and sense of purpose—had been viewed by nearly half a million fans on YouTube, with more than 134,000 comments. "We've voluntarily entered this beautiful prison," the song's lyrics read. "Even when we fall, we rise again, as we always have." The hashtag #BTSComeback2020 trended following the release, as well as #WeONWithBTS, with fans posting videos of themselves in tears after listening to the album.

"Can we just appreciate how perfect the choreography, those moves, those voice, and those faces? I'm speechless," one fan posted on Twitter. Another wrote: "I've been crying listening to the songs without knowing the meanings of the lyrics... how am I gonna cope when lyric translations come out?"

Seven years

The album's title alludes to both the number of members in the band and the time since the group



BTS

made their debut. The song "ON" is "like a diary of our past seven years", member RM told Apple Music before the release. "We stumble from time to time but we got back up," he said. "It's like a declaration that we have admitted our destiny." The group had managed to "expand out musical spectrum", RM added.

"In 2013 we had a performance in front of 300 people, 500 people. But now we are doing stadium tours, so everything's got bigger and happier." "Map of the Soul: 7" was the most pre-ordered South Korean album of all time, with more than four million copies sold before its release. The group had rolled out a 30-second preview "ON" exclusively on TikTok Thursday, momentarily caus-

ing the app to crash. They are the first band to introduce a single via the short-form video platform, and the snippet offered a challenge calling on fans to use the music to create their own videos. More than 33,000 videos were made using the track by Friday morning, showing fans dancing to the song in classrooms, bedrooms, airport terminals and elsewhere. But one dark cloud on the band's otherwise stellar horizon has emerged: a high-profile concert initially scheduled for March 8 in Daegu has been cancelled due to the novel coronavirus outbreak in the city. — AFP



Harvey Weinstein leaves the Manhattan Criminal Court, as a jury continues with deliberations in New York City. — AFP

Weinstein jury suggests deadlock over top charge

The jury in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial hinted it was struggling to reach agreement on the most serious charge of predatory sexual assault as day four of deliberations ended Friday without a verdict. The 12 jurors asked New York state Judge James Burke whether they could be hung on one or both of the top counts but unanimous on the three lesser counts. Weinstein, 67, faces life in prison if the jury of seven men and five women convict him of predatory sexual assault following the Manhattan trial. The jury is considering five counts against the fallen film producer: two of predatory sexual assault, two of rape and one of engaging in a criminal sexual act.

The jury must reach unanimous verdicts on each count, although if they find him guilty of the most serious charges, they do not need to consider the lesser ones. On Friday, the jurors submitted a written question to Burke asking whether they could be deadlocked on the predatory sexual assault charges but reach decisions on rape and the criminal sexual act. Burke told them to take more time after lead prosecutor Joan Illuzzi-Orbon said the state was not willing to accept a partial verdict at the moment. "Please resume your deliberations," he said, without directly answering their question.

The defense said it was OK with a partial verdict. The jury was dismissed at 3:00 pm (2000 GMT) and will reconvene at 9:30 am Monday. The charges relate to ex-actress Jessica Mann and former production assistant Mimi Halesy. Mann, 34, says Weinstein raped her in March 2013, while Halesy alleges he forcibly performed oral sex on her in July 2006. To convict on predatory sexual assault, they must believe one or both of the women plus "The Sopranos" actress Annabella Sciorra who says Weinstein raped her almost 30 years ago.—AFP

Fox and NBCUniversal in talks to acquire streaming platforms

Media groups Fox Corp. and NBCUniversal are looking to buy ad-supported streaming platforms meant to lure customers who don't want to spend money on subscriptions, the Wall Street Journal reported Friday. Fox, the Murdoch-family controlled media group which owns the Fox News Channel, has said it would be willing to shell out some \$500 million for Tubi, a streaming platform which airs mostly older movies and TV shows, the report said.

A tie-up could help expand the footprint of Fox, which last year sold much of its film and television assets to Disney but retained its broadcast television network in the deal. Tubi, sometimes called the "free Netflix," claims to have some 25 million users and recently announced an expansion into Europe. It already operates in the United States, Canada and Australia. NBCUniversal, a subsidiary of Comcast, is meanwhile engaged in what the WSJ called advanced talks with Vudu, a Walmart-owned, ad-supported service that allows users to rent and buy movies or watch them online via a free streaming platform.

NBCUniversal already has plans to launch a new streaming television service called Peacock in April, which can be accessed both ad-free or with ads at different payment tiers. The potential Fox and NBCUniversal acquisitions come as internet platforms and entertainment groups are launching streaming and on-demand services as part of a larger trend to attract viewers who are veering away from traditional television.—AFP



Pixar finds new life with a wave of the wand

Pixar's new film "Onward" hits screens around the world at the end of the month with the much-loved animation company hoping that it will restore a little glitter to a brand that has dulled in recent years. "Onward", which screened at the Berlinale on Friday, is Pixar Animation Studios' first original animated feature since "Coco" in 2017 and is closer to the world of Harry Potter than Buzz Lightyear. It is a tale of unicorns and magic in which two brothers—Ian and Barley Lightfoot voiced by Tom Holland and Chris Pratt—have 24 hours to reconnect with their father who died many years earlier, before Ian, the younger of the two, was even born.

It is a buddy movie that opens up fraternal relations as well as the father-son relation. But things do not quite go as planned, as one might expect in a Pixar quest movie, and the two brothers stumble through a fantasy universe with magic wands, spells, dragons and unicorns. In some respects it unfurls like a video game, a world unfamiliar to director Dan Scanlon who previously teamed up with "Onward" producer Kori Dae on the 2013 film "Monsters University". "I didn't know very much about that but luckily we are working with Pixar and they brought their love of these games, and they taught us a lot," Scanlon told a news conference prior to the Berlin screening on Friday. The story came from Scanlon who lost his own father when he was a child.

"After 'Monsters University', we wanted to make something more personal, from an honest place," said Scanlon. "I told Kori about my own experience, having lost my father when I was a one-year-old and my brother only three. 'We had so many questions about what he was like and how we were like him, we did not remember him at all'. 'That becomes kind of the seed of the story.' Pixar certainly has high hopes for 'Onward'. The success of "Toy Story 4" at this year's Oscars meant the company had racked up 10 academy awards for best animated feature since the category was created in 2001. However, they have come under fire for the fact that four of their last five films have been sequels. — AFP

Trump scoffs at South Korea's 'Parasite' Oscar win

US President Donald Trump on Thursday scolded the best picture Oscar for the South Korean film "Parasite," asking how a foreign movie could get the honor. "How bad was the Academy Awards this year?" Trump asked the crowd at a packed re-election campaign rally in Colorado Springs, Colorado. "We got enough problems with South Korea, with trade. On top of it, they give them the best movie of the year?" Trump asked in disbelief. "Parasite," a dark comedy exploring class divides, made history by becoming the first non-English-language film to win Hollywood's biggest prize. Saying "was it good? I don't know," Trump seemed to indicate he had not watched the film.

Neon, the US distributor for "Parasite," answered the president on Twitter, saying his opposition to the subtitled film was "Understandable, he can't read." Trump, whose presidency has been built on a nationalist "America first" platform, said it was time to bring back classics from Hollywood's golden age. "Let's get 'Gone With the Wind.' Can we get 'Gone With the Wind' back please? 'Sunset Boulevard?'" he said. The success of "Parasite"—which also garnered the Oscars for Best Director, Best Original Screenplay and Best International Feature—has caused huge excitement in its home country, and South Koreans dismissed Trump's comments as unsurprising and tasteless. "I feel sorry for American citizens" for having Trump as their president, one Korean poster wrote on Facebook.

Another added: "Trump just proved that the Oscars had indeed been very local," referencing an earlier description of the awards by "Parasite" director Bong Joon-ho. Bong and the movie's cast were invited to lunch at South Korea's



In this file photo South Korean film director Bong Joon Ho poses with his engraved awards as he attends the 92nd Oscars Governors Ball at the Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood, California. — AFP

presidential Blue House on Thursday, where President Moon Jae-in said he was "particularly proud of the fact that... Bong's ability was so excellent that it broke down the barrier". At his rally Trump also took a crack at Best Supporting Actor winner Brad Pitt, calling him "a little wiseguy." Pitt used his award acceptance speech to support the president's impeachment. — AFP

Chile's Vina del Mar music festival goes ahead despite tensions

Protest-hit Chile takes a tentative step back to normality on Sunday when Latin America's biggest music festival gets underway at Vina del Mar amid heightened security. Protests that flared up in October—initially over a rise in metro fares—abated during the summer holidays before breaking out anew in recent weeks, raising authorities' concerns over mass gatherings. Ricky Martin, Maroon 5 and Puerto Rican star Ozuna are the headline acts as the annual festival in the Pacific Coast resort city begins amid threats of protests.



Calls to disrupt the festival have circulated on social networks, with protests to center on the Quinta Vergara amphitheater where the festival has been held for more than six decades. Organizers have installed metal detectors at entrances and brought festival opening times forward for the duration of the six-day festival. In another sign of official nervousness, the festival's traditional Hollywood-style red carpet opening, one of Chile's most watched televised events, has been canceled.

Ricky Martin's message

Ricky Martin, who supported the social protests, will open the festival on Sunday with a performance from his Movimiento Tour. At the height of the protests, Martin addressed a message to Chile's President Sebastian Pineria on social media: "You have to know that the will of a people is respected, is obeyed, is fulfilled. Listen to your people." Outspoken Chilean star Mon Laferte's performance will be closely watched. She bared her breasts in a message of support for protesters at the Latin Grammy Awards in Las Vegas in November.

Stand-up comedians have been warned to refrain from making jibes at the authorities during the festival, which runs through February 28. Since authorities announced a modest hike in metro fares in the capital Santiago on October 18, more than 30 people have died in protests. They quickly mushroomed into wider discontent over inequality and the rejection of conservative billionaire Pineria and his government. A nationwide referendum on changing the dictatorship-era constitution is set for April. — AFP

Lifestyle | Fashion

Rome unveils tomb that may belong to wolf-suckled king

An ancient tomb thought to belong to Rome's founder Romulus was presented to the world on Friday, after months of investigation by history sleuths. The 6th century BC stone sarcophagus, with an accompanying circular altar, was discovered under the Forum in the heart of Italy's capital over a century ago—but experts could not agree on whether or not it belonged to the fabled figure. According to legend, Romulus founded the city after killing his twin brother Remus.

The brothers had been raised by a she-wolf—the symbol of Rome shows them sucking at her teats—but later fell out over where to build the new metropolis. Historians have long been divided not only over whether the pair actually existed, but if so where Romulus' body—which was reportedly dismembered after his death by angry senators—may have been buried. The tomb was found in the 19th century and was known to specialists at the time but was forgotten until new digs within the past year.

The Colosseum Archaeological Park, which manages the Forum where the sarcophagus lies, said recent clues all pointed to it being the founder's tomb, in what it labeled an "extraordinary discovery". Still, archaeologists called for caution, saying it was impossible to scientifically confirm—and no bones were found inside the sarcophagus. "It's only a suggestion based on ancient sources, all of which speak of the presence of the tomb of Romulus in this area of the Forum," Patrizia Fortini, who was charged with the dig, told AFP. "It's certainly an important monument. The shape of the chest reminds us of a

memorial, a place of remembrance, but what it really was, we can't say."

'Rome's political birth'

Romulus, made popular by writers such as Livy, Ovid and Plutarch, is said to have ploughed a square furrow around the Palatine Hill to demarcate the walls of the future city. When a mocking Remus hopped over the "wall" to prove how ineffective it would be against invaders, his brother killed him. A team of scientists carrying out a dig in the late 1980s discovered a long, deep gash marked by large stones, which they claimed was the "sacred furrow" ploughed by Romulus. Legend has it he went on to establish the Roman senate and rule as the city's first king for nearly 40 years, before disappearing into thin air one day while out inspecting his troops.

Some versions of the tale have him taken up to heaven by the god of war but others have him brutally murdered by jealous senators, who tore him limb from limb and scattered his body parts across the city. There may have been no body to bury. In any case, Romulus acquired a cult following, making it more than plausible that the ancient city built a shrine to its beloved—and possibly mythical—founder. "Whether Romulus existed or not is not important," archaeologist Paolo Carafa told AFP. "What matters is that this figure is considered by the ancients to mark the political birth of the city." — AFP



In this handout picture a 18th century crown who has been kept hidden by a Dutch citizen for two decades is pictured in Ethiopia's Prime Minister office during a hand over private ceremony in Addis Ababa. — AFP photos



In this handout picture Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (right) is given a 18th century crown by Sirak Asfaw (left), who had kept it hidden in his apartment in the Netherlands for two decades, during a hand over private ceremony in Addis Ababa. — AFP

Rare Ethiopian crown, hidden for 21 years in the Netherlands, returns home

Ethiopia's government on Thursday assumed custody of a priceless 18th-century crown that a former refugee had kept hidden in his apartment in the Netherlands for two decades. The handover took place at a ceremony in the capital, Addis Ababa, attended by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Sigrid Kaag, the Dutch minister for foreign trade and development cooperation. Sirak Asfaw, the one-time refugee who is now a Dutch citizen, fled Ethiopia during the late 1970s during the so-called "Red Terror" purges.

He found the gilded crown—which features images of Christ and the Twelve

Apostles—in 1998 in a suitcase left behind by a visitor. It had "disappeared" from the Holy Trinity Church in Cheleqot, a village in northern Ethiopia, the Dutch government said in a statement Thursday. Sirak assumed the crown had been stolen but worried it would "just disappear again" if he returned it to Ethiopia's leaders, so he kept it in his apartment in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam, he told AFP last year.

Only after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018 did Sirak feel comfortable handing it over. He then contacted Arthur Brand, a renowned Dutch art detective, who brought the story to the Dutch

government's attention. "We're honored and delighted to have been able to facilitate the rightful return," Kaag, the Dutch minister, said in a statement Thursday. Abiy thanked the Dutch government for organizing the artefact's return, according to a report from state-affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporate, which noted that the crown "is thought to be one of just 20 in existence". By Thursday afternoon, the crown was on display at Ethiopia's National Museum. — AFP



An ancient tomb thought to belong to Rome's founder Romulus is pictured at the Curia - Comitium in the Roman Forum of Rome, during its presentation to the media. — AFP photos

FASHION INDUSTRY "RAPING" WOMEN WITH SEX-DRIVEN MARKETING, SAYS ARMANI

Giorgio Armani accused the fashion industry on Friday of "raping" women with short-lived trends and sex-driven marketing as he presented his Emporio Armani line at Milan Fashion Week. "I think it's time for me to say what I think. Women keep getting raped by designers, by us," Armani, 85, told reporters on the sidelines of the show for the line aimed at younger customers. "If a lady walks on the street and sees an ad with a woman with her b**bs and a**e in plain sight

and she wants to be like that too, that's a way of raping her," Armani said. "You can rape a woman in many ways, either by throwing her in the basement or by suggesting that she dresses in a certain way."

Armani, known for his sober, elegant outfits, founded his label in 1975 and has built it into a global brand. "In my show there are short skirts, long skirts, ample and tight trousers. I have given maximum freedom to women who can use all possibilities if they are sensible," he

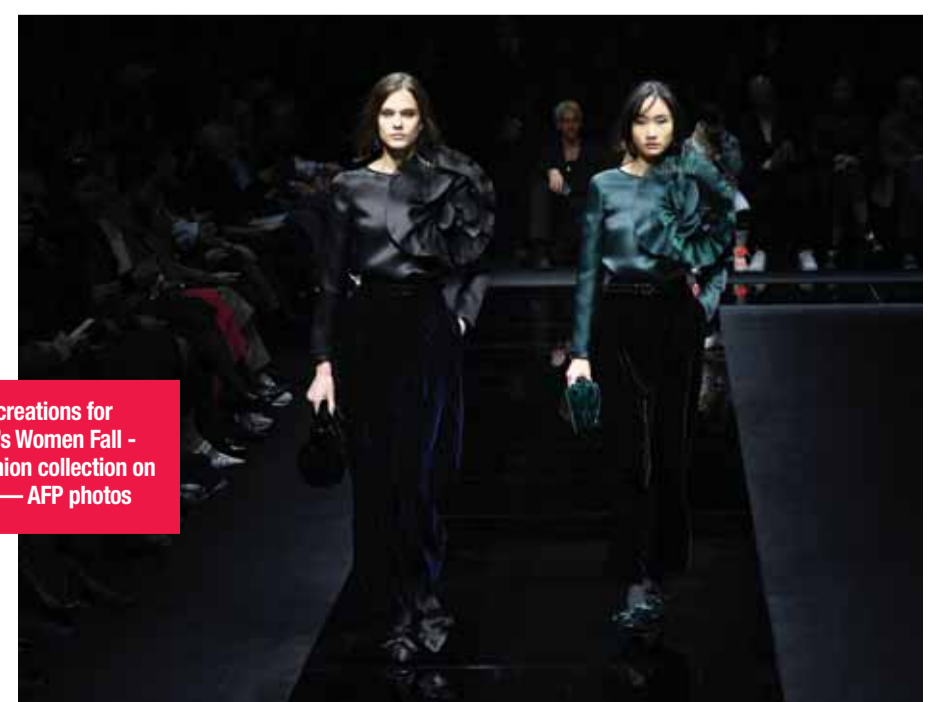
said. "I'm sick of hearing the word 'trend'. We need to try to work for today's woman. There shouldn't be trends," he said. In his Fall/Winter 2020 Emporio Armani show the designer stayed loyal to his simple and neutral looks, keeping silhouettes loose and straight lined with a new emphasis on recycled materials.

"The R-EA capsule collection has been made with recycled fabrics and materials, as it has already been done for Emporio men's line," Armani said after the show. At the beginning,

black dominated the catwalk, then it was the turn of shades of green and blue, because "shops need colors to catch customers' eye," as Armani remarked. Models wore short lace trimmed shorts, opaque tights and wide-legged trousers. Dressed were ruffled and cinched at the waist with belts or combined velvet and silk.

Jackets, long and flowing or cropped and buttoned, were combined with tiny halter neck tops. Footwear mainly consisted of laced up

boots and bags and clutches were small. Velvet, a recurring material, was also used in accessories. "The Emporio Armani woman is strong-willed, eclectic and bold in her decisions. With little regard for mundane rules, she is a young woman that bewilders and astonishes," show notes read. Armani will present the Fall/Winter 2020 collection for his main Giorgio Armani line today. — Reuters



Models present creations for Emporio Armani's Women Fall - Winter 2020 fashion collection on Friday in Milan. — AFP photos



A general view from Watson Island of One Thousand Museum building in Miami.



A general view of One Thousand Museum building in Miami. — AFP photos

Zaha Hadid's 'exoskeleton' tower an instant Miami landmark



A partial view of One Thousand Museum building in Miami.

In the heart of Miami, among the towering skyscrapers that rise above Biscayne Bay, the eye-catching new luxury condo building by late star architect Zaha Hadid dominates the skyline. The unique curved "exoskeleton" design of the One Thousand Museum building has created buzz. The futuristic structure is the only residential space in downtown Miami with a helipad. The high-rise also honors the legacy of the Iraqi-British architect, who died in Miami in 2016 at age 65, when the 62-storey tower was built up to about the eighth floor.



A view of a terrace at the gym area in One Thousand Museum building.



A view of one of the living room at one of the full-floor apartments at One Thousand Museum building.



A view of the sky lounge at floor 60 at One Thousand Museum building.

About six months ago residents began moving into the Miami building—which has been in the works since 2012. "We wanted to make sure that we left this landmark of her achievements," Lepine said. One Thousand Museum-Hadid's first tower in the Western Hemisphere—is now the crown jewel of her design firm, which is based in London. It has 84 units, two pools, a juice bar and the helipad, among other high-end amenities. It is 709 feet (216 meters) tall. In the gym, a swirling tornado spiral staircase snakes up to the spa.

The penthouses offer stunning views of the park surrounding the Perez Art Museum Miami, the bay and then out to the Miami Beach and the Atlantic Ocean. The structure's signature curves stand out among the traditional linear buildings near One Thousand Museum. "There are 360 angles. Why only use one of them? Why only use 90 degrees?" said Lepine, paraphrasing his late boss.

Form and function

The building's "exoskeleton," as architects call it, flows from the base to the top of its exterior, and sinks at times between the tower's windows. That structure is not just for aesthetics—it is functional. It is made of white fiberglass-reinforced concrete, and allowed the design team to play with open spaces inside, without the need for columns. "The exoskeleton for us was a real look at how architecture could be synthesized with structure into an overall very elegant expression," Lepine said.

The flexibility and finishing of the novel material used in this "permanent formwork" technique allowed for a fluid look. One Thousand Museum was developed by Louis Birdman, Gilberto Bomeny, Gregg Covin and Kevin Venger. Prices start in the \$5 million range, and shoot up to \$24 million for units that take up an entire higher floor. Residents hail from about 20 different countries. A handful of apartments are still on the market. "It has all the basic elements of a residential tower, but I think configured in a way that's very, very clever, very creative and in a way that sort of stands out," Lepine said. — AFP



An employee is seen at the counter in the main lobby at One Thousand Museum building.



Architect Zaha Hadid's face painted on a portrait hung in the main lobby of One Thousand Museum building in Miami.



A view of the dining room at one of the full-floor apartments at One Thousand Museum building in Miami.



A view of the master bedroom at one of the full-floor apartments.



A detail view of the pool area at One Thousand Museum building.



A view of one of the living room at one of the full-floor apartments at One Thousand Museum building.



A view of the stairs leading the indoor pool in the roof top at One Thousand Museum building in Miami.



A view of the indoor pool on the roof top at One Thousand Museum building.



An Iranian man walks past a mosaic mural as another drives his motorcycle in Tehran yesterday. — AFP

South Korea reports surge in virus cases, including Samsung employee

SEOUL: South Korea reported 229 more coronavirus cases yesterday, the sharpest spike in infections yet, with many new cases involving patients being treated in hospital for mental health issues. The national toll of 433 is the highest outside China apart from the Diamond Princess cruise ship, with the jump in cases at the hospital in the southern city of Cheongdo following a similar spike among members of a religious sect in the nearby city of Daegu. Among the new cases was a Samsung Electronics employee at a plant in Gumi, 200 km south-east of Seoul, leading the tech giant to say it would suspend operations there until tomorrow.

Meanwhile, 95 of the newly confirmed cases were "related" to patients or staff at Cheongdo Daenam Hospital in Cheongdo, the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) said. "Most of the hospital's patients who have been diagnosed are those who had been staying as inpatients for mental illnesses," vice health minister Kim Gang-lip told reporters. Some cases show "no confirmed epidemiological connections", meaning they are not sure where or how they contracted the virus, he added. Authorities reported another death yesterday, taking the toll to two. Both victims had been inpatients at the hospital.

Separately, more than 200 members of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus have now been infected, starting with a 61-year-old woman who attended at least four services at the church's Daegu branch before being diagnosed. KCDC said some 9,300 Shincheonji members

in Daegu have either been quarantined at facilities or been asked to stay at home. Among them, 1,261 said they had symptoms, health officials added. The mayor of Daegu - South Korea's fourth-biggest city, with a population of more than 2.5 million - has advised locals to stay indoors, while access to a major US military base in the area has been restricted.

One of the Shincheonji members in Daegu visited China - where the deadly virus was first detected - in January, while three others are believed to have travelled to other countries, KCDC director Jung said. Cheongdo, 27 kilometres south of Daegu, is the birthplace of Shincheonji's founder Lee Man-hee. County officials said on Friday that a three-day funeral was held for one of the church members three weeks ago at a hall owned by the Cheongdo hospital.

Shincheonji is often accused of being a cult and claims its founder Lee has donned the mantle of Jesus Christ and will take 144,000 people with him to heaven on the day of judgement. But with more church members than available places in heaven, they are said to have to compete for slots and pursue converts persistently and secretly.

President Moon Jae-in on Friday called for a "thorough investigation" of everyone who attended the funeral and Shincheonji services. The central government on Friday had declared Daegu and Cheongdo "special management zones", with Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun saying the region would be supported with medical personnel, beds and equipment. Shincheonji offered an



CHUNCHEON, South Korea: Medical workers wearing protective gear carry a patient infected with the COVID-19 coronavirus at a hospital yesterday. — AFP

apology, suspending its services and gatherings 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. But its leader Lee told his followers the outbreak had been "caused by the Devil" and compared it to the biblical testing of Job. Yonhap news agency reported. — AFP

No coronavirus cases in Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

Iran yesterday ordered the closure of schools and universities in two cities hit by the coronavirus outbreak that has killed five people in the Islamic republic - the most outside the Far East. The move came as Iranian authorities reported one more death among 10 new cases of the virus. Since it emerged in December, the new coronavirus has killed 2,362 people in China, the epicenter of the epidemic, and 16 elsewhere in the world.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Iran first surfaced on Wednesday, when authorities said it claimed the lives of two elderly people in Qom, a Shiite holy city south of the capital. They were the first confirmed deaths from the disease in the Middle East. "We have 10 new confirmed cases of COVID-19," Iran's health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told state television yesterday.

"One of the new cases has unfortunately passed away," he added, noting that eight of them had been hospitalized in Qom and two in Tehran, without specifying where the death occurred. The latest cases take to 28 the total number of confirmed infections in Iran. Based on official figures, nearly 18 percent of those infected with the new coronavirus in Iran have died, compared with little more than three percent in China.

Sheikh Basel stressed that the ministry is committed to the highest level of transparency with regards to the

recent discovery of infected cases in some neighboring countries. The ministry provides citizens and residents with all the information needed to avoid infection, he said. He pointed out that the ministry continues to apply all preventive measures to prevent the transmission of the virus to the country, the most important of which is recommending not to travel to areas where the disease has appeared, except for extreme necessity.

The ministry also takes all preventive measures adopted internationally with those coming from those areas, he noted. The minister also called on citizens and residents to follow official statements issued by the ministry. The health ministry has cautioned against travel to Qom. "Out of keenness on the safety of citizens and the residents in Kuwait, we will quarantine all arrivals from Qom until we verify that they are clear of the virus," it said in a statement.

Interior ministry assistant undersecretary for residency affairs Maj Gen Talal Maarafi announced receiving an official letter from the health ministry demanding preventing Iranians from entering Kuwait as a precautionary measure after the discovery of coronavirus cases there. "The health ministry is committed to following all instructions coming from MoH to fight the disease," Maarafi added, noting that MoI had received official letters banning the entry of nationals of Iran, Hong Kong and China. Maarafi said upon receiving applications from the companies they work for or family members in Kuwait, nationals of these countries who have valid residencies in Kuwait will be granted extra three-month absence permits or until further notice once this grace period is over.

Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation decided on Friday to suspend all flights to and from Iran upon recommendations from the health ministry.

In a press statement, the authority said all expats who visited Iran over the past two weeks will not be allowed to enter the country, even if they have valid visas. Kuwaiti citizens who visited Iran during the same period, will be put in quarantine at special health facilities, it noted. The authority also called on all citizens to postpone travel to Iran until further notice.

Kuwait Airways, the country's flag carrier, has suspended all flights to Iran based on advice of the health ministry and DGCA. Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) also suspended the movement of passengers to and from Iran via land ports. "The decision is a precautionary measure aiming to prevent possible spread of the illness to passengers," KPA said in a statement.

The Iranian Embassy in Kuwait yesterday issued a press release regarding the coronavirus cases in Iran and Kuwait's decision to stop all flights to Iran. The embassy statement stressed Kuwait took measures to prevent the arrival of the virus to Kuwait, including halting all flights between both countries.

"Since the Iranian health ministry detected the infections, specialized medical teams were deployed to Qom, where they built special prevention and containment centers," the embassy explained, noting that all preventive and precautionary measures have been taken to quarantine suspected cases and treat them, along with imposing strict measures on entering or leaving the country. The embassy added that the Iranian health ministry's media center continues to transparently announce the latest about the virus and the number of cases. It also urged everybody to ignore groundless social media rumors.

As a "preventive measure", Iranian authorities ordered the closure of schools, universities and other educational centers in Qom and the nearby city of

Arak from today, state television reported. The World Health Organization has expressed concern over the speed at which COVID-19 has spread in Iran, as well as it being exported from the Islamic republic to other countries including Lebanon. "The concern is... that we have seen an increase in cases, a very rapid increase in a matter of a few days," said Sylvie Briand, director of the WHO's global infectious hazard preparedness department. "We are just wondering about also the potential of more exported cases in the coming days," she added.

Iranians have been snapping up surgical face masks in a bid to avoid catching the virus. Online retailer Digikala - Iran's equivalent of Amazon - said on Friday that it had sold 75,000 masks within a 36-hour period. It said it was not claiming a commission on its mask sales, amid concerns that demand was causing prices to skyrocket on the black market. "Besides the high demand, we stand against the unusual price increase," Digikala tweeted. "We stand alongside our dear suppliers and by providing fresh supplies, we hope we can meet a part of the country's demand."

The health ministry said tests had been carried out on 785 suspected coronavirus cases since the outbreak began. "Most of the cases are either Qom residents or have a history of coming and going from Qom to other cities," its spokesman said. Iran has yet to confirm the origin of the outbreak, but one official speculated that it was brought in by Chinese workers. "The coronavirus epidemic has started in the country," state news agency IRNA quoted the health ministry's Minoou Mohraz as saying. "Since those infected in Qom had no contact with the Chinese ... the source is probably Chinese workers who work in Qom and have travelled to China," she added.

Sports

Depleted Brumbies stun Chiefs as Reds rout hapless Sunwolves

Springboks winger Mapimpi bags a double as Sharks bounce back from defeat last week

HAMILTON: An illness-weakened ACT Brumbies stunned Super Rugby leaders Waikato Chiefs yesterday, as the Queensland Reds routed the hapless Sunwolves and Coastal Sharks stormed past the Melbourne Rebels.

The Brumbies, missing several players after an outbreak of mumps in their camp during the week, blew away Warren Gatland's men 26-14 with a dominant first-half display in Hamilton. In Brisbane, the Reds bagged their first victory of the season against Japan's Sunwolves, running in 10 tries in a 64-5 hammering — their biggest ever win.

South Africa's Sharks, meanwhile, proved too hot to handle for the Rebels in Ballarat, coming out 36-24 on top. The Brumbies, Australian conference leaders, scored four tries to two, including a double for Pete Samu, to end a 13-match losing streak in New Zealand dating back to March 2014.

Brumbies skipper Allan Alaalotua praised his players for thwarting a late fightback from the home side. "We knew the Chiefs were going to come out hard in the second half but I'm really proud of the boys in how we held them out," he said.

The Chiefs entered the match on top of the Super Rugby ladder but a string of uncharacteristic turnovers and poor discipline contributed to their first defeat of the season. The Brumbies scored two tries in the opening 15 minutes, one when fullback Tom Banks shrugged off a tackle and the other when rugby league convert Solomone Kata powered past former All Black Aaron Cruden. Samu added a third, dashing from the back of a scrum to make it 19-0 at half-time, then scored another two minutes after the re-start to make it 26-0.

Cruden finally got the Chiefs on the board in the 48th minute after their first meaningful attack of the match. They gained momentum with a second to

Lienert-Brown while Brumbies prop James Slipper was sin-binned, but the deficit was too much.

'GOOD ARM-WRESTLE'

The free-flowing Reds finally snared a win after tough losses on the road to the Golden Lions, Jaguares and Brumbies. It was impressive stuff from Brad Thorn's men, who dominated all aspects of a lopsided game.

They scored six tries in a stunning first half performance and the rout continued in the second with another four. They were shared between nine players, with Tate McDermott the only one to get a brace.

The Sunwolves' solitary try in the second half, after the Reds made a raft of substitutions, came from Siosaia Fifita. "It was brilliant, we've been dreaming about that for weeks. To put it into action was awesome," said Reds captain Liam Wright. "We didn't change many of our processes (from previous losses), that's just our system. The win will do us a lot of good."

Earlier in Ballarat, Springboks winger Makazole Mapimpi bagged a double as the Sharks bounced back from defeat last week. The Durban-based team scored an early try and they never relinquished the lead.

"There was a lot of running, good skills showcased from both teams," said Sharks skipper Andre Esterhuizen, with the Rebels unable to build on their opening win of the season last week against the NSW Waratahs.

Mapimpi dotted down after five minutes, but the Rebels bounced back when debutant Andrew Deegan's cleverly flicked pass sent Wallabies winger Marika Korobete through for a converted try.

Esterhuizen restored the lead, using brute force to shrug off three tackles on his way to the line. The Sharks delivered a dagger blow near half-time when



BRISBANE: Reds' Bryce Hegarty (centre R) is tackled by Sunwolves' Michael Stolberg during the Super Rugby match between Australia's Queensland Reds and Japan's Sunwolves in Brisbane yesterday. —AFP

Madosh Tambwe finished a sweeping counter-attack to give them a 22-10 lead at the break. Kerron van Vuuren and Madosh Tambwe were both sin-binned early in the second stanza and the Rebels capitalised

with a try to Isi Naisaran.

But Mapimpi got his second after a 19-phase attack, then Curwin Bosch finished off a 95-metre move to ensure victory. —AFP

Wilder, Fury bulk up for showdown

LAS VEGAS: American boxer Deontay Wilder will be at a career high weight, but will still be 42 pounds lighter than Tyson Fury for their much-anticipated heavyweight rematch at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas.

Wilder weighed in at 231 pounds (105 kg) and Fury tipped the scales at 273 pounds on Friday as both boxers weighed in much heavier than they did for their first fight 14 months ago. Wilder is 18 pounds heavier and Fury added 15 pounds to his frame.

Organizers cancelled Friday's face-to-face photo op at the weigh-in after the fighters exchanged shoves during the final news conference on Wednesday. But the pair did jaw at each other from a distance on the podium.

"That's my belt. That's mine," Fury yelled at Wilder, who holds the WBC heavyweight title. The two will square off in one of the biggest heavyweight fights recent memory Saturday at the MGM's Grand Garden Arena.

Tickets for Saturday's bout have been changing hands for up to \$11,000, while promoters predict the event could generate more than 2 million pay-per-view sales in the United States alone. At the centre of the action are two of heavyweight boxing's most charismatic and skilful protagonists, the hard-hitting "Bronze Bomber" Wilder and Fury, the eccentric, self-styled "Gypsy King" from northern England.

After slow start, Bruins top Flames

BOSTON: Patrice Bergeron scored twice and Brad Marchand got the game-winner as the Boston Bruins rallied to beat the Calgary Flames 4-3 Friday for their fifth consecutive victory. Calgary jumped to a 3-1 lead through the first 3:23, but the Bruins became just the seventh team in NHL history (regular season and postseason) to win despite allowing three goals in the first four minutes of a game. The Flames had been the most recent team to accomplish the feat, when they beat the visiting San Jose Sharks 4-3 in a first-round playoff game on April 13, 2008. Brad Marchand had a goal and an assist for the Bruins, who also got a goal from Charlie Coyle and two assists from David Pastrnak. Jaroslav Halak made 18 saves for the win. Mikael Backlund scored twice for the Flames, and Johnny Gaudreau added a goal. Calgary goalie Cam Talbot stopped 19 shots.

WILD 5, OILERS 3

Defenseman Jared Spurgeon scored his first career hat trick as Minnesota won at Edmonton. Kevin Fiala and Carson Soucy also scored for the Wild, who improved to 2-1-0 under interim coach Dean Evason and completed a season sweep of the Oilers. Goaltender Alex Stalock made 23 saves. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins scored twice and Leon Draisaitl also tallied for Edmonton, which lost both games on its homestand. Goalie Mikko Koskinen stopped 34 of 38 shots.

RANGERS 5, HURRICANES 2

Igor Shesterkin stopped 27 shots to win his sixth consecutive decision, and New York defeated Carolina in Raleigh, N.C. The Rangers improved to 7-0-0 in their last seven road games. Mika Zibanejad posted an unassisted goal and two assists, and Jesper Fast, Brady Skjei, Artemi Panarin and Ryan Strome also scored as the Rangers won for the sixth time in their past seven games. Brock McGinn and Sebastian Aho scored Carolina's goals. Jacob Slavin provided assists on both scores. Petr Mrazek made 31 saves.

BLUES 5, STARS 1

Colton Parayko had a goal and two assists as St. Louis earned its third victory in four days by defeating host Dallas. Jaden Schwartz and Jordan Kyrou had a goal and assist for the Blues, who got just their second road victory in its last 11 tries. The Blues also got goals from Alexander Steen and David Perron, two assists each from Ryan O'Reilly and Robert Thomas, and 18 saves from Jake Allen. Jamie Oleksiak scored for the Stars, who took just their second regulation loss in their last 11 games. Goaltender Ben Bishop allowed four goals in 13 shots before Anton Khudobin replaced him during the second period.

AVALANCHE 1, DUCKS 0

J.T. Compher broke through in a tight defensive battle to score a second-period goal, and Colorado extended its road winning streak to five games by beating Anaheim. Pavel Francouz made 26 saves while



LAS VEGAS: US boxer Deontay Wilder (L) and British boxer Tyson Fury (R) face off during their official weigh-in at the MGM Grand Las Vegas in Las Vegas, Nevada. The boxers will fight for the World Boxing Council (WBC) Heavyweight Championship Title at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. —AFP

Fury recovered from two juddering knockdowns to claim a draw, miraculously climbing off the canvas in the 12th round to hang on for a share of the spoils. Once the final bell rang, the judges ruled it a controversial split draw: 114-112 for Fury, 115-111 Wilder and 113-113.

Wilder will be making the 11th defence of his title in an attempt to break a tie with Muhammad Ali for consecutive heavyweight defences. He

demolished Dominic Breazeale in one round last May, and then scored a spectacular one-punch seventh-round knockout of Cuba's Luis Ortiz in November.

Fury has promised to take a more aggressive approach this time around. But cuts are a worry after he required more than 40 stitches to patch up a horrific gash over his right eye in an unimpressive win over Otto Wallin in his last fight in September. —AFP

earning his first career shutout as Colorado posted its second consecutive victory following a three-game losing streak. Francouz's effort came on the same day he agreed to a two-year contract extension with the Avalanche, reportedly for \$2 million per season. Goalie John Gibson stopped 28 shots for Anaheim, which lost its third consecutive game and fell for the fourth time in the past five contests. The Ducks are 0-2-0 to open a six-game homestand.

ISLANDERS 4, RED WINGS 1

Jordan Eberle scored three goals for New York, which snapped a four-game losing streak by beating Detroit in Uniondale, NY. The Islanders, who were outscored 11-2 over a four-game Western Conference road trip that ended Wednesday, moved into sole possession of the Eastern Conference's first wild card, one point ahead of the idle Columbus Blue Jackets. Leo Komarov scored an empty-netter in the final seconds for the Islanders. Goalie Semyon Varlamov carried a shutout deep into the third period and made 21 saves.

BLACKHAWKS 2, PREDATORS 1 (OT)

Alex DeBrincat scored two goals, including the game-winner with 57.8 seconds remaining in overtime, to lift Chicago over visiting Nashville. DeBrincat sealed the victory with a breakaway goal that came off a Predators turnover on the opposite end of the ice. Chicago pulled even at 8-8 in overtime games this season and won for only the second time in the past nine games. Mattias Ekholm scored for the Predators, who have lost back-to-back games. —Reuters

Farah says he has 'suffered' from Salazar links

LONDON: Mo Farah says he has suffered "financially and emotionally" from his association with disgraced coach Alberto Salazar, who is banned from athletics for four years over doping violations.

The American coach, who is appealing against his sanction at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, led the Nike Oregon Project, which included British distance runner Farah among its stable of athletes between 2011 and 2017.

It was shut down after Salazar's ban, imposed in October by the US Anti-Doping Agency. Four-time Olympic champion Farah, said in January he would have ended the relationship with Salazar much sooner had he known the coach was facing a ban.

But, speaking to The Times, Farah, who will bid for a third successive 10,000-metres Olympic title in Tokyo this year, has suggested some sponsors have turned their back on him due to headlines highlighting his Salazar links.

He said: "If I wasn't Mo Farah and I saw Mo Farah and I'm seeing these headlines, I'd question... yeah, I'd ask the same questions. 'I don't want to go into any more detail but there's been a lot of stuff, financially and emotionally, where I have suffered a lot.'"

Farah added that he was left stunned by Salazar's ban and that his decision to quit the Oregon Project in 2017 was not sparked by a tip-off.

"I didn't have a clue," said Farah adding that when news of the ban emerged, "for me it was like, wow, four years. I was thinking, 'Oh my God. I know I never did anything. I know he was my coach. But to put up with this year after year, it's not you, it's the coach, but it's you it is aimed at, is quite frustrating."

"If I had realised there was going to be a problem, I would have been out (sooner). But I was faced with someone who had helped me in my career, to get me where I was, and you have the right to talk to him and look him in the eye."

Prior to the sanction, Farah said the coach did his best to reassure him. "He said they are just allegations made by people with grudges and 'I promise you this will be proven,'" Farah said. "At that point you don't want to think anything else, and you just want to carry on."

"He also hadn't been found guilty. And it wasn't just about me. As a single man I could have just said 'move'. But I had four kids, three at school, my wife's there, we'd bought a house. I'm not just going to say, 'There's been some allegations, we're going.'" —AFP

Froome the focus in Dubai desert

DUBAI: All eyes will be on Chris Froome today as the four-time Tour de France champion returns to the peloton in the UAE Tour for the first time since an accident almost ended his career. The 35-year-old Team Ineos star suffered multiple fractures and spent months in rehabilitation after a gust of wind hurled him into a wall at 50 kilometres an hour during a recon at the Criterium du Dauphine in June last year.

That has delayed by 12 months his assault on a record-equalling fifth Tour de France crown, a journey that begins with a tough week in the Dubai desert. "The year's gone incredibly well so far but having said that I do still need to manage expectations," he told his Team Ineos website on Friday.

"I'm still quite a way off where I was at the Dauphine before the crash. It's going to take me a while to get back to that shape." "It will be a huge relief just to be back in the peloton again," he said. "It feels like I've been given a second chance to come back to pro racing after a crash like that. I'm definitely not taking that for granted."

Froome joins a high-class field featuring last year's runner-up Alexandro Valverde (Movistar), Adam Yates (Mitchelton-Scott), and an Ineos squad with Rohan Dennis and in-form Eddie Dunbar. —AFP

25 Wilder, Fury bulk up for showdown



26 Hasaranga stars as Sri Lanka clinch ODI thriller



27 Bayern past bottom side Paderborn



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Argentinian midfielder Giovani Lo Celso (L) vies with Chelsea's Croatian midfielder Mateo Kovacic during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur at Stamford Bridge in London yesterday. — AFP

Chelsea see off rivals Tottenham

LONDON: Chelsea strengthened their hold on a Premier League top-four place yesterday by beating London rivals Tottenham 2-1 but Sheffield United missed the chance to boost their case for Champions League football next season.

Liverpool's staggering 22-point lead over second-placed Manchester City means the title race is effectively over but the sides below them are scrambling to qualify for Europe's top club competition.

Frank Lampard's fourth-placed Chelsea went into their match against Jose Mourinho's Spurs at Stamford Bridge without a win in their past four Premier League matches and just one point clear of Spurs.

Fringe players Olivier Giroud and Marcos Alonso were recalled by Lampard. Both rewarded their manager's confidence by scoring in the home win. The result means Lampard has completed a league double against his former manager this season after their 2-0 victory

at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in December.

But the match was overshadowed by a VAR controversy, with officials ruling that Tottenham midfielder Giovani Lo Celso did not deserve to be sent off for a "leg breaker" stamp on Cesar Azpilicueta.

World Cup winner Giroud put Chelsea ahead in the 15th minute when he reacted quickest to finish beyond Hugo Lloris after Ross Barkley had struck a post. Chelsea doubled their advantage three minutes into the second half, Alonso drilling in a first-time shot after being set up by Barkley.

Alonso's free-kick hit the bar before Antonio Rudiger deflected Erik Lamela's shot into his own net in the 89th minute. Lampard criticised VAR after Lo Celso was allowed to stay on the pitch.

"I hate to call for red cards but that is a leg breaker," he said. "Everybody knew they made a mistake. I was just waiting for the red card to be shown." Adding to

Lampard's frustration, television broadcaster BT Sport reported that VAR officials had told them Lo Celso should have been sent off.

Tottenham boss Mourinho unsurprisingly side-stepped questions about the tackle, preferring to talk about previous VAR decisions that he felt went against his team. "I hope the noise is exactly the same as when VAR killed us," he said. "There should have been a red card for Watford and Liverpool against us. Why didn't they say they made a mistake then?"

As it stands, a fifth-placed finish would guarantee Champions League football next season because Manchester City, in second, have been banned from Europe's elite competition for two years.

City hope to have their appeal against the ban heard by the Court of Arbitration for Sport before the start of next season. Sheffield United took the lead at home to struggling Brighton through Enda Stevens but Neal

Maupay equalised on the half-hour.

The result leaves Sheffield United in sixth place on 40 points, level with Tottenham. Burnley won for the fourth time in five Premier League matches to lift themselves to eighth in the table. Shane Long put Southampton ahead early against relegation-threatened Aston Villa and Stuart Armstrong doubled their lead deep into stoppage time.

Ralph Hasenhuttl's men are 10 points clear of the drop zone. Crystal Palace, a point behind, beat Newcastle 1-0 to ease their own worries. Pep Guardiola's Manchester City take on third-placed Leicester at the King Power Stadium in the evening kick-off. Manchester United, Wolves, Arsenal and Everton, who all harbour ambitions of qualifying for next season's Champions League, are all in action today. Runaway league leaders Liverpool host struggling West Ham tomorrow. —AFP

Dortmund move second, Haaland hits 40th goal of season

BERLIN: Erling Braut Haaland scored his 40th goal of the season as the teenager continued his phenomenal scoring streak in Borussia Dortmund's 2-0 win at Werder Bremen yesterday. The 19-year-old flicked home a second-half cross to score his 12th goal in eight games for Dortmund as Lucien Favre's side moved second in the Bundesliga, four points behind leaders Bayern Munich.

Haaland, who scored twice in Tuesday's Champions League last 16, first-leg win over Paris Saint-Germain, also netted 28 goals for Salzburg before joining Dortmund for 20 million euros (\$22 million) in December.

Dortmund ground out victory after showing some early nerves in Bremen where they crashed to a 3-2 German Cup defeat earlier this month. Centre-back Dan-Axel Zagadou gave the visitors the lead by volleying home a Jadon Sancho corner on 52 minutes.

Haaland doubled the advantage by drilling Achraf Hakimi's square ball into the corner on 66 minutes to score his ninth Bundesliga goal. After five straight league defeats, Bremen remain 17th and five points

from safety.

They suffered another blow in the relegation battle as Fortuna Duesseldorf, who are a place above them, enjoyed a 2-0 win at Freiburg. Dortmund climbed above RB Leipzig on goal difference.

Julian Nagelsmann's Leipzig can move back to within one point of Bayern, who beat bottom side Paderborn 3-2 on Friday, when they visit Schalke later. Fourth-placed Borussia Muenchengladbach slipped six points behind Bayern, albeit with a game in hand, as Lucas Ribeiro's injury-time strike snatched Hoffenheim a 1-1 draw at Borussia Park.

Matthias Ginter had powered in an early opener for Gladbach, but the hosts were made to pay after Alassane Plea saw a 75th-minute penalty saved by Hoffenheim goalkeeper Oliver Baumann.

Despite splashing out 77 million euros (\$83 million) on transfers in January, Hertha Berlin's poor form continued in a 5-0 thrashing at home to Cologne. Hertha were brought crashing back down to earth after Alexander Nouri won his first game in charge following Jurgen Klinsmann's shock resignation last weekend at Paderborn.

The home side defended woefully and were 2-0 down inside 22 minutes as Jhon Cordoba scored an early double. The Colombian striker exploited a four-on-two situation for his first goal and easily escaped his marker to head in the second.

Midfielder Florian Kanz added two goals of his own before Mark Uth curled home a free-kick 20 minutes from time as Hertha capitulated. — AFP



BREMEN: Dortmund's Norwegian forward Erling Braut Haaland celebrates after scoring during the German first division Bundesliga football match Werder Bremen vs BVB Borussia Dortmund, in Bremen, northern Germany yesterday. — AFP