

**5** Wild rabbits thriving thanks to Kuwait's anti-poaching laws



**7** Grave of slain Iraq commander becomes new anti-US magnet



**24** Quake in Iran kills nine in neighboring Turkey



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# Iran's neighbors impose travel bans as coronavirus toll rises

Kuwait suspends entry of Iranian ships • Kuwaiti returnees sent to home quarantine



DAEGU, South Korea: Market workers wearing protective gear spray disinfectant at a market in this southeastern city yesterday as a preventive measure after the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. — AFP (See Page 6)

**KUWAIT/TEHRAN:** Iran's confirmed death toll from the new coronavirus rose to eight yesterday, the highest outside China, sending neighboring countries scrambling to contain the outbreak. Kuwait Port Authority announced a ban on the entry of all ships from Iran, while Turkey said it would "temporarily" shut its border with the country. Pakistan also said it was closing its frontier with the Islamic republic and Afghanistan banned all ground and air travel between the two nations.

The moves come amid growing regional concerns about the spread of the virus. Lebanon on Friday confirmed its first case - a 45-year-old Lebanese woman who had travelled from Qom in Iran - and Israel yesterday quarantined at home nearly 200 school pupils who came into contact with South Korean tourists who contracted the virus. Well-informed sources said all Kuwaitis returning from Iran have been sent home after filling questionnaires and health cards and after all tests and specimens taken proved they are free of any coronavirus infections. The sources added that returnees will be subjected to home quarantine during the virus incubation period under health ministry supervision.

"Most cases did not have to be quarantined in the first place and they only filled in the needed forms, gave specimens and were subjected to tests before they were allowed to be quarantined at their homes," the sources explained. Meanwhile, MoH's official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad announced the arrival of six more flights carrying citizens returning from Iran, noting that all

passengers did not show any symptoms nor were there any suspected cases.

Iran yesterday reported three more novel coronavirus deaths among 15 new cases in the past 24 hours, taking its total number of fatalities to eight and infections to 43. Four new COVID-19 cases surfaced in Tehran, seven in the holy city of Qom, two in Gilan and one each in Markazi and Tonekabon, health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said. Authorities have ordered the closure of schools, universities and other educational centers in 14 provinces across the country from yesterday as a "preventive measure".

Art events, concerts and film shows have been banned for a week. "We are on the frontlines, we need help," the head of Qom's medical sciences university, Mohammadreza Ghadir, said on state television. "To prevent the spread of the novel #coronavirus and protect the public, Afghanistan suspends all passenger movement (air and ground) to and from Iran," the office of the National Security Council of Afghanistan said in a statement posted on Twitter.

A provincial official in Pakistan and the nation's Frontier Corps also confirmed the country had sealed the land border with Iran. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan share long, porous borders with Iran that are often used by smugglers and human traffickers, while millions of Afghan refugees live in the Islamic republic - raising fears that the virus could easily spread over the border.

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## Unified contract for domestic help goes into force

**KUWAIT:** The Public Authority for Manpower's domestic help department has started distribution of the new unified contract for recruiting domestic helpers. Head of domestic help offices Khalid Al-Dakhnan said the new contract is now valid, and offices can start recruiting according to its rules and conditions. He said there were two contracts previously - one for the offices and another for the Philippine Embassy.

Sources at the manpower authority said the new contract was the result of several studies by the authority, which approved it recently. The sources said the contract commits the employer to provide suitable residence equipped with appropriate living means for helpers, feed them, provide them with clothes, treat and nurse them, register them for health insurance and pay them at the end of every month, provided the salary is not less than what is mentioned in the contract, in exchange of a receipt signed by the worker.

Sources added that among the general rules in the new form is not to make the helper work for more than 12 hours a day, with five hours of work followed by one hour of rest, eight hours of nightly rest, a weekly day off and paid annual leave. The contract gives the worker the right to an indemnity equal to one month's salary per year, while the employer should not keep any documents or IDs that belong to the helper. The helper's residency cannot be transferred during the initial period, while committing those involved in a dispute to settle it at the domestic help department at the manpower authority. Commitment to the contract should be by the employer and their family members too.

Meanwhile, deputy director of the manpower authority Abdullah Al-Motoutah said labor offices in all governorates continue accepting renewal applications for expats' work permits in the private sector regardless of the worker's age. Motoutah said as long as the worker is able to do the job, there will be no restriction on renewing their residency even if they are over 70, adding that the manpower authority has not set a certain age for not renewing expats' work permits. — Al-Jarida

## Israel team in UAE; Pope rebuffs deal

**DUBAI:** An Israeli cycling team raced through Dubai yesterday, taking part in the UAE Tour for the first time in the latest overture between the two countries, which have no diplomatic relations. Gulf Arab nations have made a number of recent moves hinting at warmer ties with the Jewish state, with Israeli athletes and officials increasingly allowed to visit. "Israel Start-Up Nation will make history

on Sunday by competing in the UAE Tour, becoming the first Israeli team to participate in the Middle East's top cycling race," the team said in a statement.

"The participation in this race by our Israeli team in a Middle Eastern nation is emblematic of how cycling can be a force for diplomatic openness and progress," its co-owner Sylvan Adams said. Like all Arab countries, except for Jordan and Egypt, the United Arab Emirates has no official relations with Israel. But Israel Start-Up Nation's members, with their country's name emblazoned on their blue and white shirts, posed on stage before the week-long race kicked off in Dubai.

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SAN ANTONIO, Texas: Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and his wife Jane wave as they exit the stage after winning the Nevada caucuses during a campaign rally at Cowboys Dancehall on Saturday. — AFP

## Sanders sweeps Nevada; Biden distant second

**LAS VEGAS:** Bernie Sanders' landslide victory in Nevada's Democratic nominating contest has scattered his moderate challengers and injected his White House campaign with a fresh burst of momentum as he drives into the next crucial battlegrounds. With his strong

result Saturday, the Vermont senator demonstrated an ability to broaden a coalition beyond the narrow limits of leftist voters, undercutting the argument from several moderates that he would not be able to bridge the divide between progressives and centrists.

"He showed last night that he can energize our core base," Howard Dean, a former presidential aspirant himself and former head of the Democratic National Committee, told CNN. By early yesterday, Sanders was comfortably ahead in Nevada with 60 percent of precincts reporting.

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DUBAI: Israel Start-Up Nation team poses before the start of the first stage of the UAE Tour from the Pointe to Silicon Oasis yesterday. — AFP

## Walls, mud packs, monkey removal for Trump in India



PURI, India: Artist Sudarsan Pattnaik is seen near his sand sculpture of US President Donald Trump and his wife Melania on Puri beach in India's eastern state of Odisha on Saturday. — AFP

**AHMEDABAD:** US President Donald Trump makes his first official visit to India today and work has been going on around the clock to spruce things up - to the annoyance of some locals as well as monkeys. The photo opportunity highlights of the 36-hour trip include a rally of 100,000 people at the world's largest cricket stadium and watching the sunset with First Lady

Melania at the Taj Mahal. A long wall has been hastily built, along the route in Ahmedabad in western India to the new Sardar Patel Stadium in order, locals believe, to hide a slum, although officials deny it.

Sardar Sarania, a resident of the slum, is disgusted at what he sees as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

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## Local

# Amir receives senior Kuwaiti officials at Bayan Palace

## Sheikh Sabah meets outgoing French ambassador to Kuwait



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chief Justice Yousef Al-Mutawaa.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of Kuwait's International Islamic Charitable Organization and Amiri Diwan Advisor Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Furthermore, His Highness received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. In addition, he hosted Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court, Justice Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir received French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy, on the occasion of ending her tenure. The meeting was attend-

ed by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah. Also yesterday, His Highness the Amir received Chairman of Kuwait's International Islamic Charitable Organization and Amiri Diwan Advisor Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq. Maatouq handed His Highness a copy of the report of the initiative to feed a billion hungry people according to the eighth annual conference of 'Effective partnership and exchange of information for better humanitarian action.' Maatouq also delivered a copy of the report to His Highness the Prime Minister during a separate meeting at Bayan Palace.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Justice

Yousef Al-Mutawaa, as well as Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

In other news, His Highness the Amir congratulated Japanese Emperor Naruhito on the occasion of his birthday. His Highness the Amir wished the Emperor utmost of health and more prosperity and development to the friendly people and country. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables, while National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem sent two cables of congratula-

tions to the Japanese House of Representatives Speaker Tadamori Oshima and the head of Japanese Councilors House Akiko Santo.

Separately, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of condolences to President of Indonesia Joko Widodo, over victims of flash flood that hit a high school group of students who were hiking along a river on Indonesia's main island of Java. In the cable, His Highness wished mercy for the deceased and a swift recovery for the injured. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables, while Speaker Ghanem addressed a cable of condolences to his Indonesia counterpart Puan Maharani. —KUNA

## Initiative against hunger successful, says IICO Chairman

KUWAIT: Amiri Diwan Advisor and Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq said that the initiative of providing one billion meals to the poor worldwide achieved great success. In its endeavor of directing efforts of local, regional and global humanitarian organizations to combat hunger in 2019, the initiative's programs, projects and partnerships came in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals to eradicate world hunger by 2030.

Maatouq said in a press conference yesterday that participating organizations have multiplied this goal threefold by distributing nearly three billion meals. He indicated that the number of implemented projects reached 331,961, with a completion rate exceeding 100 percent. Over 132 million beneficiaries of these projects benefited from the pledges that initially aimed at nearly 99.5 million, with a completion rate of 133 percent, Maatouq explained. Kuwait-based IICO is one of the largest humanitarian organizations in the Muslim world, operating as an independent, multi-faceted charity that provides its humanitarian services to those in need in the world without discrimination or intolerance away from interference in politics or ethnic conflicts. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The Ambassador of Japan to Kuwait Masato Takaoka hosted a reception at the Japanese embassy recently to celebrate the birthday of Japan's Emperor Naruhito. Senior officials, diplomats and media persons attended the event. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## Mexico greets Kuwait on National days

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Mexico to Kuwait released the following statement yesterday, congratulating Kuwait on its national holidays: "Ambassador of Mexico Miguel Angel Isidro has the honor to extend his sincere felicitations and best wishes to His Highness Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness Prime Minister, the Government and the people of the State of Kuwait, on the auspicious occasion of the National Day and Liberation Day of the State of Kuwait, wishing the friendly people of Kuwait to be blessed with peace, prosperity and happiness under the wise leadership of His Highness Amir of the State of Kuwait and His Highness Crown Prince.

"Ambassador Isidro is most grateful for and proud of the achievements that the two nations have made as true partners ever since the establishment of their diplomatic ties. The close and enduring friendship has made it possible for the two nations to cherish and celebrate each other's happy occasions with utmost respect and sincerity. The government and the people of Mexico, including Ambassador Isidro, are deeply thankful for the beautiful and peaceful relations that their two nations were able to build, maintain and grow."



Miguel Angel Isidro

## AUB attracts national talents at PAM's career fair

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to attract and support the most qualified national ambitious youth, Ahli United Bank (AUB) participated in the 'Because You Deserve 3' event organized by the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) at its center in Al-Raqqi with the presence of Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel.

This participation comes in line with the bank's commitments to empower Kuwaiti youth and encourage talented young people to join AUB. The Bank also executes its role and social responsibility towards members of the Kuwaiti community by providing jobs, training and development opportunities.

On this occasion, Naqeeb Amin, HR General Manager at AUB, said in a press release: "AUB is keen to participate in the event 'Because You Deserve 3' as part of the Bank's continuous efforts to interact with Kuwaiti fresh graduates and attract qualified skilled nationals to join the Bank's different departments, divisions and branches within its endeavors to open the banking field for the highly qualified Kuwaiti youth."

Amin added: "AUB is proud to be present in the various recruitment events as good opportunities to identify more qualified nationals and attract them to



KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel visits AUB's booth.

join the Bank. This enriches the work environment and helps provide the opportunity to Kuwaiti skilled

employees to assume the responsibility of development, progress and prosperity."

Local

# Kuwaiti union demands measures against importing fish from virus-hit countries

## Mass absence of students at public schools yesterday

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** Chairman of Kuwait Fishermen Union Thaher Al-Suwayyan once again called for supporting local products and fish catches through resolving the problems fishermen are facing, so that local fish can provide food reserves in case foodstuff imports are stopped for any reason. Suwayyan also hailed the decisions made by the civil aviation and the ports authorities banning fishing boats from neighboring countries because of coronavirus cases in Iran. Suwayyan called for stricter measures and scrutinizing health and origin certificates of all imported fish in order to prevent importing them from infected countries via third countries.



### Arrest warrant issued for MP's son

Kuwait Ports Authority had announced yesterday suspending ships coming from Iran in Shuaiba, Doha and Shuwaikh ports, due to the spread of Coronavirus in the neighboring country. This is a precaution measure taken to prevent the virus from entering Kuwait, and is part of the country's plan to fight the virus, the authority's Director General Sheikh Youssef Abdullah Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah said in a press statement.

#### Mass absence

Schools featured an increased level of mass absence of students in many public schools, where some schools had zero attendance, something that an education source described as a regular phenomenon before the national celebrations. The source added that school administrations will impose absence regulations on all students absent without due excuse. In another educa-

tional concern, the Ministry of Education (MoE) suspended interviewing heads of departments being promoted to supervisors until further notice pending CSC's decision on approving the technical supervision structure. In this regard, educational sources said Education Minister Saud Al-Harbi addressed the Civil Service Commission (CSC), urging the approval of the supervision organizational structure and job descriptions, which authorizes supervisors to visit schools, evaluate the performance of department heads and report back.

#### Amiri pardon

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced 1,390 central prison inmates will benefit from the Amiri pardon annually given on the occasion of the national anniversaries, including 839 who will have their time cut and 551 who will be exempted from fines and bails. The ministry also said 151 of the pardoned inmates will be released tomorrow morning, gradually followed by the rest until the end of 2020. The ministry explained that the pardoned inmates include 13 expats suffering from dangerous infectious diseases and two others who had spent the longest time at the central prison - 29 years.

In addition, MoI explained that citizens and bedoons who had their times cut short will be allowed to travel until their time is over, but warned they will be returned to prison and have their amnesty cancelled if they commit the same crimes again. Finally, MoI pointed out that the first group of released expat inmates will leave for their home countries at noon tomorrow.



**KUWAIT:** This file photo shows a general view inside the fish market in Sharq. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

#### Arrest warrant

The public prosecutor yesterday ordered the arrest of a lawmaker's son for insulting a policeman, driving without having a license and escaping arrest. The same order also included detaining two of the lawmaker's secretaries for insulting a policeman, helping to release his detained juvenile son from a police patrol by force and helping him escape.

#### Fight at popular salon

A female Lebanese hairdresser working at a popular salon in Salmiya fought with a Syrian coworker and threw hot tea at her, causing her first degree burns. Security sources said both women were arrested pending further investigations.

## Kuwait, Iran discuss ties, regional issues



**KUWAIT:** Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Irani. — KUNA

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah yesterday held a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Irani, discussing bilateral relations. The two sides also pondered conditions on the regional and international arenas. Ambassador Ayham Abdulatif Al-Omar, the assistant foreign minister for the deputy minister bureau affairs, attended the meeting. —KUNA

## Egyptian President congratulates Kuwait on National days



**CAIRO:** Kuwaiti Ambassador to Egypt Mohammad Al-Thuwaikh meets with the Egyptian Presidential Secretary Counselor Ahmad Al-Ansari. — KUNA

**CAIRO:** Egyptian President Abdulfattah Al-Sisi congratulated Kuwait, His Highness the Amir, government and people on the 59th National Day and the 29th Liberation Day anniversaries. The remarks were made during a reception that the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt Mohammad Al-Thuwaikh held for the Egyptian Presidential Secretary Counselor Ahmad Al-Ansari, as a representative of President Sisi, who visited the embassy to convey Sisi's congratulations on Kuwait's National holidays.

"Through our presence in Cairo, we have become accustomed to a brotherly gesture by President Sisi, where he offered his congratulations and blessings to Kuwait leadership, government and people on this occasion," Ambassador Thuwaikh said. The

ambassador added that Ansari's visit indicates how great the sentiments and appreciation by the Egyptian leader, the Egyptian government, and the Egyptian people are towards their brothers in Kuwait, "and this is not usually strange to them."

Thuwaikh conveyed this "dear occasion" with the warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The ambassador noted that during the next few days, the joint high committee between the two countries will hold the meetings of its 13th session, during which several agreements and memoranda of understanding will be signed. — KUNA

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## Local

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Kuwait City landmarks seen from the Arabian Gulf's beach. — Photo by Babu Neelandan (KUNA)

# Ooredoo Kuwait successfully concludes 'Made in Qatar 2020' sponsorship

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KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait Chief Executive Officer Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulla Al Thani is honored.

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Kuwait, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait successfully concluded its sponsorship of 'Made in Qatar 2020' exhibition as the telecom sponsor. The exhibition was held in Kuwait from February 19 until February 22 at the Kuwait International Fairground with the participation of over 220 companies and factories from Qatar with the attendance of Ooredoo Kuwait Chief Executive Officer Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulla Al Thani and the company's top management.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Al Thani said that the exhibition demonstrates the close brotherly relationships between Qatar and Kuwait and we are pleased to participate in one of the largest events in the Gulf region. "This platform brought together innovations and high technologies of Qatari companies and factories under one umbrella in the state of Kuwait," said Al Thani.

Al Thani pointed out that the exhibition offered a good opportunity for the Kuwaiti community and young businessmen to meet with Qatari manufacturers, businessmen and investors to learn more about Qatar's various industries. "The exhibition provided an optimal platform for both parties to review establishing new alliances and partnerships that help enhance Qatari industries, particularly

those that depend on modern technologies," he added.

Stressing the company's role in social responsibility, Sheikh Mohamed said that Ooredoo's participation in the exhibition "emphasized our social responsibility strategy that is based on many values including communicating with all segments of the society, caring for them and enriching their digital lives, as well as manage all the challenges that might hinder the progress of our societies."

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



Officials tour the exhibition.

# Wild rabbits thrive in Kuwait's desert thanks to anti-poaching laws



KUWAIT: A wild rabbit spotted at a location in Kuwait's desert. — KUNA

KUWAIT: The wild rabbits' presence largely multiplied in Al-Ritqa area along the border region between Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, especially after enforcing environmental laws that criminalize poaching. Head of the Kuwaiti Environmental Lens team Rashed Al-Hajji said yesterday that in the early 1970s, Subbiya area was full of rabbits, porcupines and honey badgers, then poaching and overgrazing spread in most of Kuwait's desert and without regulation, which led to extinction of the furry creatures. Currently there are rabbits in Kuwait thanks to the Ministry of Interior, as they took care of this region and prevented hunters from tampering with the land, causing the number of rabbits to rise annually, he explained. In nature, they are constantly

tense, with tightening nerves and muscles ready to speed off as soon as their long ears and big eyes pickup on the sound of any moving object. As a form of camouflage, color of the rabbits' fur is similar to the one of the earthy environment, which helps get rid of enemies through sharp eyesight and a strong sense of smell that allows them to determine the source of danger and escape at a speed of 30 kmph. The female rabbit gives birth to 1-3 babies throughout the year and can reproduce after four months, reaching the peak of fertility in winter, where pregnancy period lasts 42 days, he said. Hajji added that few live over a year given wild conditions due to the lack of adequate protection from enemies in nature. — KUNA

## Kuwait charities dispatch 203 aid trucks to Syria, Yemen

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Al-Salam Society for Humanitarian and Charitable action dispatched yesterday, in cooperation with the International Islamic Charity Organization, 203 trucks loaded with relief aid to Syria and Yemen. The move is part of the Kuwaiti charities' 2020 relief campaign, dubbed 'let us join hands and break the number.' Amiri Diwan Advisor and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq praised all in a press statement efforts exerted to make this campaign a success, including the gathering and dispatching of the 203 trucks in a few days for refugees in Syria and Yemen. Maatouq, who is also the president of the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO), expressed appreciation and thanks for Al-Salam Society for their humanitarian and charitable work, and to all those who donated to this campaign. Meanwhile, the President of the Board of Directors of Al-Salam Society Jassem Al-Aoun said in a statement that 'Al-Salam' is keen to bring joy to refugees in Syria or in Yemen. He noted the humanitarian initiative comes in implementation of His Highness the Amir's directives and guidelines. In the meantime, the general manager of the society, Dr Nabil Al-Aoun said in a similar statement that "108 trucks were allocated for our brothers in Syria and 95 trucks for our brothers in Yemen." Aoun noted that this campaign is part of the pledges of the State of Kuwait and Al-Salam Society to the United Nations in support of Syrian people. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Trucks loaded with humanitarian aid prepare to embark to Syria and Yemen yesterday.



KUWAIT: Citizens wave Kuwaiti flags as trucks loaded with humanitarian aid prepare to embark to Syria and Yemen yesterday. — KUNA photos

## UN office in Kuwait partakes in celebrations

KUWAIT: The United Nations Office in Kuwait in collaboration with the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village hosted on Saturday a ceremony marking the 59th National Day and the 29th Liberation Day anniversaries. The ceremony was hosted in UN Office Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad building, and was attended by huge crowds of foreign and Arab diplomats. The General Director of the village, Advisor at the Amiri Diwan Mohammad Dhaifallah Sharar, told reporters that the village's participation comes to

embody the distinguished relations between the State of Kuwait and the United Nations. Sharar added that this celebration was an exceptional UN initiative in recognition of Kuwait's role in supporting UN efforts to establish world peace, noting that the village's participation in the UN function came upon directives from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, the village director Saif Al-Shalahi said in a similar statement that the village's participation came to offer the diplomatic and

international community a cultural and heritage view of the country, through setting up a heritage exhibition that is a gift from the village's employees to the United Nations. Shalahi said that the exhibition representing the life of the people of the desert in the past, which includes art of Sadu, which is one of the traditional Bedouin weaving. Many old handicrafts were also shown, and a hobby of falconry was presented, while a presentation of some Kuwaiti folk cuisine and ancient Rababa art were also featured. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village's participation in the event. — KUNA

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Israel's 'most vulnerable' hit by political stalemate

## Caught between extremes, Merkel's party mired in crisis

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SHANGHAI: A security guard wearing a protective facemask is seen at the temporarily closed Shanghai Disney resort in Shanghai yesterday. The coronavirus epidemic that has killed over 2,400 people is communist China's 'largest public health emergency' since its founding, said President Xi Jinping yesterday. — AFP

# China reports 2,442 deaths, 76,936 cases

## South Korea sees 123 new infections, 4 deaths

SHANGHAI: China reported another fall in the new coronavirus infections outside of its epicenter yesterday, but world health officials warned it was too early to make predictions about the outbreak as new infections and fears of contagion increased elsewhere. China's health commission confirmed 648 new infections yesterday - higher than a day earlier - but only 18 were outside of Hubei province, the lowest number outside of the epicenter since authorities started publishing data a month ago.

But new infections outside of China continued to worry world health authorities, with South Korea yesterday reporting a fourth death due to the virus and 123 new cases, bringing its total to 556, having doubled from Friday to Saturday. Cases in Italy, Europe's worst hit country, more than quadrupled to 79 on Saturday, with two deaths. Ten new cases in Iran took the total to 29 there, and six deaths, deepening unease at home and in neighboring countries in the Gulf.

The World Health Organization said it was channeling efforts into helping to prepare vulnerable countries, including 13 in Africa. It expressed concern on Saturday about the number of new infections that had no clear link to China, such as travel history or contact with a confirmed case. More than

half the new cases in South Korea were linked to a Shincheonji Church of Jesus congregation in Daegu, after a woman known as "Patient 31" who attended services tested positive for the virus last week.

The woman had no recent record of overseas travel. The disease has spread to some 26 countries and territories outside China, killing more than a dozen people, according to a Reuters tally. The virus has been fatal in 2% of reported cases, with a risk of death higher for older patients, and relatively few cases among children, according to the WHO.

The potential economic impact of the outbreak overshadowed a meeting of G20 finance ministers in Saudi Arabia, at which the International Monetary Fund chief said the disruption caused by the coronavirus would likely lower China's economic growth this year to 5.6%, down 0.4 percentage points from its January outlook, and shave 0.1 percentage points from global growth.

### Patient backlog

China's health commission said the number of new deaths from COVID-19, as the disease caused by the virus is known, was 97, all but one of which were in Hubei. Eighty-two of those were in the provincial capital Wuhan. The official Xinhua news

agency reported Wuhan had conducted nucleic tests for all its backlog of patients in a bid to arrest the coronavirus spread, including those confirmed or suspected to be infected or in close contact with confirmed cases and patients with fever.

Guo Shengkun, secretary of the Communist Party's Politics and Law Commission, inspected several jails on Saturday and stressed that China should learn from the infections last week of hundreds of inmates, including taking extraordinary measures and "wartime strategies" to tackle the spread. In total, China has reported 76,936 cases, and 2,442 deaths. The WHO says the virus remains mild in 80% of patients, and severe or critical in 20%.

South Korea's earlier cases were linked to China but the new infections centre in two places, Daegu, a city of about 2.5 million, and a hospital in Cheongdo, a county with about 43,000 people. Both have been designated "special care zones". In Italy, schools and universities were closed and three Serie A soccer matches slated for yesterday postponed in Lombardy and Veneto, the two regions where the outbreak is concentrated.

The two regions are Italy's industrial heart and jointly account for 30% of gross domestic output. The announcement by Iranian authorities of multiple cases and



BEIJING: Community volunteers (right) wearing a protective facemasks and gloves to protect against the COVID-19 secure the entrance of a residential area as they take the temperature of a man on a street in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

deaths over a short period of time has led to criticism and accusations from Iranians online of a cover-up by officials. Authorities had no immediate response. The United Arab Emirates announced two new cases on Saturday, an Iranian tourist and his wife, raising the total in that country to 13.

Lebanon confirmed its first case on Friday, a 45-year-old woman returning from Qom, Iran. Iraq announced on Thursday that

it had banned border crossings by Iranian nationals, Iraq's state news agency said. That followed Iraqi Airways suspending flights to Iran, following Kuwait Airways. Saudi Arabia said on Friday it had suspended travel by citizens and expatriates to Iran. Japan's health minister apologized on Saturday after a woman who was allowed to leave a coronavirus-infected cruise ship docked near Tokyo tested positive for the virus. — AFP

## 'America First' vs 'Make in India' as Modi hosts Trump

NEW DELHI: Trade ties between the United States and India have long been problematic but under "America First" President Donald Trump and "Make in India" Prime Minister Narendra Modi, they have worsened. While eclipsed by his trade war with China, Trump's tussle with India, and New Delhi's prickly reaction, has made a major pact unlikely during the American president's visit to the world's fifth-largest economy from today.

"They've been hitting us very, very hard for many, many years," Trump said of India ahead of the 36-hour trip to Ahmedabad, Agra and New Delhi accompanied by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and others. Here, AFP looks at the main issues of contention between the two countries on trade, which hit almost \$145 billion in 2018, with the US deficit of \$25 billion - much to Trump's annoyance:

### Protectionism

India has long had a penchant for pro-

tectionism. Its import tariffs are among the world's highest. Under Modi, facing slowing growth, accelerating inflation and a widening budget deficit, this hasn't changed. Under pressure from farmers and fearing yet more cheap Chinese imports, Modi in November balked at joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a trade pact including Asia's main economies and China.

In recent months, Modi's government has hiked duties on US imports, including on \$600 million worth of Californian almonds as well as apples, steel and chemicals coming into Asia's third-largest economy. In its recent budget, the right-wing government raised tariffs on items such as shoes, children's tricycles and furniture, irking Washington which cancelled a visit by trade envoy Robert Lighthizer, reports said.

Plans to force foreign firms to store Indian consumers' data locally have also irked US businesses, as have e-commerce regulations hitting firms like Amazon and Walmart. Modi's "Make in India" drive is aimed at getting foreign companies to manufacture in the South Asian country and so reduce imports - mirroring Trump's "America First" mantra. New Delhi's actions "have made the protectionism concerns in India even greater", a senior US official said ahead of Trump's arrival.

### Steel and holy cows

However, many of India's recent moves have been in response to actions by the

Trump administration, starting with its 2018 decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum from India and other countries. India is the world's third-largest steelmaker, and its exports of steel products have tumbled 46 percent according to the Peterson Institute for International Economics. Exporters of mechanical and electrical machinery and auto parts have also suffered.

Last year, Trump added to the pain by suspending India's privileges under the decades-old US Generalized System of Preferences program that had allowed it to ship \$6 billion in goods duty-free. The US wants to sell more medical devices like stents to India while US dairy farmers - a key voter base for Trump ahead of his re-election push in November - want greater access for their products. India says it is worried American cows have been fed bovine extracts - a no-no in a country where most Hindus believe the animals are sacred. Modi relies heavily on support from his farmers too.

### Easy rider?

United by mistrust of China, Trump's visit will see deals in defense and other areas, including potentially the supply of six nuclear reactors, the fruit of a landmark atomic accord in 2008. The visit will be big on optics, with Modi and Trump appearing at a rally at the world's largest cricket stadium and the US president and First Lady Melania watching the sunset at



AHMEDABAD: Workers place a US national flag under a billboard displaying a picture of US President Donald Trump outside the Sardar Patel stadium in Ahmedabad yesterday, ahead of Trump's first official visit to India. — AFP

the Taj Mahal.

But the main "deliverable" that both strongmen want is a big trade deal, and in its absence they might instead strike a smaller agreement, according to press reports. This could include India lowering duties on large-engine Harley-Davidson motorcycles - long a bugbear of Trump -

and farm products like alfalfa hay and pecans, according to Bloomberg News. "We would not like to rush into a deal, as the issues involved are complicated and there are many decisions which actually could affect or impact the lives of millions of people on the ground," cautioned an Indian government spokesman. — AFP

International

# Ladder to safety: Syrians eye escape over Turkish border

## Turkey places barbed wire and watchtowers to prevent crossings

**KAFR LUSIN:** Abu Jabber has a plan to escape the Syrian regime's advance: he has built a ladder from rusty metal for him and his 11 children to climb over the Turkish border wall. Six months ago, the family fled deadly fighting in Idlib province of northwest Syria, seeking shelter near the border village of Kafr Lusin, where dozens of families live in an informal camp for the displaced. Newcomers live in tents while others, like Abu Jabber, his children and his parents, have built makeshift homes at the foot of a cement wall that separates Turkey from Idlib province.

Turkey, which already hosts the world's largest number of Syrian refugees with around 3.6 million people, has placed barbed wire and watchtowers along the wall to prevent any more crossings. Ankara fears that an offensive launched in December by Russian-backed Syrian government forces against the last major rebel and jihadist bastion in Syria could spark another influx. The government has this month escalated its offensive and seized dozens of villages and towns in Idlib and the neighboring province of Aleppo.

"When I saw that the situation was getting worse, I decided to build a ladder," said Abu Jabber, standing outside his new home among the olive groves of Kafr Lusin. "I did this in case the regime makes further advances," he explained, undaunted by the formidable fortifications erected by Turkish authorities to keep his and other displaced families at bay. "We will climb over the wall to protect the lives of our children," he said, pointing to the do-it-yourself ladder he made with bits of rusty metal. Abu Jabber said there was no other solution. "Either they (regime forces) kill us all or we enter Turkey."

### 'I need shelter'

He and his family have been displaced several times since Syria's war erupted almost nine years ago. Half of the three million people living in Idlib are displaced

from other regions of Syria who abandoned areas recaptured from rebels by government forces. Abu Jabber, whose home was originally in Hama province, said his 10-year-old son, who has an amputated hand, lost an eye in regime bombardment. Trying to escape to Turkey also carries its risks.

Turkish border guards have sporadically opened fired on Syrian civilians attempting to cross the border illegally. "Going to Turkey is not really a choice, but I need security. I want to be able to sleep, I need shelter, heating and food," Abu Jabber said. The regime offensive has displaced some 900,000 civilians since December, and an estimated 170,000 of them are living out in the open, the United Nations says. The UN and aid groups have called for ceasefire, while the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has warned of a "bloodbath".

"Our fear now is that a full-on offensive could lead to the worst catastrophe of Syria's brutal war, an out-and-out bloodbath for displaced civilians," NRC chief Jan Egeland said earlier this month. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has urged Syria's neighbors, particularly Turkey, to take in more of the displaced. "I am appealing for neighboring countries, including Turkey, to broaden admissions, so that those most in danger can reach safety—even knowing that capacities and public support are already strained," Grandi said.

### 'Tear down the wall'

In Kafr Lusin, tents made of plastic sheeting are home to families of 10 people or more. Abdel Razzak Sallat arrived at the informal camp two weeks ago from the town of Binnish, northeast of Idlib city, along with his eight children. They now share a tent with his sister-in-law's family in all, 19 people crammed together under the canopy. Their belongings, including flimsy mattresses and blankets, are piled up on one side, while an area has been turned into a makeshift kitchen



**KAFR LUSIN:** Photo shows makeshift homes at an informal camp for the displaced in Kafr Lusin village on the border with Turkey in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib. —AFP

with a gas cooker and foodstuffs kept on shelves.

By day, the family sits around a stove to keep warm, and at night they lay out the mattresses on the ground—but there are not enough to go round and the space is limited. So some of us "sleep sitting up", said Sallat. Like Abu Jabber and others, he said he fled to

Kafr Lusin for safety—border regions are usually spared bombardments. And like Abu Jabber, he said that if forced, he would "enter Turkey". "Look how life is beautiful behind the wall, while here it's a disaster," he said. "Aren't we humans too? If we have to... we will tear down the wall." —AFP

## Saudi-led coalition foils Red Sea attack by Yemen's Houthis

**DUBAI:** Naval forces from the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen yesterday foiled an "imminent terrorist" attack by the Iran-aligned Houthi movement in the southern Red Sea, a major commercial shipping channel, the coalition said. The forces destroyed an unmanned boat laden with explosives that was launched from Hodeidah province in western Yemen, coalition spokesman Colonel Turki al-Malki said in a statement on Saudi state news agency SPA, without identifying the targets.

There was no immediate confirmation from the Houthi movement, which has been battling the Sunni Muslim military coalition since 2015 in a conflict that is largely seen in the region as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and foe Shiite Iran. Yemen lies along the Bab Al-Mandeb strait at the southern mouth of the Red Sea, one of the most important trade routes for oil tankers heading from the Middle East to Europe.

Malki said the planned attack posed a threat to regional and international security and maritime trade. He said the use of Hodeidah for operations was a "glaring violation" of a UN-led peace deal in the disputed port city that was agreed between the Saudi-backed Yemeni govern-



**SANAA:** Smoke billows following an air strike by the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemeni capital Sanaa yesterday. —AFP

ment and the Houthis in December 2018.

Violence rose in January, ending more than three months of unprecedented calm in the five-year-old conflict following informal ceasefire talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis. Coalition warplanes carried out several air strikes on the Houthi-held capital Sanaa yesterday, hitting the presidential palace and other military sites, residents told Reuters. Malki said later that the operation on Sanaa had destroyed Houthi sites used to store ballistic missiles and drones.

The strikes were the first to hit the capital for several months, residents said, and followed attempted missile attacks by Houthi forces on Saudi cities on Friday, as the kingdom prepared for a gathering of finance ministers from the Group of 20 major economies in Riyadh. The Western-backed coalition intervened in Yemen to try to restore the internationally recognized government that was ousted from power in Sanaa in late 2014 by the Houthis, who now control most major urban centers. —Reuters

## Grave of slain Iraq commander a new anti-US magnet

**NAJAF:** A minibus stopped outside the world's largest cemetery in the Iraqi Shiite holy city of Najaf. Five women got out, telephone cameras filming the scene, and dashed excitedly towards a grave. Clad in black, they joined wailing women and men beating their chests in grief at Wadi Al-Salam (valley of peace), an ever expanding cemetery. All eyes were on the grave of Iraqi paramilitary commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis.

Killed alongside top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in a US drone strike in Baghdad on January 3, Muhandis is now revered as a martyred icon of anti-American resistance. His grave has become a magnet for Shiites vowing vengeance against Washington. Below a life-sized portrait of the deceased commander, a young man knelt before his grave, the wailing of women ringing around him. "May God avenge us from America," the man screamed.

Located along aisle nine of Wadi Al-Salam, the commander's final resting place has gained near-holy status. It has become a stop for the thousands of Shiite pilgrims who pass through Najaf each day to visit

the tomb of Imam Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed. "It is not just a grave, it has been transformed into a shrine," Abbas Abdul Hussein, a security official at the cemetery said. "Men, women and children... flock from Iran, Lebanon and Bahrain daily to visit Abu Mahdi," he said.

### 'Hell' to pay

Washington's number one enemy in Iraq, Muhandis was head of the Hashed Al-Shaabi, an Iraqi military network largely incorporated into the state. He was Soleimani's top Iraqi aide and widely seen as Tehran's man in Baghdad. The US strike that killed Muhandis and Soleimani outside Baghdad airport dealt a severe blow to Tehran and its so-called axis of resistance that stretches across Iran, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon. Iraq's armed factions, the most hardline of which are financed, trained and armed by Iran, have vowed to avenge Muhandis's death. They said America's 5,200 troops in Iraq would have "hell" to pay.

But almost two months after the assassination, there has yet to be a heavy response, apart from Iranian missile strikes on January 8. As well as the grave at Wadi Salam, a small altar has been erected at the site of Muhandis's death at the entrance to Baghdad airport. Dressed in black from head-to-toe, Um Hussein said she made a 450-kilometre trek from Basra in southern Iraq to pay homage at the grave. "Every time we come to visit (the tomb of) Imam Ali, we will make a stop to see the hero and

martyr Muhandis," she said. "It is a duty."

### 'Hero' who defeated IS

From the early hours of the day until after sunset, the entrance to the cemetery is bustling with minibuses ferrying visitors. Standing over Muhandis's grave, tears rolling down her cheeks, Souad said she also came from Basra to honor the "hero" who "defeated" the Islamic State (IS) group. "His death really affected us and the Hashed as a whole," she said.

Wadi Salam is also the final resting place of thousands of Hashed fighters killed during the 2014-2017 battle against IS. It was on this front that Muhandis - known for his virulent anti-Americanism long before the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq - became a revered figure. Muhandis, accused of involvement in deadly 1983 attacks against the French and US embassies in Kuwait, oversaw the Hashed and its integration into the state.

He transformed most of his paramilitary fighters into regulars, but some have remained outside state structures, including those Washington accuses of attacking its personnel in Iraq. Flanked by the graves of other Shiite commanders, Reza Abadi, an Iranian from Soleimani's hometown of Kerman, recited a eulogy over the grave of Muhandis. "We came here to show our respect for this man who is dear to Iranians and Iraqis," he said. "The memory of the two martyrs, Hajj Qasem and Abu Mahdi, will never be forgotten." —AFP

## Togo counts votes as challenger claims 'fraud'

**LOME:** Togo tallied ballots yesterday after a key challenger insisted he could cause a shock upset despite what he claimed was "fraud" in an election President Faure Gnassingbe was widely expected to win. Troops briefly surrounded the homes of opposition candidate Agbeyome Kodjo and one of his main allies shortly after voting ended on Saturday in a move the authorities said was for their "own safety".

Kodjo had emerged as a dark horse challenger looking to stop Gnassingbe's bid for a fourth term in office that would extend his family's half-century domination over the West African nation. The president and his supporters had been confident of a resounding victory in the first round, despite widespread disillusionment after 53 years of dynastic rule that has failed to drag many out of poverty. "I have the conviction that in the coming week, I will lead this country," Kodjo told journalists at a press conference in his house after the security forces left.

"Considering the revelations of fraud which marked this ballot, it is impossible for

the outgoing candidate to be elected in the first round." Kodjo claimed the authorities had used ballot stuffing, fake polling stations and people casting multiple votes to skew the results in the incumbent's favor. The challenger said figures gathered from various polling stations showed he was in the lead in the capital Lome and the coastal region and had "good scores" in other areas. The election commission is expected to release the official provisional results early next week.

The situation around Lome was calm yesterday morning, an AFP journalist reported. Internet connections appeared to be sporadically interrupted. Gnassingbe has led the West African country of eight million people since taking over in 2005 following the death of his father Gnassingbe Eyadema, who ruled with an iron fist for 38 years.

Kodjo, a former prime minister under Gnassingbe's father, gained ground during the campaign after winning the backing of an influential former Catholic archbishop. The authorities banned hundreds of local observers from monitoring the election and cancelled the system of electronic security at the last moment. Some 300 international observers were deployed, mainly from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, with many African states supporting the incumbent. —AFP



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## International

# Caught between extremes, German Chancellor's party mired in crisis

## CDU tries to keep its distance from both hard right and left

**BERLIN:** Senior members of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling Christian Democratic Union have warned the party was in crisis as it tries to keep its distance from both the hard right and left. The issue has come to a head in recent weeks in the small eastern state of Thuringia, where uproar followed a move by CDU regional lawmakers to join the far right AfD in voting to oust a popular Left party politician as state premier.

The breaching of a "firewall" preventing any cooperation between centrist parties and the anti-immigrant AfD has sparked soul searching on both wings of the CDU. An identity crisis now threatens to engulf the party after Merkel's anointed heir Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer was forced to renounce her leadership ambitions after failing to hold a clear party line on the issue. "We are going through a crisis of confidence," Health Minister and rising party star Jens Spahn said Saturday.

### 'Credibility'

"This is about the CDU's credibility in Germany," ahead of elections which must take place by next year, added party secretary general Paul Ziemiak. Thuringia may be home to barely two percent of the population of Europe's largest economy - but it highlights the pressures building on a party ruling in an already uncomfortable coalition at national level with the Social Democrats. There will be a March 4 re-run in the state after a pro-business Free Democrat, a traditional CDU ally, stepped down having been elected regional president with dual CDU and AfD backing.

That will likely mean the re-election of the Left's Bodo Ramelow, denied by last month's controversial initial vote, to head a minority leftist government until

fresh local elections next April. But Ziemiak warned Saturday that CDU support for Ramelow would break with official party policy of neither backing far right nor far left. "Anybody who votes in favor of Ramelow as regional government head goes against CDU policies," said Ziemiak. The CDU's confused stance in Thuringia has already forced out regional party head Mike Mohring.

### Balancing act

Wolfgang Schauble, the CDU's former Interior minister and now Bundestag president, ruled out "any cooperation between the CDU" and the Left as the latter "is the legal successor of the old SED," the old East Germany's ruling party - even if Ramelow is a moderate leftist. Current Interior Minister Horst Seehofer on Friday warned right-wing extremism was the "biggest security threat facing Germany" after Wednesday's racially motivated shootings in the Frankfurt suburb of Hanau, which gave rise to nationwide protests.

The rise of forces beyond the centre right and centre left has left Germany's traditional parties facing an almost impossible balancing act, the political spectrum now salami-sliced to a degree which makes forming majorities ultra complicated both nationally and regionally. Left supporters are meanwhile outraged at also being placed beyond the CDU's "firewall," essentially as undesirable as a far right which most CDU leaders view as a political home for "Nazis" or "fascists." Today will see the embattled CDU lay out a timetable for candidates seeking to take the party forward post-Merkel but also address strategy for Thuringia, both issues deeply entwined. —AFP



**HANAU:** A man holds a placard featuring Regional leader of AfD Thuringia Bjoern Hoecke and the words 'Never again' during a vigil in Hanau, near Frankfurt am Main, western Germany after at least nine people were killed in two shootings late on February 19, 2020. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Niger kills 120 'terrorists'

**NIAMEY:** A joint operation by Nigerian and French troops in southwest Niger killed 120 "terrorists" and seized bomb-making equipment and vehicles, the country's defense ministry said yesterday. As of February 20 "120 terrorists have been neutralized" in the operation in the vast Tillaberi region near the border with Mali and Burkina Faso, the statement said, adding there had been no losses among Nigerian or French troops. Niger's defense minister Issoufou Katambe praised the "cooperation... in the battle against terrorism," according to the statement. Authorities in the restive Tillaberi region have ramped up security restrictions, closing markets and banning motorbike traffic after attacks by jihadist groups over December and January killed 174 Nigerian soldiers. A state of emergency has been in place in the region for the past two years. —AFP

#### Dozens of jihadists 'neutralized'

**PARIS:** French soldiers "neutralized" around 50 in a series of operations in Mali this month, the army said Friday as it seeks to quell a years-long insurgency in the West African nation. The operations were carried out near Mopti in central Mali, where a group of several dozen fighters declared their allegiance to the Islamic State group in a video released in late January, the first such declaration in the region. The army added that a helicopter assault accompanied by drone strikes northwest of the city on February 9-10 killed a senior leader of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Overall, the chief of staff said it had also destroyed around 30 motorcycles and two pickup trucks, and seized weapons along with cellphones and other electronic equipment. As a rule the army does not give a precise breakdown of how many people are killed, wounded or captured, using only terms such as neutralized or "taken out of action." —AFP

#### Israeli forces kill Palestinian

**JERUSALEM:** Israeli forces yesterday shot dead a Palestinian suspected of placing a bomb near the Gaza border, before extracting his body with a bulldozer, the army said. "Following the successful thwarting of the attack near the Gaza Strip fence earlier this morning, an IDF (Israeli army) bulldozer extracted the body of one of the attackers," a military spokeswoman said. Earlier yesterday, the army had said it "spotted two terrorists approaching the security fence in the southern Gaza Strip and placing an explosive device adjacent to it". "The troops opened fire towards them. A hit was identified," a military statement said. Following the incident, a video from Gaza emerged on social media showing a bulldozer approaching the body as young, apparently unarmed men, were trying to collect it. The sound of gunfire is heard and the men ultimately run away as the bulldozer collects the body. A tank can be seen positioned nearby. —AFP

## Oman ruler aims to reduce public debt

**DUBAI:** Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said said yesterday the government would work to reduce public debt and restructure public institutions and companies to bolster the economy. Sultan Haitham, in his second public speech since assuming power in January, said the government would create a national framework to tackle unemployment while addressing strained public finances. "We will direct our financial resources in the best way that will guarantee reducing debt and increasing revenues," he said in the televised speech. "We will also direct all government departments to adopt efficient governance that leads to a balanced, diversified and sustainable economy."

Rated junk by all three major credit rating agencies, Oman's debt to GDP ratio spiked to nearly 60 percent last year from around 15 percent in 2015, and could reach 70 percent by 2022, according to S&P Global Ratings. The small oil producing country has relied heavily on debt to offset a widening deficit caused by lower crude prices. Also, the late Sultan Qaboos, who ruled Oman for nearly 50 years, held back on austerity measures that could cause unrest. The country has delayed introducing a 5 percent value added tax from 2019 to 2021, and economic diversification has been slow, with oil and gas accounting for over 70 percent of government revenues. —Reuters

## Hamburg votes amid Germany's political tumult

**HAMBURG:** Voters in the German city-state of Hamburg head to the polls yesterday, with the centre left expected to hold its own against the environmentalist Greens, who have been enjoying rising popularity across the country. Federal politics in Germany has appeared particularly chaotic in recent weeks, with a regional vote in the former communist east indirectly bringing down Chancellor Angela Merkel's chosen successor.

Over the longer term, the progressive, ecologist Greens look set to replace the centre-left Social Democratic Party as the main national rival to Merkel's CDU conservatives, with support for them surging last year and now almost twice as high as for the SPD. But things are not so gloomy for the centre left in Hamburg, where despite the Greens' gains, the SPD looks set to maintain its grip on the mayor's seat.

In opinion polls in this wealthy "Free Hanseatic City" last week, support for the SPD was well over 30 percent, a lead of more than 10 points over the Greens and three times higher than the CDU. "We have to hold our ground against the federal trend," SPD lead candidate and incumbent Hamburg mayor Peter Tschentscher, 54, told AFP.

In part, the centre left has done so by

adopting policies with a distinctly "green" feel, including a proposal to convert a massive coal power plant to natural gas to slash greenhouse emissions. Meanwhile, the far-right AfD - which enjoys strong support in the east of the country - is struggling to gain ground in prosperous Hamburg where it could even fall short of the five percent hurdle to enter parliament. At just under 3,000 euros (\$3,258) per month, incomes in the port city are somewhat higher than the national average.

### Havoc in Berlin

On Friday, the Greens' national leader, Robert Habeck, said that the prospect for the ecologists doubling their score in Hamburg from the last vote in 2015 was "phenomenal", even if they fail to unseat the SPD's Tschentscher. Should the opinion polls prove correct, the port city will likely retain the "red-green" coalition that has ruled since 2011, sparing Berlin the political earthquakes provoked by other recent regional votes.

Earlier this month, Merkel's conservatives were shaken by the apparent alliance of their regional branch in the eastern state Thuringia with the far-right AfD party, voting in a liberal politician as state premier. The breach of a historic political taboo provoked a nationwide outcry. As a result, CDU leader and Merkel's heir apparent, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, announced her resignation, throwing open the question of who will succeed the veteran chancellor following elections next year at the latest.

## Italian towns wake to quarantine, queue for food in virus outbreak

**CODOGNO:** Tens of thousands of Italians prepared for a weeks-long quarantine in the country's north yesterday as nerves began to fray among the locals faced with new lockdown measures. Two people have died from the virus since Friday and more than a hundred cases have now been reported in Italy, most of them centered around the small town of Codogno, about 70 kilometers southeast of Milan.

Over 50,000 residents in eleven towns - 10 in Lombardy and one in the neighboring region of Veneto - now face what Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said on Saturday could be weeks of lockdown. Locals wearing facemasks were already lined up outside a supermarket in the town of Castelpusterlengo, a 10 minute drive from Codogno yesterday morning.

Shoppers were made to wait, then allowed to enter in groups of 40 inside the store to stock up on provisions. Although one woman in the crowd downplayed the virus, telling other shoppers it was "not fatal" if properly treated, others were less sanguine. "It's inhuman," said one man who gave his name as Sante. "Fighting over four sandwiches is just disgusting." Another woman, Emanuela, told AFP-TV that residents including her were nervous. "I'm really scared, we're going through a really tough situation," said the woman, a nurse who works in the area.

### Rising infections

Blockades were not yet erected, and cars could be seen driving in and around the area of Codogno and Castelpusterlengo, although police cars patrolled the area. It was not clear how authorities would impose the travel restrictions and whether residents would still be allowed to travel from town to town within the affected



**HAMBURG:** Germany's Social Democratic Party's (SPD) mayor of Hamburg and top candidate Peter Tschentscher casts his vote next to his wife Eva Maria (2nd right) during the election for a new parliament in German city-state Hamburg yesterday. —AFP

Meanwhile, the SPD's failure to recover from disastrous showings in federal elections in 2017 and in subsequent state polls has seen nervous party members chew through multiple leaders. The party finally settled on a duo of relative unknowns last year after a long and divisive selection process. The pair, Norbert Walter-Borjans and Saskia Esken, have been notable by their absence from Hamburg campaign events.

### No island

While Hamburg's political make-up is unusual, events in the final week of campaigning showed that the port city is far from insulated from events in the rest of

Germany and Europe. On Friday, Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg joined a massive "Fridays for Future" demonstration in Hamburg attended by around 10,000 people, according to police.

Weekly marches across the country by the school strike movement last year helped force Berlin to raise its climate ambitions and fix a binding end to coal power generation by 2038 in law. At the same time, support for the Greens has surged across the country. Meanwhile, both the SPD and the Greens cancelled final campaign events on Thursday, after a racist gunman killed nine people with migrant backgrounds in the city of Hanau. —AFP



**CODOGNO:** An empty road at the entrance of the small Italian town of Codogno is pictured yesterday, under the shadow of a new coronavirus outbreak, as Italy took drastic containment steps as worldwide fears over the epidemic spiraled. —AFP

zones, without surpassing an outer limit.

"We're preparing to set up the checkpoints for the containment zone," a policewoman told AFP, saying that initially the perimeter would be narrow but could widen over time. "We're about ten criminal police teams here, so nothing related to this kind of situation, but we've been called in from Bologna, Turin and Genoa to give a hand," she added. For now, the quarantine appears to be largely dependent on individuals to respect the system but the government said those found in violation

could face fines and even three months in jail.

The government has also said the army was prepared to step in if needed to enforce the perimeter.

Yesterday, the head of the civil protection department, Angelo Borrelli, said during a press conference that thousands of beds were at the ready in military barracks or hotels to house quarantined or sick individuals, if needed. The number of those infected with the virus had now grown to 132, including the two people who died, Borrelli said. —AFP



## International

## Israel's 'most vulnerable' hit by political stalemate, uncertainty

## Funding squeezed for programs helping troubled youths

**JERUSALEM:** Israel's grinding political deadlock has squeezed funding for programs helping troubled youths, disadvantaged communities and the disabled, forcing state-backed social organizations to rely on crowd-funding to get by. Polls indicate the country's March 2 election, the third in less than a year, will not produce a clear win for right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or his main rival Benny Gantz of the centrist Blue and White party.

That result could force more fraught coalition talks, prolonging the stalemate that has kept lawmakers from passing a budget for this year. But some analysts said the urgent need to approve a government spending package, especially for Netanyahu's ultra-Orthodox political allies, could help break the logjam.

Former Bank of Israel governor Karnit Flug told AFP that a caretaker government without a majority in parliament, the Knesset, like the one currently led by Netanyahu, had no chance of passing a budget. Core departments like the security services have remained funded but many other areas have suffered, added Flug, now a researcher at the Israeli Democracy Institute. Flug said funds that were allocated to build hundreds of new classrooms to keep pace with Israel's rising population have been frozen.

Plans to improve services for the disabled, curb domestic violence and boost healthcare by sending more doctors to poorer communities have all been placed on hold, she added. The lack of a 2020 budget "primarily affects the most vulnerable," Flug said. Beyond cutbacks to government programs, civil society organizations that rely on public funds to deliver social services are also facing a dire situation, she warned.

## 'Crazy Knesset members'

One such organisation is Maagalim, which supports around 8,000 at-risk youths through mentorships. Maagalim head Assaf Weiss told AFP he had lost roughly three-quarters of his budget due to the political stalemate.

Founded 20 years ago, the organization works with teenagers dealing with a troubled home life, violence in their communities, or a range of other challenges. Weiss made clear that he was not willing to cut services because "some crazy members of the Knesset" were incapable of forming a government.

He wrote to the finance ministry arguing that Maagalim, and organizations like it, were Israel's "social Iron Dome" - a reference to the military's missile shield that intercepts short-range rockets fired mainly from Gaza. The ministry did not respond, but Weiss said Maagalim has maintained services through small, one-off donations from more than 2,500 individuals. "It was an emergency crowd-funding campaign," that raised two million shekels (\$872,000, 808,000 euros) in three weeks, Weiss said.

## 'Matter of life and death'

Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving premier, has endured in office in part through alliances with parties representing the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, or haredi, who account for roughly 10 percent of the population. Haredi institutions, which rely heavily on state funding, are receiving less money this year and could face a crunch if a budget is not passed. For example, religious study institutions (Yeshivot) that cater to individuals over 18 are facing an estimated budget shortfall of \$88 million for 2020, Gilad Malach, an expert on the ultra-Orthodox, told AFP.

For Chaim Levinson, a political commentator at Haaretz newspaper, that makes passing a budget "a matter of life and death" for haredi political leaders. Speaking on Haaretz's podcast, Levinson argued that if the outcome of the vote risks extending the budget stalemate, haredi leaders "will take an active role in forcing Netanyahu to compromise, because they need money desperately."

"I don't think they will go with Gantz but I assume they will go to Netanyahu and say 'look, we must have



**GAZA-ISRAEL BORDER:** Palestinians set fire to tyres along the Gaza-Israel border east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, as an Israeli earth mover drives along the border across the other side. — AFP

a government," he added. Malach was skeptical that ultra-Orthodox leaders would force Netanyahu's hand exclusively over the budget issue. But, he said, despite their bond with the premier, certain haredi leaders

could pivot to Blue and White if it served their financial and other interests. If they fear being left out of the government, "they might join a coalition under Gantz," he said. — AFP

## Israel: The Middle East powerhouse

**JERUSALEM:** Israel, which holds legislative elections on March 2, has become the Middle East's military powerhouse since its creation seven decades ago after the UN adopted a partition plan for then British-run Palestine. Here are some facts about the country.

## Military power

Israel is considered the leading military power in the Middle East and is widely believed to possess its sole, if undeclared, nuclear arsenal. It receives nearly \$4 billion a year in military aid from the United States. It has had a series of wars with its Arab neighbors, the first of which broke out on May 15, 1948, a day after Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the country's creation.

Officially Israel has been through eight conflicts, including the Six-Day War of June 1967 in which it seized the West Bank and east Jerusalem from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and Egypt's Sinai and the strategic Golan Heights from Syria. It later annexed east Jerusalem and the Golan, decisions denounced by the international community. Its last major military operation was in 2014 in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, from which Israel unilaterally withdrew in 2005. It has signed peace treaties with just two Arab governments—Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

## Settlements, intifadas

Israel's population has increased tenfold since 1948, reaching nearly nine million, according to official statistics. More than 600,000 Israeli settlers have an often tense co-habitation with the around three million Palestinians living in the West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem. The international community regards the settlements illegal and an obstacle to peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel considers Jerusalem to be its "indivisible" capital, while the Palestinians want to make the east of the city the capital of their future state. There have been two Palestinian uprisings or intifadas — 1987-1993 and 2000-2005. The first ended with the signing in Washington of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. They granted the Palestinians limited autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as an interim step towards a comprehensive peace deal, which has never been agreed.

## Regional tensions

Officially in a state of war with Syria, Israel has sought to avoid direct involvement in the raging conflict in its neighbor that began in 2011. But it has routinely fired missiles at what it says are Iranian targets in Syria, where elite Iranian forces and allied militia support President Bashar Al-Assad. Israel has diplomatic relations only with Egypt and Jordan, but it has been trying to develop relations with other countries in the Arab region, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

## Support from Trump

Israel has won the staunch support of US President Donald Trump, since he came to office in January 2017. After unilaterally recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017 and its annexation of the Golan from Syria in March 2019, Trump in late January 2020 unveiled a peace plan for the Middle East that included many concessions to Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been in power since 2009, formed the a new government in 2015 that is widely regarded as the most right-wing in Israel's history.

## High-tech and natural gas

Israel's high-tech sector represents more than 40 percent of its exports, giving the country the nickname the "start-up nation". In recent years, Israel which has limited natural resources discovered major offshore gas reserves. Tourism is also a source of revenue. Israel has very low unemployment, and growth of nearly three percent but more than one-fifth of the population lives below the poverty line. — AFP

## Mobile phone services restored; Afghanistan's partial truce holds

**KABUL:** Mobile phone services were restored across swathes of Taliban-contested areas of Afghanistan over the weekend as a partial truce with the militants held for a second day. The Taliban, US and Afghan forces are currently overseeing a week-long "reduction in violence" that kicked off on Saturday. The commitment has seen fighting drop dramatically and is set to pave the way for an American withdrawal deal to be signed later this week.

There have been reports of small clashes in rural areas, but no major attacks that have long defined the conflict have erupted. "In general we do see (a reduction in violence)," acting interior minister Masood Andrabi said. The

## Banned Thai opposition party says junta helped IMDB cover-up

**BANGKOK:** A banned Thai opposition party yesterday accused the former military junta of helping cover up Malaysia's multi-billion-dollar IMDB scandal, urging Thais to demand the truth ahead of a censure debate against Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha. The Future Forward Party, the third-largest party in parliament, was dissolved on Friday by Thailand's Constitutional Court over a loan it

took from its billionaire founder. The dissolution was decried by democracy advocates as a way to weaken opposition to the government of Prayuth, who first came to power in a 2014 military coup and led a military junta until after elections last year that his pro-army party won. Future Forward's spokeswoman, Pannika Wanich, told reporters at a news conference yesterday that the junta had worked with Malaysia's former government to arrest a whistleblower in the IMDB case in 2015 and had allowed financial criminals to operate in Thailand, risking the country's international ties.

"The junta government yearned for international acceptance after the coup...and formed a dark alliance with Malaysia," Pannika said. "The only person who can issue these orders is Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha," Pannika said. Pannika cited irregularities surrounding

lull in violence allowed telecom operators to begin restoring networks across the country that have long been hampered by fighting. "Around 730 cell towers have restarted," said Naqeebullah Sailab, vice chairman of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of Afghanistan.

"There are towers which started operating after almost five years." Two separate officials with knowledge of the country's telecoms industry in northern Afghanistan also confirmed that mobile networks were being restored in insurgent-hit areas. The Taliban have long targeted Afghanistan's private telecom firms, kidnapping engineers, destroying transmission masts and forcing regular coverage blackouts in volatile areas to avoid detection of their fighters.

Afghanistan boasts millions of mobile users in a population of 30 million, with the fast-growing industry employing around 200,000 people and earning strong revenue in an otherwise moribund economy. Thousands of telecommunication towers, however, are in insurgency-hit areas and vulnerable to attacks. The partial truce is expected to set the conditions for Washington and the insurgents to sign a

deal in Doha on February 29 that could, ultimately, pull US troops out after more than 18 years and launch war-weary Afghanistan into an uncertain future.

A successful week would demonstrate that the Taliban have command and control of their forces, and it would also be a show of good faith before signing any deal. The partial truce has also given a much-needed respite to civilians who have borne the brunt of the gruesome war. The UN's Afghanistan mission reported Saturday that more than 10,000 people had been killed or wounded in 2019 alone. As fighting eased across the country, Afghans took to the streets to enjoy the relative calm.

In their southern stronghold of Helmand, Taliban fighters mingled with locals, small "peace" demonstrations took place across the country, and a bicycle race was held in the eastern city of Jalalabad. Washington has been in talks with the Taliban for more than a year to secure a deal which would see it would pull about half of the 12,000-13,000 troops currently in Afghanistan out. In return, the Taliban would give security guarantees and a promise to hold peace talks with the government in Kabul. — AFP

Thailand's arrest and the subsequent confession of Xavier Justo, the Swiss national who was arrested in Thailand in 2015 the first whistleblower in the IMDB affair.

The government also harbored Malaysian financier Low Taek Jho, known as Jho Low, allowing him to enter the country at least five times between October 2016 and May 2018, despite Low having an Interpol red notice from Singapore, she said. Low has been charged in Malaysia and the United States over the alleged theft of \$4.5 billion from Malaysia Development Berhad (IMDB), set up by former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak with the help of Low, to promote economic development.

At least six countries, including the United States, have launched money laundering, financial mismanagement and criminal probes into IMDB dealings. Low has denied any wrongdoing. — Reuters



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## Floating Petri dishes? Cruise industry in dock

Deadly viruses, chickenpox outbreaks and mass cases of the runs: sometimes luxury cruise ship holidays are not the trips of a lifetime elderly passengers had hoped for. Cruise-goers have fallen sick en masse in the past, their predicament on the high seas coming into sharp focus because the holidays can cost thousands of dollars and are often marketed as trips of a lifetime. "Cruise ships are very prone to outbreaks of common cold and the vomiting virus," said John Oxford, professor of virology at Queen Mary University of London. "Invariably the ships are overcrowded and with so many passengers, hygiene levels can slip."

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) logged eight outbreaks aboard cruise ships last year of the highly contagious norovirus, which causes vomiting and diarrhea - hardly the stuff of a dream holiday. Measles, E. coli, chickenpox and salmonella poisoning have all broken out on cruises in recent years. "Unfortunately, the more elderly demographic found on a typical liner are more likely to be susceptible to anything which might present a serious health challenge," warned Dr Simon Clarke, an associate professor at Britain's University of Reading.

With global concerns mounting about the threat of the new coronavirus, an elderly Japanese man and woman died on Thursday having been on the virus-stricken Diamond Princess. The vessel, moored in Yokohama, was by far the biggest coronavirus cluster outside the epicentre in China. Some have pointed the finger at Japan's authorities for how they handled the 14-day quarantine of hundreds of passengers. For now, US authorities have recommended that travellers "reconsider" cruises to or in Asia, citing the risk of coronavirus-linked travel restrictions and quarantines.

### Annual growth

Stewart Chiron, a leading industry expert, says that cruise ships are nothing like the hotbed of viruses that they are painted out to be and cruise lines take "extensive precautions to keep ships clean". "When viruses are introduced, cruise lines have various protocols and procedures to clean ships and prevent further spreading of the virus," he added. US-based Chiron says that the image of thousands of people crammed together on board - ripe conditions for the spread of illness - is also wide of the mark. "Cruise ships are much larger than most people realize. There's plenty of space for passengers to spread out in to have enjoyable, healthy experiences," he said.

According to Chiron, citing CDC figures, of the more than 31 million people who holidayed on cruise ships last year, there were 1,038 cases of norovirus, or 0.003 percent. Chiron and other experts say that the cruise industry has successfully shrugged off past negative headlines and will quickly bounce back once the coronavirus passes. Cruise Lines International Association, the world's largest cruise industry trade organization, says 17.8 million people took an ocean cruise in 2009, compared with last year's 31 million, demonstrating its continually growing popularity. About half of all passengers are from North America and analysts say they are unlikely to be perturbed by events on vessels in Asia. "As with previous crises, there may be new-booking slowdowns as people get caught up in news cycles," said Chiron. "Once this period concludes, there will be a surge of bookings and booking patterns will return to normal."

### 'You're trapped'

Tara C Smith, professor of epidemiology at Kent State University in Ohio, is not so convinced. "Granted, I could become ill via any type of travel or even via a staycation with my kindergartener," said Smith, who trained in microbiology and infectious diseases. "But cruise ships take those risks of background infection and amplify them due to the constant shared quarters of travellers on board." Smith conceded that coronavirus was an "extreme example" and said that most cruise passengers will experience no problems at all. "But personally, I'd rather not take the risk," she said. "One never knows what infections might enter on a cruise ship and it's a location where you're trapped with all your fellow passengers. "It just doesn't sound like a fun vacation to me." — AFP

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This photo taken on Feb 20, 2020 shows a restaurant worker wearing protective clothing as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 passing a bag of food to a customer on the street outside their restaurant in Beijing. — AFP

## Chinese restaurants starved for cash amid virus

It is lunch time in Beijing, but the only diner in Cindy's Cafe is an employee having a staff meal - it has been closed for more than three weeks as China battles a deadly virus epidemic. Restaurants are taking a huge hit as many people across the country of 1.4 billion have been either under some form of quarantine or are reluctant to venture outside since late January over fears of contagion. At Cindy's Cafe in Beijing's Roosevelt Plaza, dine-in revenue has fallen to zero, and relying on deliveries hardly makes up the shortfall, said manager Cai Yaoyang.

"On a good day in the past, we could earn over 1,000 yuan (\$143) a day from deliveries," Cai told AFP. "Now, it's just around 200 to 300 yuan a day. The impact is especially big." He estimates losses to the company, which has more than 10 outlets in China, could be "at least a few million (yuan)" given rent and unused stock from the unexpected Lunar New Year closures. "If there is no business, staff may be asked to take more days off," said Cai.

Many restaurants have suspended dine-ins to help curb the spread of the virus, but eateries that have resumed operations remain largely empty, with people still encouraged to stay home to avoid infections. The new coronavirus has killed more than 2,400 in China and infected nearly 77,000. At an outlet of Bellagio Cafe, another restaurant chain, employee Zhu Xiangying told AFP it had only made 30,000 yuan in around 10 days, compared with over 200,000 yuan in normal times.

### Selling fresh produce

The China Cuisine Association said in a report this

month that the country's restaurant industry saw 4.67 trillion yuan (\$665 billion) in catering revenue last year, with earnings over the Lunar New Year break making up over 15 percent. With millions of people staying indoors during the festival this year, those holiday earnings have evaporated. Some, including hotpot chain Haidilao - which has temporarily closed its mainland China outlets - have turned to selling fresh and frozen products directly to communities.

In Yunhaiyao, a chain specializing in Yunnan cuisine, restaurant tables are piled with fresh vegetables instead of cooked dishes - ready to be packed and delivered to housing compounds. Yunhaiyao, which has more than 100 outlets in China, now bulk-buys groceries for residents near its stores as a new income stream. It has also rolled out a fresh line of prepared ingredients so customers can quickly whip up Yunnan specialties while cooped up at home. Zhao Yebule, store manager at Yunhaiyao's Tongzhou branch in Beijing, said deliveries can rake in up to 6,000 yuan daily. But the company is still in a pinch. Li Jianying, a regional manager overseeing 10 outlets, said only around half of his staff were ready to resume work. Others cannot leave their residential compounds freely or face a 14-day quarantine when they return to Beijing. "Our sales are just about 10 percent that of regular times before the epidemic," with delivery sales falling by half, he added. Yunhaiyao remains worried about expenses such as rent, and has taken a 10 million yuan loan to ease cash-flow pressures. Li, however, stressed there were no plans to cut staff for now.

### 'Sharing' employees

One way out is to "share" employees with other businesses that are enjoying an increase in demand: e-commerce platforms. JD.com saw a 215 percent spike in fresh food sales over the Lunar New Year, while Meituan Grocery's daily sales in Beijing tripled at its peak during the holiday. Li estimates "a few hundred" Yunhaiyao staff have taken on short-term work with third-party firms like supermarkets or online platforms. Cai added Cindy Cafe was in talks to help workers find temporary employment.

JD.com and JD-backed Dada Group have offered more than 35,000 jobs, with over half being frontline roles such as couriers and drivers, while around 40 workers from restaurant chain Putien now staff Meituan Grocery as well. Yet, the current situation remains a looming threat to jobs. A survey by Peking and Tsinghua universities, covering around 1,000 small- and medium-sized enterprises, said about 85 percent of these firms could only survive up to three months on their cash reserves. Even as policymakers extend preferential loans and introduce tax breaks - among a slew of other measures - authorities "won't be able to extend life support to all", said Capital Economics in a report on Wednesday. "The longer the disruptions drag on, the harder it will be to avert significant damage to employment," it added. As it is, the big players are hurting. Lao Xiang Ji, which has some 800 outlets, estimates it suffered at least 500 million yuan in losses, said chairman Shu Cong Xuan in a video on the company's WeChat account. Another major chain, Xibei Noodle Village, said on social media that it "cannot last for long" with tight cash flow. — AFP

## EU wants battery autonomy, but first it needs graphite

As Europe looks to declare its tech independence by becoming a leader in next-generation batteries, it will have to start by making its own graphite. The problem is, nearly all of it now comes from Asia, mainly China. So France's Carbone Savoie and Germany's SGL Carbon, the only European firms deemed capable of taking up the challenge, have been corralled into an ambitious battery alliance launched by Brussels last year.

"Thank you for bringing us on board this 'Airbus for batteries,' though to be honest, we weren't even on the passenger list," Carbone Savoie's chairman Bruno Gastinne told France's deputy finance minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher on Thursday. They were attending the ribbon-cutting for a new, more efficient carbon baking oven, a "brick cathedral" some five metres underground at its site in Venissieux, just south of Lyon in southeast France.

The €11 million (\$11.9 million) investment will allow the company to double its carbon production, the first step for making the ultrapure synthetic graphite prized for

batteries. The carbon is then shipped to its factory at Notre-Dame de Briançon in the Alps, where nearby hydroelectric dams provide the intense electrical currents needed to turn it into graphite. Carbone Savoie also says it has developed a new production technology that uses just half the energy required currently, and cuts waste levels in half. "It will be less expensive and more efficient than Chinese graphite, while consuming less energy. The hard part is that we have to move quickly," said Regis Paulus, the firm's head of research and development. "To catch up with the Chinese, we have to invest massively," he said.

### 'Can't do it alone'

EU authorities in November unlocked a whopping €3.2 billion for the European Battery Alliance, hoping to attract an additional five billion euros in private money to build the factories needed to meet homegrown demand. Automakers in particular are racing to shift to electric fleets, under growing pressure to cut carbon emissions and the reliance on fossil fuels. Batteries make up around 40 percent of the value of an electric car, but are currently made by companies in South Korea, China and Japan.

A single electric model from Tesla, for example, requires around 70 kg of graphite. Carbone Savoie's CEO Sebastian Gauthier told AFP. While the material can be mined, battery producers usually prefer the more

expensive synthetic versions that offer improved technical performance. It is the only key component of lithium-ion batteries that can be produced in a factory - nickel, lithium, manganese and cobalt must be mined.

But without government help, few of Europe's industrial giants were willing to embark on the costly crusade to build their own batteries. The push has been a boon for Carbone Savoie, which just five years ago was on the brink of closure by its parent company Rio Tinto, the Anglo-Australian mining giant. The company had long focused on making anodes for extracting aluminium by electrolysis, but fierce competition had slashed sales.

It was acquired in 2016 by the French turnaround specialists Alandia Industries, which has invested 40 million euros to diversify operations - specialized graphites now represent 15 percent of its output, up from zero just a few years ago. The bet has paid off, with profits rising to €17 million last year, on sales that reached €127 million. Even so, the 120-year-old company still does not produce anywhere near enough graphite required to fulfil Europe's electric car dreams, or its own goal of becoming "the European leader in battery graphite" by 2025.

That would require a good chunk of the funds promised by Brussels, which have been pledged by Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Belgium, Sweden and Finland. "We can't do it alone, we're going to need help," said Gastinne, estimating the necessary investments at "several tens of millions of euros". — AFP

## Precarious Dakar tenants face eviction as rents rise

After months of threats from his landlord, visits to the police and a court hearing, Djibril Diagne came home on New Year's Day to find the water had been cut off. Today, Diagne, his second wife and five children use outdoor taps to wash and cook. Opposite their dark flat in a scruffy suburb some 15 km from central Dakar, workmen swing shovels on a building site, as horse-drawn carts travel up and down earth roads. The tenants above and below him have both left, says the 64-year-old electrician, from a faux-leather armchair in his threadbare living room.

In a tale that has echoes for many poor tenants in Senegal's capital, Diagne's landlord is trying to evict him and put up the rent. Dakar is located on a cramped peninsula of some 3.7 million people, whose population has shot up as rural Senegalese have moved in - and rents have followed close behind. International organizations and businesses are also lured by Dakar's stability in an otherwise turbulent region.

Dakar's poorest residents, however, are paying for the price of the boom. In a country where some 40 percent of people live in poverty, Senegal passed legislation in 2014 to ease pressure on tenants. Experts say tenancy protections are universally ignored. Bassirou Sakho, a commercial lawyer who moonlights as a pro bono eviction defense

attorney, said the rent-control law has only increased evictions as landlords seek to recoup losses. "It's astronomical," Sakho, 54, said softly of the number of evictions, in his small downtown office.

Among other things, the law was meant to reduce rents under 150,000 CFA francs (\$250) by 29 percent. But using a loophole, landlords often reclaim apartments saying they intend to live there themselves, said Elimane Sall, a school teacher who also heads Dakar's tenant association. Properties are then rented out again at a higher price. "Demand is higher than offer and people are profiting," said Sall, adding that there is no legal enforcement. Senegal's housing minister Abdou Karim Fofana, who has admitted to problems enforcing the law, did not respond to several requests for comment. "We are working ... to ensure that people will have no problems accessing decent housing," he told MIPs in December, according to local media.

### 'People don't give a damn'

There is no official data for recent rent rises, although anecdotal evidence from real-estate agents suggest that prices have surged. A former housing analyst turned real-estate agent, who declined to be named, said rents downtown running to the northern seaside district of Almadies had "almost doubled" in the past decade. Senegal's statistics agency says rents across Dakar "skyrocketed" 115 percent between 1994 and 2010, hitting the poor hardest, and complaints about rapacious landlords were ubiquitous.

But abuses can cut both ways, said former Senegalese diplomat Ababacar Diop, who urged more social housing to help the poor. For example, a former tenant of his, a mechanic, agreed to pay 100,000 CFA francs (\$167) a month but never paid after handing over his advance and moving in.



Residential and office buildings are seen in Dakar on Feb 6, 2020, where rising rents have become a headache for tenants. — AFP

"What can I do? I won in court," Diop said. Some profit-seeking landlords resort to abusive tactics, such as cutting off the water, to force tenants out, Sakho the lawyer said.

Enforcing the law is often difficult since many rental contracts are informal. And landlords who use the courts to evict tenants are hugely successful. Dakar's district court served 5,079 eviction notices between November 2018 and October 2019, according to court records obtained by AFP. It dismissed 463 requests over the same period. Many tenants leave before getting to court. Pape Moussa Wade, 43, received a court summons in January after he refused to agree to a 20-percent rent hike. He has since left his flat in the suburbs to avoid costly court fees. "These people don't give a damn about the law," Wade said, explaining that he knows the rules because he's a real-estate agent. — AFP

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2020

## Business

**12** Saudi material sector leads top GCC M&A transactions during Q4 2019**13** KFH launches exclusive KFH-Oasis Club card designed with Kuwaiti Flag**14** British digital bank serves clients shunned by established lenders

## Zain gets 3 international certifications from Cisco

### Certifications reflect company's commitment to offering most advanced technology solutions

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, received three international certifications from Cisco, the global leader in telecommunications and networks technologies. Zain's latest certifications from Cisco reflect the company's commitment to offering the latest and most advanced technology solutions as per the highest international standards for customers in Kuwait's business sector.

The first certification from Cisco, Advanced Collaboration Architecture Specialized Partner, acknowledges Zain's capabilities with respect to Cisco's HCS solutions over the cloud in the Kuwaiti market. The second certification, Advanced Cloud and Managed Services Certified Partner, affirms Zain's capabilities in offering the latest advanced cloud and managed services to corporate customers. The third certification recognizes Zain as a Premier Certified Partner of Cisco. The bundle of services and solutions Zain offers in collaboration with Cisco aims at raising operational efficiency and increasing productivity for businesses while providing high levels of security.

Commenting on the achievement, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "today we are proud to have received three international certifications from our partner Cisco. This

recognition from one of the world's biggest technology leaders affirms Zain's capabilities as the first and only operator to provide Cisco's Hosted Collaboration Solutions (HCS) over the cloud in the Kuwaiti market, as well as recognize Zain as a Premier Certified Partner and its capabilities in offering advanced cloud and managed services to corporate customers. Furthermore, this affirms Zain's leadership and capabilities in adopting the highest international standards to offer advanced solutions with fantastic service level quality to our corporate customers, whom we consider an essential part of the Zain family; the biggest family of subscribers in Kuwait".

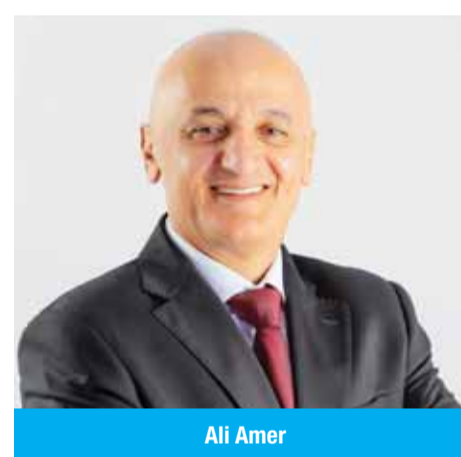
Al-Marzouq explained: "today's business world is witnessing fast-paced advancements in technology, and this has changed the tools companies rely on to increase productivity and enhance efficiency within their operations. For this, we have strived - through our partnership with Cisco - to offer a bundle of the most advanced innovative



Hamad Al-Marzouq

solutions over the cloud to meet the professional needs of our large, medium, and small enterprises customers. At the same time, our solutions offer high levels of security against cyber-attacks and digital threats".

Al-Marzouq further added: "at Zain, we continue to achieve our strategy towards



Ali Amer

fully transforming into an integrated digital service provider, through which we mainly aim at empowering a more efficient business sector in the Kuwaiti market. This surely reflects our commitment in further pushing the digital transformation wheel in Kuwait by contributing to advance the local business

sector. We consider ourselves an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait on all levels, especially within business areas".

Ali Amer, Managing Director, Service Provider Sales, Cisco Middle East and Africa, said: "Zain's selection of Cisco's Hosted Collaboration Solutions (HCS) reinforces its position as an innovative, forward-thinking telecom service provider, serving Kuwait. At Cisco, we are proud to be a partner of choice, helping Zain accelerate agility, boost security, enhance its operations and meet business objectives in line with Kuwait's national agenda".

Cisco's Hosted Collaboration Solutions, offered by Zain to large, medium, and small enterprises, offer customers the ability to connect through unified voice communications, which enable voice and video communications via cloud-based services, enhanced communications, as well as interactions between employees with flexibility and ease through Cisco's industry-leading devices. Zain also offers a wide variety of innovative solutions for business customers, including voice/call control, mobility (SNR), IM and presence, point-to-point video, desktop softphone, smartphone softphone, remote access, unified messaging, immerse video, web conferencing, contact center agent, and more.

**Hamad Al-Marzouq:** "We are proud to be the first and only operator to provide Cisco HCS Cloud solutions in Kuwait, continuing our digital transformation strategy to empower a more efficient business sector"

## Virus blows shipping industry off course

LONDON: Sea freight transport, the lifeblood of trade and a bellwether of the global economy, has been blown off course by the new coronavirus, sparking general alarm.

As analysts pore over charts to gauge just how badly Chinese mega-factories have been hit, figures provided by cargo ship traffic paint a gloomy picture. The Baltic Dry Index (BDI) reflects the daily price of moving goods such as coal, rice and wheat along routes deemed representative of the global market.

Some call it the canary in the coal mine for the economic world. The BDI has now reached lows last seen in early 2016, when the shipping sector was suffering a supply and demand imbalance in the wake of the 2008-09 global economic crisis. Its "capsize" index for the largest category of ships - ones that cannot even squeeze through the Suez or Panama Canals - is at historic lows.

"The latest slump is directly related to the coronavirus epidemic in China and the subsequent restrictions on activity," London's Capital Economics consultancy said in a research note.

"Given that China accounts for about 40 percent of global seaborne trade, it is not so surprising that freight rates have tanked," Lars Bastian Ostereng, an analyst with Norway's Arctic Securities, said the outbreak "basically led to full stops in many ports in China".

### 'Free fall'

Louis Dreyfus Armateurs, a global merchant based in France, is one of many shipping giants approaching China with caution. The 169-year-old company has banned its sailors from going on shore and stopped relieving its crews at Chinese ports, resulting in considerable disruptions.

"The coronavirus epidemic is a very serious event for the market," Antoine Person, a top executive at the firm, told AFP. China does not just produce goods but is also a major consumer with a booming middle class and the world's largest population.



**CORK:** A handout still image taken from footage released by the Irish Coast Guard shows the abandoned MV Alta cargo ship on the rocks off the coast of Ballycotton near Cork in Ireland. — AFP

It accounts for "about 35 percent of all seaborne dry bulk imports in the world," Ostereng of Arctic Securities said. With the number of reported deaths from COVID-19 now above 2,400 and swathes of the country under effective lockdown for a second month, Chinese demand might suffer for months to come, Ostereng said.

This would impact exports to China from around the world, including the United States and Europe, with accompanying political repercussions. "Power generation in China has dropped and steel mills are reportedly cutting capacity utilization which, respectively, point to lower demand for coal and iron ore," Capital Economics wrote. That in turn reduces Chinese imports of coal and steel produced in places such as Australia and Brazil, impacting their economies.

The price of shipping both commodities is reflected in the BDI index, which is in "free fall", Capital Economics said. In addition to importing raw materials - Chinese factories consume nearly 40 percent of metals produced in the world - the factory slowdown has forced the world's largest shipper to brace for the year ahead.

Denmark's AP Moller-Maersk said Thursday that the outbreak has "significantly lowered visibility on what to expect in 2020". "We expect a weak start to the year," it warned.

### Seasonal swings

Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, the international business editor of The Daily Telegraph, wrote on Thursday that the shipping collapse was "threatening weeks of chaos for manufacturing supply lines and the broader structure of global trade". He conceded that optimists expect Chinese demand and factory output to explode once the restrictions end and businesses try to make up for lost ground.

But no one can be sure when that will be or if the world has avoided another viral wave that reaches pandemic proportions. Some shipowners, intermediaries and other market actors said factors such as which way the unpredictable Sino-US trade war goes would weigh as well.

Person, the Louis Dreyfus Armateurs executive, said that "new shipping standards and weather events are also behind the fall in the BDI." The weather, for one, will certainly improve, and the extended Lunar New Year festivities in China have ended, raising some hopes.

But Chinese factories are still experiencing severe worker shortages and Evans-Pritchard is unconvinced. "Fiscal stimulus is coming but the transmission channels will remain blocked as long as the lockdown measures stay in place," he wrote. "But to lift the curfew risks losing control of the virus." — AFP

## ECB launches a review of its monetary policy

FRANKFURT/RIYADH: For many people, the language of European Central Bank policymakers is so impenetrable, it could be beamed from another planet. Now, however, the ECB experts are in for a dose of real life as they meet audiences ranging from students to clergy this year to get their views on inflation and feedback on the central bank's work, six officials told Reuters.

The series of events, called "ECB Listens" after a similar initiative by the Federal Reserve, illustrates a marked change in style under new President Christine Lagarde, a former politician with a penchant for public relations. Just last October her predecessor, then President Mario Draghi, had expressed his reservations about communicating with the public at large rather than finance aficionados.

"One has to be cautious about that because as soon as you change your audience, you change your language and you naturally step into a different realm: the realm of politics," he said.

The change of tack could also be an indication of the quandary the eurozone's central bank finds itself over the adequacy of the inflation data used to justify trillions of euros worth of monetary stimulus to support Europe's economy. Surveys show households in the euro zone perceive inflation to be far higher than official data. Some ECB policymakers suspect this is because the data does not factor in changes in the price of homes occupied by their owners - a key measure of financial health for millions of people. An ECB spokesman declined to comment.

### Taking aim at inflation target

The ECB will kick off proceedings, part of a year-long strategic review, with an event in Brussels on March 26, according to the sources who are on or

close to the ECB's Governing Council. Each of the euro zone's 19 national central banks has been asked to hold at least one such meeting by the summer, they said. The ECB is unlikely to make any communication about the outcome of its review, which could see it redefine its inflation target, until well after the end of the public consultations, the officials added.

This would dash the hopes of some policymakers, including Slovak central bank governor Peter Kazimir, who have said they would like to see the ECB's revised inflation target published early, in time for its annual forum in Sintra, Portugal starting on June 29.

"It would look pretty awful if we put out substantial communication on the review in June because that would mean we are not taking the feedback seriously," said one of the sources, who all spoke on condition of anonymity because the ECB's deliberations are private.

### Public consultations

The public meetings will see small entrepreneurs, academics, students, pensioners and even priests invited to give ECB policymakers a piece of their mind on inflation as well as other topics ranging from climate change to digital currencies. However, the public meetings may draw accusations from some quarters of simply being a public-relations exercise.

The sources themselves were unanimous in believing input from the public was unlikely to sway deliberations on how to reset the ECB's definition of price stability, currently worded as an inflation rate "below, but close to 2 percent".

Rather, policymakers are keen to understand why perceptions of inflation are so high and why salary growth is comparatively sluggish. They will also try to explain the ECB's activities in simpler language, in line with the personal style of Lagarde, a former French finance minister and head of the International Monetary Fund. "There is a covert goal of spreading the ECB's message to the people," one of the sources said. "It's an experiment in a new communication approach." — Reuters

## Business

# Saudi material sector leads top GCC M&A transactions during Q4 2019

## Markaz: SAFCO closes largest deal with acquisition of SABIC Agri-Nutrients Investment Co

**KUWAIT:** Saudi's material sector leads the top GCC M&A transactions during Q4 2019 as per a report recently issued by the Investment Banking Department at Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz". The Saudi Arabian Fertilizers Company (SAFCO) closed the largest deal throughout the quarter through its acquisition of a fellow materials company, SABIC Agri-Nutrients Investment Company. SAFCO acquired 100 percent of the firm's share capital for a total consideration of \$1.2 billion.

The second largest transaction involves China's State Grid Corporation's intention to acquire a 49 percent stake in Oman Electricity Transmission for a total value of \$1.0 billion. The next transaction involved Ripplewood Advisors, a US-based private equity firm, acquiring a 6 percent stake in Banque Saudi Fransi for a total consideration of \$578 million. Following that, Saudi's Investment Recycling Company fully acquired Global Environment Management Services, a local industrial waste management firm, for \$453 million. The National Bank of Bahrain ("NBB") announced its intention to acquire a 71 percent stake in Bahrain Islamic Bank ("BISB") for \$234 million. Based on the latest offer, NBB will acquire over 754 million shares of BISB at \$0.3 per share or 0.167 NBB shares per BISB share.

### GCC M&A growth

According to Markaz' report, the number of closed M&A transactions in the GCC during Q4 2019 decreased by 8 percent compared to Q4 2018 however it increased by 63 percent quarter over quarter ("QoQ"). Among the region, the UAE reported the highest increase in the number of closed transactions QoQ, while Saudi Arabia recorded the highest increase compared to Q4 2018.

### Acquirers and targets

A majority of the transactions completed during Q4

2019 and Q3 2019 were carried out by GCC acquirers. Of the total number of transactions closed during Q4 2019, GCC acquirers accounted for 71 percent while foreign acquirers accounted for 25 percent. The remaining 4 percent represents transactions for which the buyer information was not available. The market witnessed a similar pattern during the previous quarter in Q3 2019 as GCC acquirers accounted for 67 percent of the total number of closed transactions while foreign acquirers accounted for 30 percent.

Overall, a majority of the GCC acquirers preferred to acquire local companies as opposed to targeting foreign players. Aside from Bahrain, the remaining GCC acquirers only closed a minimum of one transaction outside of the GCC whereas UAE acquirers were active in both the local, regional and foreign markets. UAE acquirers reported a total of seven closed transactions that involved foreign targets. In addition, Qatari acquirers didn't complete any transactions within their home country however, they completed transactions in the region and internationally.

### Foreign buyers

In comparison to the previous quarter, the market attracted a higher level of interest from foreign buyers throughout the quarter. Overall, there was a total of 12 closed transactions, which is 33 percent higher relative to Q3 2019 as well as Q4 2018. Foreign buyers have predominately acquired companies within the UAE, which is evident based on the number of transactions that involved UAE targets (-84 percent). The remaining transactions involved Bahraini and Saudi targets, each of whom represented 8 percent of the total transactions completed. Kuwait, Oman and Qatar recorded no foreign activity throughout the quarter.

Number of Closed GCC M&A Transactions

Country	Q4 2019	Q3 2019	Q4 2018	% Change (Q3 2019)	% Change (Q4 2018)
Bahrain	3	0	1	N/A	200%
Kuwait	11	8	18	38%	-39%
Oman	3	0	4	N/A	-25%
Qatar	0	1	3	-100%	-100%
Saudi Arabia	10	8	7	25%	43%
United Arab Emirates	22	13	20	69%	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>-8%</b>

### Sectorial view

The transactions that closed throughout the quarter spanned across multiple sectors unlike the previous quarter whereby 60 percent of the total activity was concentrated within four sectors. The sectors that witnessed the greatest level of activity throughout Q4 2019 were the Industrials sector and the Financials sector, which accounted for 17 percent and 15 percent of the total number of transactions respectively. The remaining transactions predominately fell within the following four sectors: Consumer Discretionary, Consumer Staples, Healthcare and Real Estate. Collectively, these four sectors accounted for 40 percent of the total activity.

In addition, the Real Estate sector witnessed a slower

season last quarter however, it observed a high level of activity throughout Q4 2019, in which it recorded a total of 5 closed transactions. On the other hand, the Energy and IT sectors recorded the greatest drop in the level of activity relative to the previous quarter.

### Deals pipeline

By the end of Q4 2019, there was a total of 14 announced transactions in the pipeline, which translates into a 17 percent growth QoQ. Roughly 36 percent of these transactions involved Saudi targets, followed by the UAE and Oman, who accounted for 29 percent and 14 percent of the announced transactions, respectively. Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar had each announced one transaction throughout the quarter.

## NBK MONEY MARKETS REPORT

### Virus effect begins to feel across global economy

**KUWAIT:** The economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak is becoming more apparent worldwide. Apple announced a surprise cut to its sales forecast. Asian governments' downgraded growth prospects, and German investor sentiment is collapsing. The fallout from the outbreak of the virus could not come at a worse time for economies like Japan and Germany, who were just beginning to see recovery after a year of global trade tensions weighed on manufacturing and exports. China insists the rate of infections is stabilizing as the economic damage is most apparent in their local economy and usual activity is halted. Sectors across the board are taking hits as factories deal with worker absences and supply chain shortages, while consumers are limited by travel restrictions and fears of the infection. Europe is starting to worry as well, with automakers fearing additional supply chain disruption. Germany carries the bulk of the burden, following a dismal year for the economy thanks to a decline in its key auto sector. In this past week, the euro was sent to record lows, gold prices climbed to record highs, and Asian stocks retreated. The US dollar advanced touching three-year highs against a basket of major currencies and neared the 100 psychological mark.

### Rates are likely to stay in place

The Federal Reserve released minutes from its Jan. 28-29 meeting during which it held interest rates steady at a range between 1.5 percent and 1.75 percent. Officials expressed confidence about the state of the US economy even as financial markets are pricing in a near-certainty of at least one cut this year and possibly two. FOMC members noted that the outlook for the economy had gotten "stronger" since its December forecast. There were only few mentions of possible dangers from the virus, though the spread of the disease had only just become an issue at the time of the meeting. "Some trade uncertainties had diminished recently, and there were some signs of stabilization in global growth. Nonetheless, uncertainties about the outlook remained, including those posed by the outbreak of the coronavirus."

the minutes said. The FOMC cut rates three times in 2019 but opted to remain unchanged in its previous two meetings.

Though trade tensions have eased, many tariffs remain in place and further tensions could flare up. The minutes said policy would remain flexible if conditions change. Looking at inflation, the Fed's preferred price measure rose 1.6 percent last year, and central bankers have failed to sustain their target of 2 percent since its announcement in 2012. The minutes revealed several officials might support a slight overshoot of the 2 percent target. The US economy began 2020 powerfully. The jobless rate is near a half-century low at 3.6 percent, while average hourly earnings climbed 3.1 percent y/y. Household consumption - aided by low interest rates - should help sustain growth and lift inflation back to the 2 percent target. Meanwhile, central bankers are buying \$60 billion of bills per month to boost reserve balances and will continue to do so moving into the second quarter of 2020. Funds have raced to the US dollar as the yen headed for its worst week in 2.5 years as worries about the coronavirus spreading in South Korea, Japan, and Beijing drove demand from Asia to the US. As investors continued to head to haven assets, the yield on the benchmark 10-year US Treasury fell to 1.5186 percent, while the two year fell to 1.3892 percent.

### Inflation rises alongside gasoline prices

Canada's annual inflation rose to 2.4 percent y/y in January due to higher gasoline prices, posing a challenge for the Bank of Canada should it decide to ease rates in the commodity-dependent economy. Stripping out gasoline, the inflation rate sits at 2 percent for the month - continuously hovering near the bank's target. Gasoline prices surged 11.2 percent y/y early January in reaction to tensions between the US and China and in the Middle East. However, prices later fell as oil demand was crushed due to the spread of the coronavirus leading many believe the effect of gas prices should dissolve. The central bank has held its overnight interest rate steady since October 2018 even as many counterparts eased, though kept the door open for a possible rate cut. There are many reasons for the bank to avoid a more accommodative monetary policy. The unemployment rate has held near 50-year lows, while wage growth continued to grow faster than the inflation rate. The housing market is strong and the stock market is delivering positive returns. The economy surprisingly grew in November, the trade deficit narrowed in December, and manufacturing activity expanded in January for the fifth straight month. The healthy domestic conditions for consumers might only get better thanks to the recent federal income tax cut. Still, the bank re-iterated that it will leave the door open for rate cuts if domestic growth stalls.

### Investor morale worsens

Investor sentiment in Germany dropped sharply in

February, adding to an increasingly worrisome picture for Europe's largest economy. Sentiment for the German economy fell 18 points this month to a reading of 8.7, significantly below January's reading of 26.7 and the 21.5 expected. The feared negative effect of the coronavirus epidemic in China is a leading cause for the decline, although the German economy has been struggling for some time now. Germany's manufacturing sector suffered its worst year for a decade last year following a sharp decline in orders. Figures show the economy flat lined in the fourth quarter, producing zero growth. For the whole of 2019, the economy expanded just 0.4 percent.

On a brighter note, on Friday German Flash Manufacturing PMI rose to 47.8, up from its 45.3 previous and 44.8 expected. Services remained resilient registering at 53.3, lower than the 53.9 expected and 54.2 seen prior. Despite reports of a slump in both exports and sentiment linked to the impact of the coronavirus, the manufacturing sector has moved closer to stabilization as surveys indicate slower falls in output, new orders and employment. Though the figure still represents a contraction, it is still the highest value seen since January 2019. The euro rose following the release of the data, while European stocks recovered some of their earlier losses.

### A worrisome labor market

The Australian job market has not seen an easy beginning to 2020. The unemployment rate unexpectedly rose from 5.1 percent to 5.3 percent in January despite an increase in full-time employment. Part-time workers left 32,700 jobs but 46,200 full-time jobs were added, creating the net increase of 13,500 and a participation rate of 66.1 percent. The high participation rate (the percentage of the population over 15 either working or looking for work) illustrates an economy where the labor market is struggling to create jobs quick enough. For perspective, the 65.7 percent seen in March of 2018 was considered a peak figure.

Though the market experienced a three-year run of hiring strength that withstood global volatility offshore and a local slowdown, the health of the job market failed to push unemployment lower and wages higher as it coincided with a growing labor force. This prompted the Reserve Bank of Australia to cut interest rates three times in 2019 in an effort to support investment and drive faster growth and inflation. Still, the easing has seen minuscule results, with Governor Philip Lowe maintaining "long and variable lags" in monetary policy means it will take time for stimulus to work its way through the economy. Meanwhile, investors will continue to assess the impact of the virus outbreak after the People's Bank of China lowered its benchmark lending rates to stimulate the economy.

The central bank's cash rate is currently at a record low 0.75 percent, with Lowe estimating the lower bound at 0.25 percent - meaning he has just two cuts before unconventional policy comes into the picture. Still, traders are pricing in a slight change of a rate cut in the next two months, though bets climb in July. The Australian dollar declined following the release of the data, ending the week at near its lowest in a decade.

### China's virus challenge

Chinese lenders have cut a key lending rate in an effort to prop up the economy recently battered by news of the coronavirus. Major lenders reduced their one-year loan prime rate (rate that banks charge their most creditworthy clients) by 0.1 percent to 4.05 percent. This follows a widely expected move a week prior by the People's Bank of China lowering the one-year loan prime rate. Governor Chen Yulu said the bank had "ample room for policy interventions", arguing the most likely scenario for China was a "rapid recovery, with the total economic impact relatively contained". Chinese stocks rallied following news of the cut, with the CSI 300 rising more than 2 percent throughout the day. Elsewhere in Asia, factory activity in Japan suffered its steepest contraction since seven years this month. There is some confidence that the virus count in China would decline. According to China's National Health Commission, there were 349 new cases reported on Wednesday in Hubei - the center of the epidemic. This is a sharp decline from the previous day's 1,693 and 1,807 on Monday.

### Oil recovers

Oil prices rose to their highest in three weeks largely in response to China's latest economic stimulus measures. The rebound follows a heavily shorted market in the early weeks of the coronavirus outbreak. Oil had rallied on speculation that the worst economic impact of the virus has been accounted for. A smaller than expected increase in US crude stockpiles was also a positive for the global supply. Still, global investors remained nervous regarding supply chains dependent on Chinese manufacturing. Gold extended its recent bullish run, climbing to seven-year highs on Friday amid concerns over the spread of the coronavirus. The safe-haven metal rally follows the latest warning by the World Health Organization regarding the outbreak, fueling pessimism about the global growth outlook. Though the coronavirus may be considered a major factor for the rise, prices have also been supported by weaker government bond yields and a Federal Reserve that has kept interest rates low. Low US Treasury yields also make precious metals, which don't offer a coupon, more attractive. Other metals such as silver, copper, and platinum also picked up.

## EXCHANGE RATES

### BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

#### ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.746
Indian Rupees	4.279
Pakistani Rupees	1.984
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.682
Nepali Rupees	2.669
Singapore Dollar	221.020
Hongkong Dollar	39.421
Bangladesh Taka	3.596
Philippine Peso	6.044
Thai Baht	9.754
Malaysian Ringgit	78.376

#### GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.775
Qatari Riyal	84.224
ani Riyal	796.491
Bahraini Dinar	814.270
UAE Dirham	83.490

#### ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	22.750
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.716
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.231
Tunisian Dinar	113.920
Jordanian Dinar	432.630
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.204
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.532

#### EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	306.450
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Euro	335.870
Sterling Pound	400.530
Canadian dollar	233.660
Turkish lira	51.160
Swiss Franc	316.580
US Dollar Buying	299.000

### DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

#### Rate for Transfr

Rate for Transfr	Selling Rate
US Dollar	306.100
Canadian Dollar	232.080
Sterling Pound	396.730
Euro	332.070
Swiss Franc	303.785
Bahrain Dinar	814.035
UAE Dirhams	83.740
Qatari Riyals	84.985
Saudi Riyals	82.520
Jordanian Dinar	433.025
Egyptian Pound	19.641
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.681
Indian Rupees	4.273
Pakistani Rupees	1.983
Bangladesh Taka	3.571
Philippines Pessso	6.042
Cyprus pound	18.205
Japanese Yen	3.745
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.684
Malaysian Ringgit	74.135
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.050

Thai Bhat	10.755
Turkish Lira	50.700
Singapore dollars	221.522

### BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

#### CURRENCY BUY SELL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
<b>EUROPE</b>		
British Pound	0.390975	0.404875
Czech Korune	0.005268	0.014568
Danish Krone	0.040476	0.045476
Euro	0.325503	0.339203
Georgian Lari	0.111182	0.111182
Hungarian	0.001156	0.001346
Norwegian Krone	0.028982	0.034182
Romanian Leu	0.065785	0.082635
Russian Ruble	0.004777	0.004777
Slovakia	0.009195	0.019195
Swedish Krona	0.027496	0.032496
Swiss Franc	0.307268	0.318268
<b>Australasia</b>		
Australian Dollar	0.195324	0.207324
New Zealand Dollar	0.188610	0.198110
<b>America</b>		
Canadian Dollar	0.226629	0.235629
US Dollars	0.302350	0.306900
US Dollars Mint	0.302850	0.306900
<b>Asia</b>		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002895	0.003696

Chinese Yuan	0.042367	0.045867
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037503	0.040253
Indian Rupee	0.003642	0.004414
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002663	0.002843
Korean Won	0.000244	0.000259
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069764	0.075764
Nepalese Rupee	0.002613	0.002953
Pakistan Rupee	0.001339	0.002109
Philippine Peso	0.005869	0.006169
Singapore Dollar	0.214019	0.224019
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001325	0.001905
Taiwan	0.010195	0.010375
Thai Baht	0.009438	0.009988
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.000013

#### Arab

Bahraini Dinar	0.806689	0.814797
Egyptian Pound	0.019384	0.022124
Iranian Riyal	0.000085	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000201	0.000261
Jordanian Dinar	0.427331	0.436331
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000105	0.000255
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021234	0.045234
Omani Riyal	0.790826	0.798774
Qatar Riyal	0.083515	0.084355
Saudi Riyal	0.080633	0.081933
Syrian Pound	0.001300	0.001520
Tunisian Dinar	0.103039	0.111039
Turkish Lira	0.043705	0.053550
UAE Dirhams	0.082799	0.083631
Yemeni Riyal	0.000996	0.001076

Business

# KFH launches an exclusive KFH-Oasis Club card designed with Kuwaiti flag

## Launch to celebrate National Days with KFH customers

**KUWAIT:** To celebrate Kuwait National Days with its customers, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched an exclusive edition of KFH-Oasis Club Card designed with Kuwaiti flag.

Group Deputy General Manager Cards at KFH, Nimer Yasin said that the campaign includes all new and renewed KFH-Oasis club cards, pointing out that KFH maintains launching new and distinguished products that meet customers' aspirations, fostering strategic partnerships to ensure optimal implementation of its various campaigns and programs.

He praised the fruitful collaboration between KFH and Kuwait Airways, Oasis Club and MasterCard in several campaigns. Yasin added in a press release that KFH-Oasis Club card is prepaid card issued in collaboration between KFH and Kuwait Airways "Oasis Club". In addition to the privileges and discounts, it offers, with every transaction, chances to gain extra miles from "Oasis Club" that can be redeemed for free tickets from Kuwait Airways. Moreover, KFH launched "The Journey of 18 Million Miles Begins with a Card" Campaign, exclusively for KFH Oasis Club prepaid MasterCard cardholders in collaboration with Kuwait Airways and Oasis Club.

"Due to the successful campaigns of 'Journey of 6

Million Miles Begins with a Card' and 'Journey of 12 Million Miles Begins with a Card', KFH launched the 'The Journey of 18 Million Miles Begins with a Card' campaign with multiple benefits", Yasin said.

He added that the 3-month campaign which ends on March 12th, 2020 includes total prizes of up to 18 million miles for 311 winners, where a customer gets 2 miles from "Oasis Club" in reward of every 1 KD domestic purchases, and 3 miles for every 1 KD international purchases.

Yasin confirmed that KFH is keen on rewarding its customers with exclusive promotions that meet their expectations, offering unique and distinguished banking experience and maintaining the bank's leadership position in the market. He confirmed that KFH has recently launched an exclusive offer for its customers with a 15 percent discount for KFH Oasis Club prepaid MasterCard cardholders, and 10 percent for all other KFH cardholders. In this offer, customers would be able to benefit through booking tickets and hotels on Oasis Club's Kuwait Airways Holidays.

Yasin explained that the exclusive campaigns and discounts contribute in adding value to KFH's competitiveness, pointing out that KFH has increased its customer base, market share, financial indicators and cus-



**Nimer Yasin** and **Meshal Al-Mutairi**

tomers satisfaction. He added that KFH keeps adopting innovation and new technologies to improve customer satisfaction, leverage services quality and maintain KFH leadership.

Meanwhile, Meshal Al-Mutairi, Director, Commercially Important Persons at Kuwait Airways, said: "In collaboration with KFH, Kuwait Airways seeks to celebrate national days with launching joint National Days card. We are pleased to convey our best wishes and congratulations to His Highness the Amir, May Allah Almighty safeguard and protect him, on Kuwait's

National Day celebrations. Also, we are pleased that this occasion coincides with the largest campaign that includes prizes up to 18 million miles and enables Oasis Club prepaid Mastercard cardholders to win million miles and travel with Kuwait Airways. This campaign designed to reward loyal customers with total prizes reaching up to 18 million miles for 311 winners." He added that customers can take advantage of the exclusive discount and multiple benefits by contacting Kuwait Airways Holidays via 1806060 or visit the Oasis Club's headquarters and Holidays at their locations in Rakan Tower and at The Avenues mall."

Al-Mutairi added that Oasis Club and Kuwait Airways Holidays are flexible programs that enable customers to redeem their miles for free tickets and upgrade to business class or first class when booking on Kuwait Airways or using miles cards such as Oasis club prepaid Mastercard.

To learn more about Oasis club partnerships and the distinctive offers of Kuwait Airways Holidays, customers can visit the company's website. As a national carrier, Kuwait Airways always seeks to expand its partnerships in the local market and enhance its products to provide the best travel experience with distinguished services and packages."

## After backing HS2 rail, Johnson mulls Heathrow runway

**LONDON:** Having backed Britain's proposed high-speed railway HS2, Boris Johnson is under pressure to keep his pledge to scrap plans for a third runway at London Heathrow airport as climate fears intensify. Prime Minister Johnson, who wants big infrastructure projects to help drive Britain's post-Brexit economy, said earlier this month that the country would shortly begin full construction work on HS2, dismissing soaring costs.

The project, while quickening train journeys between London in southeast England and major cities in the north, will also free up capacity on existing lines and aims to help rebalance the UK economy. While construction of the HS2 line is set to produce vast amounts of carbon emissions and destroy ancient woodlands and wildlife, according to experts, its electric trains are set to be far more environmentally friendly than planes making similar trips.

### 'Lying in front of bulldozers'

Johnson's predecessor Theresa May in 2018 approved a new runway at Heathrow, Europe's busiest airport, three years after Johnson had promised to "lie down in front of... bulldozers and stop the construction", citing environmental as well as aesthetic concerns. Her government argued that the project would provide a major boost to Britain's economy, creating for example up to 114,000 local jobs by 2030.

With Johnson now prime minister, an MP from the small Liberal Democrat party recently asked the Conservative leader if he would carry through with his 2015 bulldozer promise. Johnson appeared to sit on the fence with his answer regarding the runway, which unlike HS2, will be funded almost entirely privately.

Replying to the question by Liberal MP Munira Wilson, Johnson told parliament that he had "seen no bulldozers at present nor any immediate prospect of them arriving". To allay environmental



In this file photo British Airways passenger aircraft are pictured at London Heathrow Airport, west of London. — AFP

concerns, Heathrow last year said it planned to reroute rivers and roads as part of the construction work.

And on Thursday, it added that it hopes all the airport's buildings and infrastructure will be zero carbon by around 2035. Building of the runway is expected to start in 2022 and take four years. New terminals will not be ready however until around 2050, when the UK government hopes the country will have a net-zero carbon emissions economy.

Regarding the runway's construction, Johnson "will continue to prevaricate and put obstacles to progress in the way... before zero emissions are a reality", independent aviation analyst Howard Wheeldon told AFP.

### Legal challenge

A decision to scrap the project could be made easier for Johnson, however, thanks to legal action by clear opponents of the project. One case has been brought by a team including Greenpeace, local London councils and the capital's mayor Sadiq Khan. They are appealing against a High Court loss last May. The new verdict is expected shortly.

"Heathrow's third runway has many obstacles to overcome, any one of which is capable of blocking the development," said John Sauven, executive direc-

tor of Greenpeace UK. "The plan requires too much money for Heathrow Ltd shareholders, who could sell up in protest. It will create too much noise, air pollution and traffic for the local residents, and far too much carbon for a planet in a climate emergency. "It's difficult to predict which of these will end up derailing the runway but it seems very unlikely that it will clear all of those hurdles," Sauven told AFP.

### £30 billion cost

The expansion is expected to cost about £30 billion (\$39 billion, 36 billion euros), including £14 billion on the first phase. By contrast, HS2 is projected to have a total bill greater than £100 billion—almost all of it at the taxpayers' expense—and a first-phase opening by the end of the decade. Heathrow, west of London, aims to increase its total capacity to 130 million passengers per day, compared with about 78 million currently. "Heathrow's new runway will make the UK a winner, connecting all of Britain to global growth and that's why we need to get on with delivering it," the airport's chief executive John Holland-Kaye recently said. Heathrow is owned by an investment consortium comprising also sovereign wealth funds from nations including China, Singapore and Qatar. — AFP

## Kosovo PM ready to revoke tariffs for Serbian goods

**PRISTINA, Kosovo:** A few years ago, the newly elected Kosovo prime minister overturned Serbian trucks. But Albin Kurti now says he is ready to revoke tariffs introduced by his predecessor on Serbian goods. Kurti, who took office in early February, is backed by most of 1.8 million inhabitants of the former Serbian province for such a move but is nonetheless walking on eggshells.

Under intense international pressure to abolish tariffs and resume stalled talks with Serbia, Kurti also faces a fierce backlash from veterans who fought for independence and dominated politics for decades. The former student leader wrote recently on his Facebook account that he was "ready" to "abolish the 100 percent tariffs" on Serbian goods.

They were introduced in late 2018 by Ramush Haradinaj as retaliation for a Serbian blockade of Kosovo's Interpol membership. Belgrade still refuses to recognize the independence declared by the breakaway territory in 2008. The tariffs "will be replaced by the principle of reciprocity between the two states" in political, economic and commercial affairs, Kurti said. The concept, commonly in use in international relations, could mean for example a ban for Serbian license plates in Kosovo, as Kosovar plates are prohibited in Serbia. US envoy for Belgrade-Prishtina talks Richard Grenell urged Prishtina to abolish tariffs as "it hurts Kosovo and chases businesses away from creating jobs".

### National pride

But opposition parties that emerged from the

guerrilla movement that fought Serb forces during the 1998-1999 war which claimed 13,000 lives, are against commercial concessions.

To mobilize the public, the opposition is trying to collect a third of the votes in Kosovo's 120-seat parliament to call an extraordinary session on the issue. Haradinaj urged the new prime minister to refrain from removing tariffs "for some temporary political points you might gain from the international community. "We have to stand united in opposing Serbia until mutual recognition," he said. His AAK party threatened to hold street protests against the move.

The tariffs are a "response to Serbia's constant attacks against Kosovo", said Kadri Veseli, leader of the largest opposition party PDK. For Shpetim Gashi, analyst at the American think-tank Council for Inclusive Governance, the issue goes beyond tariffs and is now a question of "national pride".

"Kurti will be walking on a tightrope when replacing it with reciprocity," Gashi told AFP.

The European Union, like Washington, made normalization of ties between Serbia and Kosovo a priority for the sake of economic development and future integration into the EU.

### 'Not forever'

A recent survey by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies showed that about 60 percent of those questioned backed the move while 35 percent were against it.

"I supported my government's decision to retaliate with the tariffs, but it cannot last forever", Ekrem Hoxha, a 40-year old technician told AFP. Muhamet Sejdiu, a 32-year old grocery store owner, echoed his words. "I understand what brought the tariffs. Serbia really has gone too far," he said. "I think it is time to return to normalcy. On the shelves I have goods from Bulgaria, (North) Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Europe... I don't mind having among them goods from Serbia."

Serbia's exports to Kosovo amount to around 400 million euros (\$433 million) annually and economists



Prime Minister Kurti's proposal for reciprocity with Serbia would mean for example a ban on Serbian license plates in Kosovo, as Kosovar plates are prohibited in Serbia. — AFP

like Safet Gerxhalii call for normalization between the two neighbors. "It is time to think about opening up a dialogue on eliminating barriers and doing business, not just between Kosovo and Serbia, but also in the whole region," he said. In exchange, Brussels and Washington are asking Belgrade to end its campaign to convince other countries to withdraw their recognitions of Kosovo's independence. According to Prishtina, Kosovo is recognized by more than 115 states, although Belgrade claims the number is less than a 100. Kurti said he was ready to resume a dialogue "focused on mutual recognition". The former rebel seems to have turned the page on his tumultuous past when he was prisoner of Slobodan Milosevic's regime and rioted against Serbia's rule and later the Kosovo establishment by spraying the parliament with tear gas. "It is clear that Kurti is evolving," said Agron Bajrami, editor in chief of prominent Koha Ditore daily. "The time for overturning Serbian trucks has passed." — AFP

## AUB offers unique features for Al-Hassad customers

**KUWAIT:** As a part of continuous development for products and services, Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced new features to boost the uniqueness of Al-Hassad Islamic Account by offering the highest number of chances to win throughout the year. By offering over 800 prizes annually, Al-Hassad presents more than double the number of prizes by any other bank in Kuwait.

Year after year, Al-Hassad Islamic Account continues its success to become the top and best Islamic account for prizes and draws in Kuwait. With new unprecedented features, Al-Hassad Islamic package of prizes for 2020 includes additional unique features, such as having all its draws for AUB customers in Kuwait only.

For the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw". This is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the last five years with one draw chance per KD 50.

The very much celebrated Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha draws continue gaining the interest of customers, where winners in these draws receive KD 100,000 each Eid, which adds more joy and happiness during those special occasions. The grand quarterly draw for Al-Hassad Islamic account of KD 250,000 prize continues being a key aspiration for customers wishing to fulfill their dreams.

On top of that, Al-Hassad still includes the monthly draw of KD 100,000, as well as 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account beneficial to both families and others wishing to build their savings through a number of short and long term advantages that are lauded by existing and potential customers.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Hassad Islamic account has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Such features include the simplest and easiest program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, unique draws during Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, loyalty multipliers, unique online account opening feature, transparent draws held during radio shows with live broadcast on the Bank's social media platforms.

## CBK announces winner of Al-Najma weekly draw

**KUWAIT:** Commercial Bank conducted the weekly draw on Al-Najma Account. The draw was conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Mr Ahmed Al-Abduljader.

The winner was Mr Amba Lal Teli - the prize of KD 5,000.

The Bank stated that the account prizes this year is featured by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that Al-Najma Account will offer weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000. Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, where each KD 25 will give the customer one chance to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

Customers can obtain further information on Al-Najma Account by either contacting the Bank through live video call service on CBK mobile application or calling the Service Center on 1888225 or by visiting the Bank's website www.CBK.com and they can also visit their nearest CBK branch where the Bank staff will be ready to serve them and respond to their queries. Furthermore all details & information related to the latest offers & services launched by the Bank is also available on the Bank's social sites.

## Business

# British digital bank serves clients shunned by established lenders

## Newly-arrived foreigners find trouble opening traditional accounts

LONDON: Among Britain's digital app-based banks that are attracting moneyed urban millennials is Monese, which also courts customers neglected by the country's established lenders. In early 2000, Estonia-born entrepreneur Norris Koppel arrived in Britain and spotted a major gap in UK banking for newly-arrived foreigners who had trouble opening traditional accounts.

Koppel was snubbed by banks owing to a lack of address documents and no credit history—and vowed to help those in a similar predicament. In the nation's booming financial technology or fintech sector, mobile phone app-based "neo-banks" such as Revolut, Monzo and Starling have established themselves as plucky upstarts. Koppel's lender Monese joined them, expanding to 31 nations in Europe with two million customers in only five years of operation.

### Riding the wave

"Investor trust in Fintechs and the amount of investment being poured into neo-banks is actually very significant; it hasn't really slowed down. 2019 was definitely a peak point so let's see how 2020 goes," Koppel told AFP. "It's very clear that banking is going through fundamental changes... and there are a group of neo-banks including Monese who are on top of that wave."

The company describes itself as an electronic money institution that provides banking facilities—but it does not currently offer credit. "Monese was born from my own very personal frustration," Koppel explained. "When I moved to the country I couldn't open a simple account and I thought maybe that is something that can be done."

"Monese is built for people who are moving to a

different country, starting a new life, finding a better job, retiring, going for studies, or getting married somewhere else," he added.

In Britain, around 80 percent of Monese customers are foreigners whose salary goes directly into their account. Groups like Monese that only operate online carry out checks to verify the identity of new applicants to help fight money laundering.

The app aims to compete with Revolut and Monzo, which have eight million and three million customers respectively in a fiercely competitive market.

Monese expects to turn a profit by 2021.

### "Uber of banking?"

Monese, which has a global workforce of roughly 400 people, describes itself as the "Uber of banking", in reference to the popular ride-hailing app. "It's a good comparison," Koppel said, noting that it was used by a lot of gig-economy workers at Uber and takeaway delivery service Deliveroo.

Britain's traditional banking sector, which is still reeling from the 2008 global financial crisis and a string of product mis-selling scandals, retains a strong grip on personal banking, experts say.

Warwick University's Andreas Kokkinis, who specializes in corporate law and financial regulation, told AFP that fintech was gaining a foothold however. "The six biggest UK banks have 87 percent of the market share for current accounts so the remaining 13 percent is split amongst smaller conventional banks and building societies, and challenger banks," he said.

"In that sense large universal banks—HSBC, Barclays, Lloyds Banking Group, Royal Bank of Scotland Group and Santander UK—retain their dominance over UK retail banking market.



LONDON: Employees of mobile phone app-based 'neo-bank', Monese work at Monese office in London. — AFP

"However, challenger banks, which operate exclusively online and thus offer cheaper services, are popular amongst customers below the age of 37." Kokkinis added that, if current trends persist, "the market share of challenger banks will grow significantly in the near future," which could lead to takeovers.

"This does not necessarily mean that large banks will lose their dominant position in retail banking markets. What is more likely to happen is that large banks

will acquire successful challenger banks."

Monese is now in fundraising talks that could give it coveted unicorn status—meaning that the business would be valued at more than £1.0 billion (\$1.3 billion, 1.2 billion euros).

The company is seeking £100 million in additional funds from new and existing shareholders, which include US online payments specialist Paypal and British Airways parent group IAG. — AFP

## Boubyan Capital launches professional brokerage service



Badria Al-Humaidhi



Suliman K Al-Enazi

KUWAIT: Boubyan Capital Investment Company, Boubyan Bank's investment arm, has announced the launch of its subscription-only professional brokerage service, which includes innovative and developed features that help brokerage clients perform technical analysis of various stocks and accurately analyze markets' performance using state-of-the-art technologies against a competitive monthly fee.

In this regard, Boubyan Capital's Executive Director - Asset Management & Brokerage Division, Badria Al-Humaidhi said: "The features of this service include a window to place advanced orders, maintain a record for

direct deals, charts & graphs, performance analysis and portfolio summaries."

Al-Humaidhi explained: "Boubyan Capital Investment Company always seeks to keep pace with technological developments to provide various solutions to Boubyan brokerage clients to grant them access to a unique and integrated trading experience upon clients' requests."

On his part, Suliman Khalifah Al-Enazi, Boubyan Capital's Senior Analyst - Asset Management & Brokerage Division stated: "Our advanced order placement window has been designed to achieve speed and produc-

tivity, as it reduces the number of steps required to execute orders. Moreover, the record of deals and orders displays all executed market deals and the full schedule of offers and orders".

Al-Enazi went on to add: "This platform includes chart tools and more than 50 technical indicators for analyzing price trends, opening, closing and adjusting positions through fully integrated charts, in addition to specialized follow-up dashboards to display profit/loss, revenue and performance history for any account during a specific timeframe."

Moreover, he stressed: "Boubyan trading service provides a unique trading experience enabling clients to have access to a package of Sharia-compliant brokerage and trading services covering various markets." Boubyan Capital Investment Company is one of the leading companies in Kuwait that provides clients with Sharia-compliant online trading opportunities in local, regional and international markets through Boubyan Brokerage website or Boubyan Brokerage mobile App. Clients may open a brokerage account with a minimum of KD 1,000 (in cash or stocks).

## NBK welcomes customers at its airport branches

KUWAIT: Serving customers round-the-clock, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) remains at their service throughout the National and Liberation holidays at its Kuwait International Airport branches located in T1 and T4, giving them access to the various banking services available at other branches across Kuwait.

The branches exclusively carry Multi-Currency ATMs to allow travelers to withdraw from six currencies that are the Kuwaiti Dinar, US Dollar, Euro, British Pound Sterling, UAE Dirham, and Saudi Riyal. The ATMs are conveniently located between the departure gates and the arrival area, serving all travelers whether they are NBK customers or not.

The bank will also have Mobile ATMs placed in a number of areas around Kuwait during the National and Liberation days, in addition to the Interactive Teller Machines (ITMs) which are available every day from 9 am to 11 pm at Kuwait International Airport T4 and The Avenues. NBK has also made it possible to withdraw in Saudi Riyal and Bahraini Dinar at the Multi-Currency ATMs located at the Nuwaiseeb border crossing.

In addition to the branches and ATMs, NBK has made available toll-free numbers for all customers to contact the bank 24 hours, seven days a week while traveling, responding to their queries about any service while ensuring they enjoy a safe and comfortable holiday. The numbers are available in nine countries and for free at any time of the day. The countries in which these numbers are available are: US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Turkey, Italy, Spain and UAE. Customers can also contact the bank anytime through the NBK WhatsApp at +965 1801801.

Customers will continue to manage

their accounts and finances and benefit from all the value-added services and solutions available on NBK Mobile Banking and NBK Online Banking. NBK Contact Center will also be available to customers round-the-clock to serve their needs and answer their questions.

Ghadeer Al-Awadhi, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "I would like to congratulate our customers on the occasion of the National and Liberation days of Kuwait and assure them that we will stay at their service around the clock at our airport branches during these holidays, in addition to having our ATMs ready for the increasing number of withdrawals by enhancing them with the latest technology for an even higher level of security."

Al-Awadhi added: "We make sure at NBK that our customers enjoy a pleasant travel experience during the holidays by providing them with services that guarantee withdrawals in the main currencies while staying in direct contact with us through our call center and meeting all their banking needs at our airport branches."

Al-Awadhi added: "We monitor our ATMs and ensure they are filled whenever they drop below the limit, especially in locations where our customers tend to withdraw the most such as shopping malls, markets and leisure parks." Providing convenience and reliability when travelling, NBK continues to offer its customers a wide range of exclusive services for their specific needs when they travel. These services accompany customers from the moment they get on their flight and until they land safely in Kuwait. NBK continues to maintain its leadership position in the banking sector supported by the largest local banking network comprising of 68 branches in Kuwait, in addition to an extensive network that exceeds 13,500 Point of Sale devices, including more than 11,700 NFC-enabled devices, the largest in Kuwait. NBK also has the largest network of ATMs owned by a bank in Kuwait, with 327 ATMs, including more than 100 CDMs.



Ghadeer Al-Awadhi

## Burgan Bank's working hours during holidays

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday that it will be officially closed during the National and Liberation Day Holidays from 25/2/2020 till 27/2/2020 and will resume business on Sunday the 1st of March 2020. However, to accommodate Burgan Bank customers, the Airport Branch will be operating 24 hours during the holidays. Khairan Branch will be operating on Friday the 28th and Saturday the 29th of February 2020 from 10am to 5pm.

For more information on any products or services, customers are required to contact Burgan Bank's call center 1804080 during the holiday. Burgan Bank would like to take this opportunity and extend its best wishes and greetings in the celebration of the national holidays.

## Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

### The lucky winners are:

1. Ahmad Atallah Mohammad Aldesam
2. Zuhair Yones Alaasmi
3. Mohammad Abdullah Ali
4. Mohammad Abdullah Ali
5. Imad Attar

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The

Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

your voice from ambient background noise during all your important personal and work calls, the person on the other end of the line can hear exactly what you are saying without all the extra background noise.

### Comfortable even when used for a long time

While most earphones can be uncomfortable to use for long periods of time, Huawei FreeBuds 3 put your comfort first. The latest accessory from Huawei feature a unique open-fit design for all day wear without any discomfort, added pressure on your ears, or even worrying about them falling out.

### Music sounds better

If you are particular about every single note, the unique design and custom innovative architecture of these earphones' balances bass, treble and middle, for a music experience like no other. The Huawei FreeBuds 3 incorporate a customized bass tube in to give you a pleasant sound throughout. These are the top three reasons why you should get the Huawei FreeBuds 3. To top it off, the Huawei FreeBuds 3 also boast a solid battery life with quick and stable connections. You get your now, in both Black and White colors.



TV shows or take a phone call even if they are sitting at a cafe or riding an airplane.

This is all possible because, while you are listening to your content, the Huawei FreeBuds 3 are listening to the rest of the world and actively cancelling out the noise to provide you with a full immersive experience whether you are riding a bike, running or outside on a blustery day. We often notice that wind can significantly affect call quality especially when running, but Huawei has designed the perfect microphone cancellation duct that can reduce wind noise, so you can enjoy all your calls or listen to music clearly. Also, thanks to Huawei's innovations such as the embedded bone sensor that picks up the vibration of the head to better distinguish

## 3 reasons why you should get Huawei FreeBuds 3

KUWAIT: Our smart devices help us take our lives on-the-go, giving us experiences that used to only be available at home or in the office. Thanks to streaming services, audiobooks, and podcasts, people watch and listen to more content than ever before. And with our workouts and long commutes in metros, headphones are an important way to interact with our devices. Huawei has introduced innovations in the Huawei FreeBuds 3 that help users enjoy all their digital audio packed in design that is comfortable to wear for long hours.

### Intelligent noise cancellation down to a pin drop

Trying to follow a phone conversation or movie can be daunting in a noisy environment. The Huawei FreeBuds 3, the world's first open-fit active noise cancellation Bluetooth earphone, allows users to freely to enjoy their

p.m. in Jabriya, Shaab, Adan, Fahaheel (Al Ghanim Electronics), and South Surra (Alsalam). Clients can also direct their queries through the Gulf Bank WhatsApp service on 65805805. To find out more about the latest products and services, customers can access the Bank's online portal ([www.e-gulfbank.com](http://www.e-gulfbank.com)) or download the Mobile Banking App (App Store/Android) to monitor accounts and conduct self-service banking transactions. Customers can also connect with Gulf Bank on its various social media channels.

Gulf Bank extends its warmest congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah; His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah; and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and to the people of Kuwait.

## Gulf Bank extends best wishes for National holiday

KUWAIT: On the occasion of the National holidays, and as per the approved guidelines set by the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), all Gulf Bank branches and its head office will be closed Tuesday, 25 February until Thursday 27 February and will resume working on Sunday 1 March.

Gulf Bank's customers will continue to be served around the clock through the dedicated Customer Contact Center, which can be reached at 1805805. Moreover, Gulf Bank's Interactive Teller Machines (ITMs) will be available during the Eid holiday from 8 a.m. until 11:45

What's On



# Ahmadi Panorama Operetta... in Love of Kuwait

Under the auspices and with the attendance of Ahmadi Governor, Sheikh Fawwaz Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Fatima Bint Assad High School for Girls recently organized the "Ahmadi Panorama Operetta...in Love of Kuwait". The event was also attended by MoE Assistant Undersecretary for Private Education, Dr Abdul Mohsen Al-Huwailah, Ahmadi Education Area Director, Mansour Al-Dihani, Ahmadi security chief, brigadier Salah Hajji, a number of mayors and media officials.

Speaking on the occasion, Al-Sabah extended his congratulations to the leadership and the people of Kuwait and expressed gratitude to all participants, supporters and sponsors for their contributions in celebrating the national anniversaries.

On his part, Mansour Al-Dihani valued the efforts exerted by the area and the school staffs and stressed that the ceremony reflects the efforts educators exert to instill patriotism in students at all stages.



PAAET's higher institute for administrative services recently organized a special ceremony to celebrate the national anniversaries with the presence of the institute assistant manager, Dr Mohammed Al-Shemmeri and a number of teaching staff members.

## Slovaks sing Arabic song on Kuwait's National, Liberation Days



By Nawara Fattahova

For the first time a song in Arabic and Slovak languages is produced on the occasion of Kuwait's national celebrations.

Ambassador of Slovak Republic to Kuwait Igor Hajdusek said that the embassy is celebrating Kuwait's National and Liberation Days.

"Every year we send our best wishes for HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, The Crown Prince, and the Kuwaiti people. But this year we decided to come up with something special proposed by the Kuwaiti Journalism and Media Club, a song from Slovak and Kuwaiti words," he told Kuwait Times.

This song will be presented by the Slovak popular La Gioia Musical Band in cooperation with Amira Azzam. "I hope this song will spread all over the world. I would like to thank all those who worked on producing this song titled: 'Mako Mithlich' (there is nothing like you)," he added.

The song is produced by Kuwaiti



Journalism and Media Club in cooperation with the Slovak Embassy in Kuwait. Its lyrics by Ahmad Al-Failakawi, audio supervision, arrangements, mix and master Abdullah Al-Omani, composed by Amira Azzam, shoot by Shireef Sabri and Maisa Khazal, and montage by Mohammed Al-Hashimi.

## 'In Love of Kuwait We Meet'



With the attendance of PAAET Deputy Director for Assisting Academic Services, Dr Jassem Al-Ostath, The cultural committee of the PC department at PAAET's College of Commercial Studies (girls) recently organized a ceremonial titled 'In Love of Kuwait We Meet'. The ceremonial was held at the college campus in Ardhya.

The ceremonial held to commemorate the national anniversaries celebrations was also attended by a number of Kuwaiti celebrities such as the veteran actor, Ibrahim Al-Sallal, historian Saleh Al-Mesbah and poet Hammad Al-Ajmi.

## Holiday Notice

Embassy of India shall remain closed on Tuesday, 25th February & Wednesday, 26th February, 2020 on the occasion of "National Day of Kuwait" and "Liberation Day of Kuwait". However, emergency consular services will be rendered by the Embassy.

## TIES Center

The TIES Center cordially invites you to our Tafseer class (Divine Wisdom from the Last Testament) today (Monday, February 24th, 2020 at 7pm).

In that class, we will focus on verses 1 and 2 of Surat Al-Hadeed (the Iron). We will discuss why this surah was named Al-Hadeed (the Iron), and answer the following questions:

1. What is the significance of memorizing and understanding Allah's names and attributes, and then praising Him

with them?

2. What is the Greatest name of Allah (SWT), and why does He love to be praised?

3. Why do all creatures sing Allah's praises and what happened when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) held some pebbles in his hand?

4. What should we begin with when supplicating to Allah (SWT), and why?

5. What happens when one patiently perseveres during hardships, keeping faith in Allah (SWT)?

Come and learn more about the Book of Allah (SWT) in a serene, friendly and encouraging environment.

Health & Science

# Under attack from climate change, Colombia's farmers befriend nature

**SUCRE, Colombia:** Forced to leave his small farm a decade ago to escape the worst floods in Colombia's recent history, Manuel Jimenez knows the destruction torrential rains can inflict only too well.

"The floods left behind a desert, a cemetery of dead trees and poisonous snakes. Everything was destroyed. We lost our home, crops and animals," said the 43-year-old farmer in Pasifueres, a remote village in the northern province of Sucre. "We lived through a cruel tragedy," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Ten years on, as climate change bites, local farmers are learning to adapt to the impacts of wilder weather by working with nature, from restoring wetlands to planting trees and growing hardy rice varieties, backed by international funding. The 2010 flooding, triggered by heavy downpours, killed about 300 people and displaced 2.2 million more, causing billions of dollars in damages across 1 million hectares (3,860 square miles). Hardest-hit were poor farming communities in La Mojana, a region stretching across four northern provinces. Aid officials warn extreme weather, from torrential rains to drought, will strike again and likely become the new normal.

Some parts of La Mojana are prone to drought, while others are experiencing more intense rains, said Jimena Puyana, who heads work on sustainable development in Colombia for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). But rural communities are fighting back. With nearly \$8 million of UN funding since 2013, about 6,000 farming and fishing families in three municipalities of La Mojana have introduced a series of measures to adapt to climate shifts and cope better with extreme weather.

The approach focuses on so-called "nature-based solutions" - which involves improving ecosystems, including

forests, wetlands and watersheds - led by village farmer associations, rather than building infrastructure like dikes and levees to contain floods. One of the main methods is to restore the wetlands and waterways that regulate the local water supply so that they can act as natural drainage systems and buffers against storms.

Prolonged flooding and sediment build-up from illegal gold mining have damaged the wetlands around farming villages, disrupting the water's natural flow and channels. "What we are seeking to do is to recover the capacity of the region's water systems," said Francisco Charry, head of climate change at Colombia's environment ministry, which is leading the project in partnership with the UNDP. Climate change is worsening the conditions faced by vulnerable communities that are prone to flooding, he added. "(They) need to find a way to adapt to this new reality," he said.

**Not afraid of rain**

At Pasifueres village, about 9 km (5.6 miles) of streams and creeks running alongside homes have so far been mapped using drones, and then deepened and widened both by hand and dredgers.

For the past four years, Yenifer Jimenez, not related to Manuel, has led a group of farmers who clear rubbish and weeds to unblock the streams each month. "We clean the streams constantly so that the water can run its natural course. This gives us protection," Jimenez said. Along the bank, farmers have also planted trees that act as a natural flood barrier. "The life of this community has been reborn with the rehabilitation of the streams. The waters don't reach the houses anymore," said Jimenez.

The 30-year-old, who belongs to a farmers' association working on adaptation, said villagers were no longer afraid

of the rains. "We can take torrential rains now. I don't think another flood would affect us like it did 10 years ago. We're better prepared," she added.

They have also built about 10 straw-and-wood houses with zinc roofs, as well as several community centers, all elevated above ground to protect them from flooding. Nearby, a small medicinal herb, fruit and vegetable garden of pepper, plantain and cassava trees has been created with a drip irrigation system. It provides women and their families with food to eat and produce to sell at the local market. Charry said communities now understood a changing climate was affecting their food security. "They are learning to co-exist with this new situation," he added.

**'Under attack'**

A two-hour drive away, along a dusty path passing thatched homes scattered among cattle and buffalo pastures and rice fields, another group of farmers at El Torno village is also trying to beat climate change. Along with a high risk of floods, rising temperatures mean farmers here lack water in the summer months. With no running water, they rely on water collected from deep wells.

"We live in a very vulnerable area. Climate change is attacking us," said community leader Amaury Ortega, shading himself from the searing heat and azure sky under a mango tree. "In the winter, there's too much water. And in the summer, we don't have any water. Temperatures now reach 43 degrees C. The wells are drying up and fishing is harder," he said. Using seeds grown in new nurseries, farmers are planting trees and mangroves along the edges of nearby wetlands to create a natural wall and reduce the risk of floods. "But it takes up to 15 years for some trees to grow, and it's difficult to rehabilitate the wetlands because



Restored streams in the village of Pasifueres in northern province of Sucre, Colombia. — Reuters

some people still aren't aware of the importance of doing this," said farmer Carlos Bohorquez. In addition, nearly 2,800 hectares of native rice that is more resilient to high temperatures have been planted by farmer associations in La Mojana. With \$117 million in funding from donors and the Colombian government - including \$38 million from the Green Climate Fund, which supports climate action in developing countries - these measures are now being rolled out to nine more flood-prone municipalities in La Mojana over the next eight years. The project will also address drought by assisting rural farming communities to install about 7,400 water harvesting tanks on the roofs of homes, schools and clinics, allowing them to collect water during the rainy season. According to the UNDP, it is one of South America's biggest climate change adaptation initiatives, aiming to benefit about 400,000 people. — Reuters

CLINIC

PAGE

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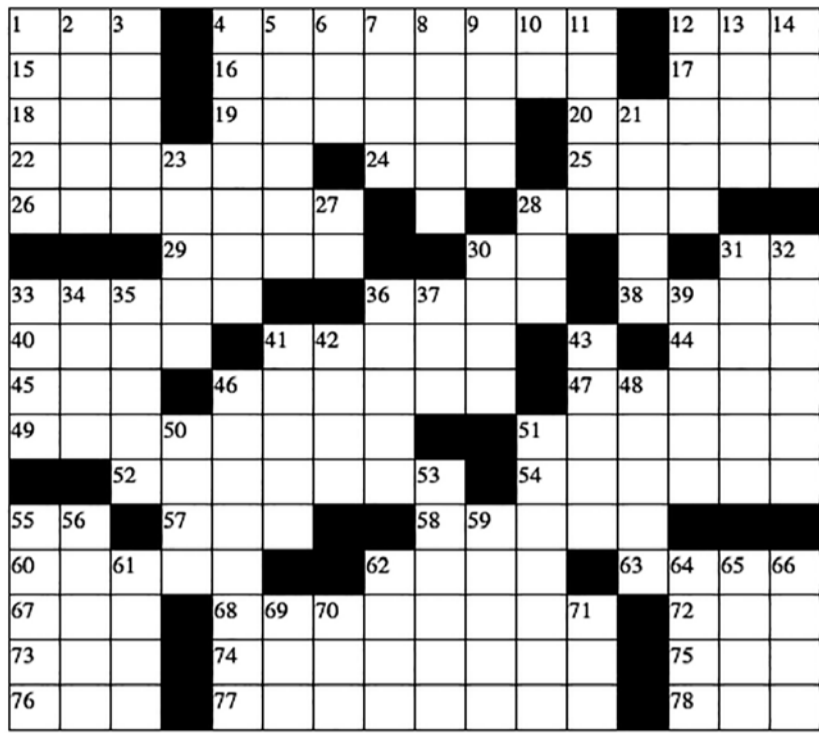
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Stars

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CROSS

- 1. A hormone secreted by the anterior pituitary gland that controls the degree of pigmentation in melanocytes.
- 4. Anticonvulsant (trade name Depokene) used to prevent some kinds of seizures.
- 12. A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.
- 15. (informal) Of the highest quality.
- 16. A prolonged disorder of eating due to loss of appetite.
- 17. A lyric poem with complex stanza forms.
- 18. A periodic paperback publication.
- 19. West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
- 20. Tall perennial herb of tropical Asia with dark green leaves.
- 22. German dramatist and poet who developed a style of epic theater (1898-1956).
- 24. A barrier constructed to contain the flow of water or to keep out the sea.
- 25. Either of two large African antelopes of the genus Taurotragus having short spirally twisted horns in both sexes.
- 26. Failure of some tissue or organ to develop.
- 29. A salt deposit that animals regularly lick.
- 33. A spoon-shaped vessel with a long handle.
- 38. Long green edible beaked pods of the okra plant.
- 40. Type genus of the Amidae.
- 44. A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.
- 45. Term of address for a man.
- 47. Brought from wilderness into a domesticated state.
- 49. One who attacks the reputation of another by slander or libel.
- 52. The brightest star in Auriga.
- 54. The selling of something purchased.
- 55. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
- 57. The federal agency that insures residential mortgages.
- 58. Cloak consisting of an oblong piece of cloth used to cover the head and shoulders.
- 60. An Indian side dish of yogurt and chopped cucumbers and spices.
- 63. Tropical starchy tuberous root.
- 67. Slender bristlelike appendage found on the bracts of grasses.
- 68. The branch of biology that studies heredity and variation in organisms.
- 72. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- 73. British informal term.
- 74. (statistics) Having a single mode.
- 75. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
- 76. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- 77. A private place of education for the young.
- 78. A workplace for the conduct of scientific research.

DOWN

- 1. Arboreal snake of central and southern Africa whose bite is often fatal.
- 2. A long steep slope or cliff at the edge of a plateau or ridge.
- 3. German philosopher whose three stage process of dialectical reasoning was adopted by Karl Marx (1770-1831).
- 4. Small long-bodied short-legged German breed of dog having a short sleek coat and long drooping ears.
- 5. Related on the mother's side.
- 6. A person active in party politics.
- 7. Toward the mouth or oral region.
- 8. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- 9. A set of questions or exercises evaluating skill or knowledge.
- 10. A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.
- 11. Worn or shabby from overuse or (of pages) from having corners turned down.
- 12. A member of a people who have no permanent home but move about according to the seasons.
- 13. Chief port of Yemen.
- 14. A notable achievement.
- 21. The mission in San Antonio where in 1836 Mexican forces under Santa Anna besieged and massacred American rebels who were fighting to make Texas independent of Mexico.
- 23. South African plant widely cultivated for its showy pure white spathe and yellow spadix.
- 27. A state in northwestern North America.
- 28. A resource.
- 30. A wound resulting from biting.
- 31. A severe or trying experience.
- 32. Twist or braid together; interlace.
- 34. An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
- 35. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
- 36. Relating to or resembling or made of or adorned with pearls or mother-of-pearl.
- 37. (usually followed by 'to') Naturally disposed toward.
- 39. A Bantu language spoken by the Kamba people in Kenya.
- 41. Genus of erect herbs of the Middle East having showy flowers.
- 42. A prearranged fight with deadly weapons by two people (accompanied by seconds) in order to settle a quarrel over a point of honor.
- 43. Spread by scattering.
- 46. A genus of Icteridae.
- 48. A long narrow passage (as in a cave or woods).
- 50. Informal or slang terms for mentally irregular.
- 51. A four-wheeled wagon that runs on tracks in a mine.
- 53. British choreographer (1906-1988).
- 56. The fifth month of the Hindu calendar.
- 59. A member of a seafaring group of North American Indians who lived on the Pacific coast of British Columbia and southwestern Alaska.
- 61. A ruler of the Inca Empire (or a member of his family).
- 62. (prefix) Half or partial.
- 64. The lower house of the parliament of the Republic of Ireland.
- 65. An informal term for a father.
- 66. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
- 69. The compass point midway between northeast and east.
- 70. Game in which matchsticks are arranged in rows and players alternately remove one or more of them.
- 71. Marked by skill in deception.

Yesterday's Solution

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STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Construction on streets or buildings might make it difficult for you to get around your neighborhood today, Aries. Traffic could be backed up for blocks. If you must run errands, either walk or get them done early in the day. The work could foul up the phone lines as well, at least for a while, so you might miss some calls you needed to take. This could be a frustrating day. Keep yourself busy at home.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Disappointment in a prominent public figure you've always admired could cause an ethical crisis today, Taurus. You might find yourself doubting beliefs and values that you've accepted without question for most of your life. Bear in mind that this is actually a healthy process. By tomorrow you'll probably have made peace with yourself, and should have done some growing up in the meantime. Hang in there!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

A lack of contact between you and a romantic partner could have you feeling rather depressed today, Gemini. You might be tempted to jump to the erroneous conclusion that your beloved no longer cares about you and that's why your phone isn't ringing. Don't fall into this trap. If you try to be objective, you'll realize that this isn't true. Chances are that your friend was held up in some way and will call as soon as there's an opportunity.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You tend to be very intuitive, Cancer, but today your channel to the other side could appear to be totally blocked. You can't sense what others are feeling, and oracles like the I Ching just don't make sense any more. You may try to fall back on logic, but that doesn't work today either. Don't think this is a permanent situation, however. Your mental biorhythms are low. You should be back to normal in a few days.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You're usually a hard worker, Leo, whether the work involves a job, personal project, or simply chores around the house. Today, however, you're going through a fit of laziness. Chances are you don't want to do a thing except lie around and read or watch TV. It's OK. We all need time to let our hair down and relax. Don't suffer undue guilt because you don't feel like working.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Today you just might want to cut yourself off from the world and hide, Virgo. Your backyard or bedroom seems especially attractive right now, and you might have just purchased a new paperback that you're dying to read. You won't even feel like sharing a meal with the rest of the household. Don't worry about this. We all want some time alone occasionally. Your family should understand.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

A friend or relative might propose some travel, Libra, but today you don't even want to think about going to the grocery store. You won't feel much like talking to anyone, either. Your mind is probably on intellectual or metaphysical matters. You could just want to stay home and study those subjects all day. Tell your friend the idea of traveling sounds great and you'll discuss it later. That's all you can manage right now.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Gloom may settle upon you today when you face your financial situation, Scorpio. You may have had a lot of bills to pay, and thus your coffers could be a bit low for your liking. Still, this is only temporary, and it probably feels good to have the bills out of the way. Find something inexpensive, like reading, to keep you busy and get your mind off it. You're probably doing fine!



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This morning you might look in the mirror and be horrified at what you see, Sagittarius. You've been working hard and are stressed out, so you probably look tired. You're apt to blow it all out of proportion, however, and think you look a lot worse than you actually do. Treat yourself to some new clothes and a walk, and then get some rest. Tomorrow you'll probably look as terrific as ever. Hang in there.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Something could happen during the day that unconsciously reminds you of something unpleasant that happened to you in the past, Capricorn. You might not even remember today's event, but memories of the occurrence long ago could plague you throughout the day and put you in a very black mood. Try to analyze why this memory affects you so much. Then when you know, let it go. You might feel as if a heavy weight has been lifted off your shoulders.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

None of your friends may be at home today, Aquarius, and so you probably won't be able to have any phone conversations or visits with them. This could cause you to feel rather lonely. You might brood a little and convince yourself that no one cares about you any more. Snap out of it! You know full well this isn't the case. Read or watch videos until someone rings you up, and they will!



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Today you might find yourself compelled to stay at home for some reason, Pisces. Perhaps you're expecting a visitor who's late or a delivery of some kind. Therefore, you could feel somewhat antsy. You like staying home, but only if you choose to do so. Find something creative to fill the time you have to spend waiting. That might make you feel as if you're choosing even if you aren't.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Newspaper

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

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- HOME
- INSERTS
- INTERNATIONAL
- INTERVIEWS
- LETTERS
- LIFESTYLE
- LOCAL
- MOVIES
- NEWSSTAND
- OBITUARIES
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- PEOPLE
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- REPORTER
- REVIEWS
- SECTIONS
- SPORTS
- SUBSCRIPTION
- TECHNOLOGY
- TELEVISION GUIDE
- TRAVEL
- WEATHER
- NETS
- NEWSPAPERS
- OPERAS
- PARADES
- PIERS
- PORT
- PROSPECT PARK
- RANGERS
- ROCKEFELLER CENTER
- YANKEES
- SILICON ALLEY
- STATEN ISLAND FERRY
- STATUE OF LIBERTY
- THE CYCLONE
- TOURISTS
- TV NETWORKS
- UNIVERSITIES
- VENDORS
- WAVE HILL

Yesterday's Solution

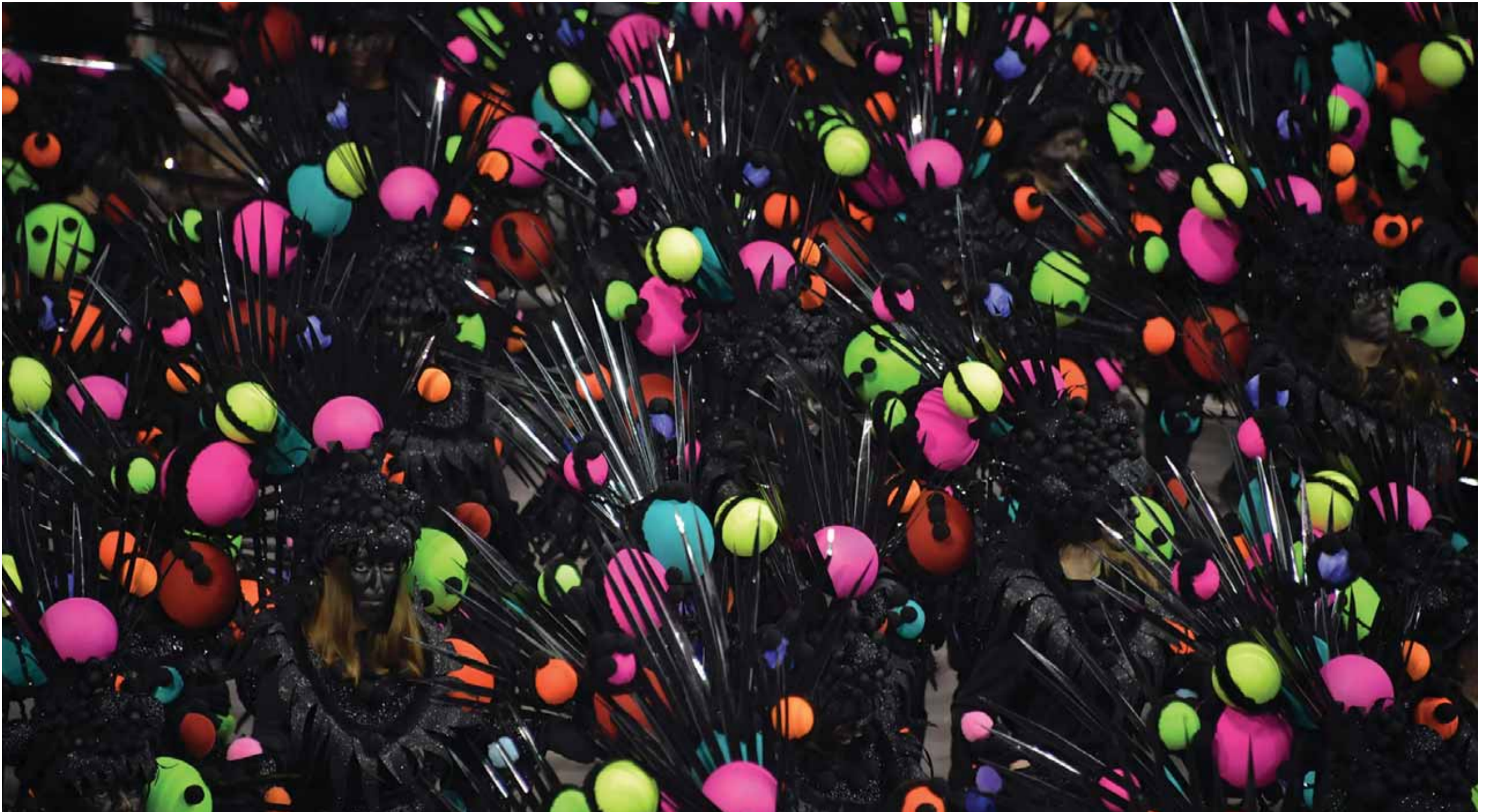
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- APOLLO THEATER
- BALLET
- BRONX ZOO
- BROOKLYN BRIDGE
- CARNEGIE HALL
- CENTRAL PARK
- CHRYSLER BUILDING
- COLLEGES
- DIVERSE
- ELLIS ISLAND
- ENTERTAINMENT
- FDNY
- HIGH LINE
- LINCOLN TUNNEL
- MADISON AVENUE
- MEDIA
- MEMORIALS
- METS
- MONUMENTS
- MUSEUM MILE
- MUSEUMS
- NETS
- NEWSPAPERS
- NYPD
- OPERA
- PARADES
- PIERS
- PORT
- PROSPECT PARK
- RANGERS
- ROCKEFELLER CENTER
- SILICON ALLEY
- STATEN ISLAND FERRY
- STATUE OF LIBERTY
- THE CYCLONE
- TOURISTS
- TV NETWORKS
- UNIVERSITIES
- VENDORS
- WAVE HILL
- YANKEES

# Lifestyle

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2020



Revelers of the Agua de Ouro samba school performs during the second night of carnival in Sao Paulo, Brazil, at the city's Sambadrome early yesterday. — AFP

## LEONARDO FANS PULL LOUVRE ALL-NIGHTERS TO CATCH SHOW'S FINAL HOURS

It's a half hour after midnight, and a huge crowd is massed in front of the illuminated glass pyramid at the Louvre for a rare night-time visit to the museum's most ambitious show in years, a landmark collection of works by the Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci. "It's a cozy atmosphere, quite unusual. It feels almost pri-

ivate," says Cherifa Tadjouri, admiring "The Battle of Anghiari" with her family at a time when most Paris nightbirds would be lining up for concerts or clubs. Since Friday, the Louvre has opened its door for three nights of free visits to the show-stopping exhibition before it wraps up today. The 30,000 tickets were snapped up in

just three hours when they were made available on the museum's website earlier this month, with people assigned time slots to avoid overcrowding. Odile Poitier, 32, enjoyed the coffee, tea and madeleine cakes offered after the visit with her brother and some friends. "Usually after a museum visit, you're ready to head home,

but here we can stay and chat, there's no hurry, everyone's relaxed," she told AFP. Jean-Luc Martinez, the museum's director, said the goal was for people to "feel at home" while soaking up the blockbuster show of 162 works, including loans by Queen Elizabeth II and the British Museum, Russia's Hermitage and the Vatican.

"It's really well organized, we were able to get pretty close to all the works," said Cora Yuan, a Chinese woman who lives in Paris, who was visiting with two friends. The exhibition, which opened in late October, marks 500 years since the death of Leonardo in the historic town of Amboise in the Loire Valley on May 2, 1519. It does not include Leonardo's most famous work, the Mona Lisa, which organizers decided to leave in its usual, highly protected wing of the museum. — AFP



Visitors look at a version of 'The Last Supper' during the night and free opening of the 'Leonardo da Vinci' exhibition at The Louvre Museum. — AFP photos



People look at the painting 'La Belle Ferronniere' (1490) by Italian Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci.



Visitors look at artefacts.

## Creator of LEGO figure dead at 78

Jens Nygaard Knudsen, who designed the iconic Lego minifigure with interchangeable legs and torsos, has died while in hospice care from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), his former colleague said Saturday. The 78-year old former designer passed away on Wednesday at a hospice center where he had stayed for a week, according to Lego designer Niels Milan Pedersen, a former colleague for Nygaard Knudsen. "His imagination was so fantastic. If we had a brainstorm it was more like a brain hurricane, because he had so many ideas," Milan Pedersen told AFP.



Creator of LEGO figure Jens Nygaard Knudsen.

Nygaard Knudsen, who died at the Anker Fjord Hospice outside the small town of Hvide Sande on the Danish west coast, was a designer at the Danish toy brick maker from 1968 to 2000. He worked with developing the now legendary minifigure with moveable arms and legs in the 1970s, before it was first released in 1978.

According to Lego, it was decided when the figure was created that it - besides having a yellow face with a neutral happy expression - would have no sex or race as these would be "determined by the child's imagination and play." "He was a man of ideas. The figure was created so that there would be life in the houses," his widow Marianne Nygaard Knudsen told broadcaster TV2. "At the time Lego's houses were empty, but then he drew this man," she added.

In addition to the Lego figure, Nygaard Knudsen was also responsible for developing some of Lego's classic themes, such as Space and Pirates. Founded in 1932 by Ole Kirk Christiansen, the group employed over 17,000 people at the end of 2018. The iconic Lego brick started being manufactured in the 1940s, but was launched in its modern form in 1958, according to the company. — AFP

## UK pianist Alexis Ffrench bids to change image of classical music

British composer and pianist Alexis Ffrench, a rising black star in the overwhelmingly white world of classical music, is on a mission "to change the narrative" that the genre is stuffy and outdated. The 48-year-old, who is set to release his latest album next month, is trying to counter what he sees as a false perception by using his fresh take on the music and growing status to reach new audiences. Ffrench's 2018 hit record "Evolution" propelled him to wider recognition after topping Britain's classical music charts for three weeks and spending around three months in the top 10.

He now boasts nearly two million regular listeners on Spotify and has to date garnered around 200 million streams online, while also hosting a weekly show on new classical music digital station Scala Radio. "Classical music is under-represented in certain echelons of society, no doubt about that," he told AFP during a practice session this week at legendary piano-maker Steinway and Sons' central London store. "I'm determined to use whatever profile, influence, I can to help young people who are certainly disadvantaged in one way or another," he added.

Ffrench was poised to dash from the interview to London's famous Abbey Road studios to continue working with a group of British youngsters not typically identified with classical music. The scheme is a collaboration between his record label Sony and the Prince's Trust, a charity helping people aged 11 to 30 get into jobs, education and training. Ffrench, who will embark on a European tour in April, also uses his radio show to "talk about classical music in a new and exciting way" and play music sometimes only loosely inspired by the traditions of the genre. "I talk about Childish Gambino and all manner of hip hop artists and what classical music can learn from that," he added, referring to the US rapper Donald Glover. "I think my duty is to change the narrative."



British pianist and composer Alexis Ffrench poses for a photograph after giving an interview at Steinway & Sons in London. — AFP

### 'Soulful sensibility'

Ffrench, whose parents emigrated from Jamaica as teenagers, actually trod an orthodox path to a classical music career from the family home in suburban Surrey, southwest of London. He trained at the Purcell School-Britain's oldest specialist music school-before moving on the renowned Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Academy. Despite his classical training, Ffrench sees his compositions as a synthesis of many styles, with classical music "in the DNA".

He draws on the influence of childhood favorites such as Stevie Wonder and Bob Marley as well as classical greats like Mozart and Beethoven. "It's classical music, but it's imbued with this kind of soulful sensibility," he explained. For his latest album "Dreamland", which he

describes as a collection of "lyrical piano songs", Ffrench took inspiration from fans sharing on social media how his music had helped them deal with their life struggles. "What I wanted to do with 'Dreamland' is create a body of music which acted as a place of solace or an oasis of calm that people could retreat to and, in a sense, just stop, listen and breathe," he said.

### 'I played the table'

Ffrench, who is married with two teenage children and lives in the British countryside, credits his disciplinarian father in particular with instilling in him a drive to succeed. A jet engineer who left Jamaica aged 16 and eventually worked for Britain's Royal Air Force, his dad instituted a schedule of early starts, regular exercise, church-going and academic rigour in his three children. "It's about the idea of being better today than you were yesterday," Ffrench recalled warmly of his "old-fashioned" upbringing.

Although "quite autocratic", his father was a music lover and often had records playing in the family home, meaning music flowed through Ffrench's ears from the earliest age. "Before I had a piano, I played the table because I could hear the music and I thought: 'I'll play this'," he recalled. Before long, he was playing the organ in church—including at weddings, to the amazement of some couples — and well on his way to some of the country's top music schools. It is this access to opportunities that Ffrench is now eager to replicate for others less fortunate. "I had teachers who never put limitations on what you could do," he said. "I was really grateful for that." — AFP



In this file photo Director and actor Clint Eastwood attends the "Richard Jewell" world premiere gala screening during AFI FEST 2019 Presented By Audi at TCL Chinese Theatre, in Hollywood, California. — AFP

## Hollywood icon Clint Eastwood backs Bloomberg

Clint Eastwood, the iconic actor and director who infamously delivered a speech to an empty chair at the 2012 Republican convention, is endorsing Michael Bloomberg for president and not Donald Trump, whom he supported four years ago. In a wide-ranging interview, the 89-year-old multiple Oscar winner told The Wall Street Journal that while he appreciates some of the good that Trump has done, he laments the bad and the ugly nature of today's "ornery" politics in America.

Trump should act "in a more genteel way, without tweeting and calling people names," said Eastwood, who endorsed the brash billionaire over Hillary Clinton in 2016 because, as he said at the time, he feared she would "follow in (president Barack) Obama's footsteps." "The best thing we could do is just get Mike Bloomberg in there," he said in the interview released late Friday, referring to the US media tycoon who jumped into the Democratic presidential nomination race in November. Bloomberg, 78, is the former mayor of New York, meaning the two men have a sliver of political experience in common. — AFP



In this file photo members of Manguera samba school perform during the second night of Rio's Carnival parade at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



Revelers of the Vila Maria samba school perform during the second night of carnival in Sao Paulo, Brazil.



Revelers of the Vila Maria samba school perform. — AFP photos

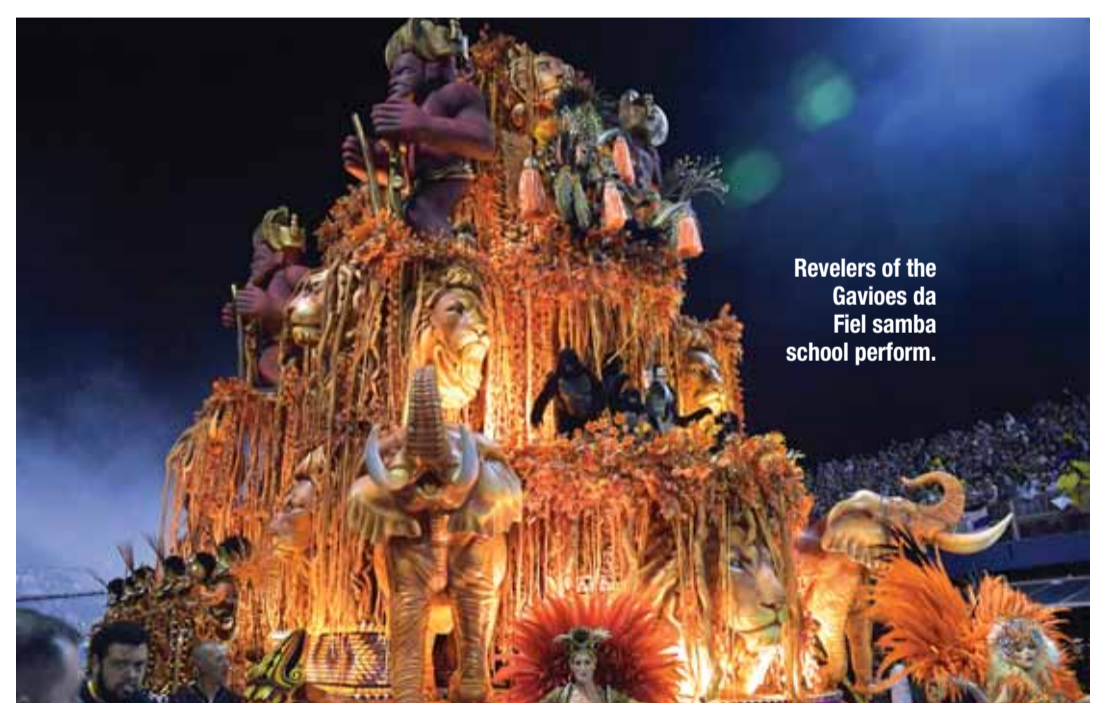
## Rio carnival gets political in Bolsonaro's Brazil

Rio de Janeiro kicks off its annual carnival parades yesterday, the first of two nights of glittering, over-the-top spectacle set to pack a heavy dose of political commentary on Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro. Vying for the title of carnival champions, the city's 13 top samba schools will have one hour each to wow spectators and judges with elaborate shows flush with scantily clad dancers, small armies of drummers and floats built on seemingly impossible feats of engineering.

The event is shaping up to be especially political after a year under Bolsonaro, who has deeply divided Brazil with his attacks on just about every cause close to the carnival community's heart: diversity, homosexuality, environmentalism, the arts. Reigning champions Manguera are planning a show about Jesus returning to Earth in one of Rio's impoverished favela neighborhoods with "a black face, Indian blood and a woman's body," in the words of its central samba song.

That has already drawn backlash from a key group of Bolsonaro supporters: evangelical Christians, who sent Manguera a petition calling the show "blasphemous." Manguera entitled its show "The Truth Will Set You Free," quoting—with a heavy dose of irony — a Bible verse often cited by Bolsonaro. "In these times, when some are preaching a belligerent, intolerant and controlling Jesus, Manguera is bringing back the Jesus of the gospel: loving, friendly, a companion of the oppressed and builder of peace," said leftist theologian and Baptist pastor Henrique Vieira, who advised the samba school on its show.

The most successful school in the history of the contest, Portela, will pay tribute to Brazil's indigenous Tupinamba people, who lived in Rio de Janeiro before the Portuguese colonizers arrived. Their central samba song features veiled criticism of Brazil's far-right wave. "Our community has no party or faction, it has no bishop and bows to no captain," it says. Those are likely references to Bolsonaro, a retired army captain, and Rio Mayor Marcelo Crivella, a fellow far-right politician, who is a bishop in one of Brazil's biggest evangelical mega-churches. Other schools have chosen themes



Revelers of the Gavioes da Fiel samba school perform.

such as the environment, fake news in Brazil's 2018 presidential race, and black and women's rights.

### Funding cut

Crivella has openly criticized the city's world-famous party since taking office in 2016, and steadily cut the 28 million reais (\$6.4 million) in annual public funding the top samba schools used to receive. This year, for the first time, the schools will get zero funds from the city.

That has only added fuel to the politically charged fire, says historian and carnival expert Luiz Antonio Simas. "The samba schools have been plunged into a financial crisis... and so they have had to reinvent themselves," he told AFP. "That has fostered a generation of young directors... who have very interesting, progres-

sive ideas on creating carnival shows that are at once art, party and politics."

Often based in Rio de Janeiro's poorest neighborhoods, the samba schools spend most of the year getting ready for carnival, with the help of thousands of workers and volunteers. Some 70,000 spectators are expected at the "Sambadrome," the massive avenue-turned-stadium where the groups parade, for a spectacle that starts at 9:30 pm each night and lasts until dawn. Manguera won last year's contest with another politically charged show that spoke out against Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorship. Bolsonaro, an army officer at the time, has often praised the military regime. — AFP



Revelers of the Aguias de Ouro samba school perform.



Revelers of the Vila Maria samba school perform.



Revelers of the Vila Maria samba school perform.



A reveler of the Mocidade Alegre samba school performs.



Revelers of the Mocidade Alegre samba school perform.



Revelers of the Gavioes da Fiel samba school perform.



# MILAN FASHION WEEK CARRIES ON DESPITE VIRUS PROXIMITY



It was business as usual Saturday for Milan Fashion Week despite a clutch of coronavirus cases including two fatalities near the northern venue. Barely 60 kilometers (35 miles) away from the capital of the Lombardy region, where outfits from Salvatore Ferragamo and Ermanno Scervino were headlining runway interest, 39 confirmed cases have emerged. The small town of Codogno, about an hour away from Italy's business capital by road, was in lockdown along with several other neighboring towns after the deaths of an elderly woman and man.

Those fatalities saw Italy become the first country in Europe to report the death of one of its own nationals from the virus. Authorities confirmed Saturday the other people infected had all had contact with "patient number one", a 38-year-old man still in intensive care in Codogno. Members of his family, friends and his doctors are all among those who have been diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus and Italian authorities have reacted by asking some 50,000 people in the area to stay at home to keep the virus spread at bay.

"The (fashion) shows are going ahead calmly, there is no panic, there are no cases of contamination or suspicion of cases in Milan or in our sector for the moment and we hope that stays so," said Carlo Capasa, president of Italy's National Fashion Chamber. "Prevention measures are absolutely active—we are in permanent contact with health institutions who tell us the situation is under control," Capasa told AFP. Salvatore Ferragamo's new collection had been the day's early highlight, the Florence-based house's British creative director Paul Andrew bringing its legendary flair alive with items including long coats and culottes.

Lingerie-inspired dresses, in silk or leather, were more the order of the day for the Scervino set, replete with shiny sequins and feathers. Also on bill was Bottega Veneta, owned by French luxury house Kering, winning a seal of approval from actress Sigourney Weaver, who found it "superb". The house's US artistic director Daniel Lee, 34, is awowedly out to turn a cold shoulder on the sensational in offering a collection which will pack a punch over time and ultimately even earn cult status rather than be cast aside at season's end. The collection married classic Bottega Veneta style with a modern approach to colour including silhouettes ranging from black to pistachio green, while other offerings included knitted black frock paired with Texan-style big boots. — AFP



Models present creations for Bottega Veneta's Women Fall - Winter 2020 fashion collection in Milan. - AFP photos

Models present creations for Salvatore Ferragamo's Women Fall - Winter 2020 fashion collection.



Cologne, Germany

© DZI / Francesco Carovillano

## GERMANY'S INCOMING TOURISM REPORTS 10TH CONSECUTIVE RISE AND RECORD RESULT



Black Forest - Germany



Neuschwanstein castle - Germany

Germany's incoming tourism figures have reached a record high for the tenth time in a row in 2019: According to (preliminary) latest data from the Federal Statistical Office, 89.9 million international overnight stays in accommodation with at least ten beds were registered from January to December. This represents an additional 2.2 million international overnight stays in comparison to the previous year and an increase of 2.5 percent.

Petra Hedorfer, Chief Executive Officer of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) comments: "Despite the difficult conditions with weaker economic growth in the euro zone, uncertainty about Brexit, trade conflicts and the discussion on climate change, the success story of German incoming tourism continues. Promoting Germany as a quality tourism destination, as well as the consistent implementation of our digital strategy and the targeted selection of marketing topics, has enabled us and our partners to inspire even more travelers in 2019."

## Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Otemachi to welcome international travellers and local clientele beginning this Summer

Facing the Imperial Palace Gardens and with Mount Fuji visible in the distance, Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Otemachi is poised to become the next level of luxury in this ever-changing city, honouring its illustrious past as it boldly looks to the future. The all-new Hotel is now confirming reservations for arrivals beginning July 1, 2020.

Miyake. At the Spa lobby, a three-dimensional fabric installation billows and sweeps outward, as if caught in a gust of wind.

### Dining and drinking in Urbane Style

Led by Executive Chef Marco Riva and culinary sensation Yusuke Aoki in the pastry kitchen, guests can expect artistry on the plate

in teatime traditions with a fresh twist of Japanese and French tastes.

"I am particularly excited to introduce our guests to our high concept restaurants and lounges," says General Manager Andrew De Brito. "As each space takes shape, we can already imagine them filled with an eclectic mix of locals and international visitors, with the city spread out beneath us."

Ideally located for business travellers within Tokyo's financial district, the Hotel's namesake Otemachi Station, one of the city's largest subway hubs, is directly accessed from the Hotel, allowing leisure guests to venture into the city easily, with the expert concierge team's recommendations and guidance firmly in hand.

Be Among the First to Experience the New Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Otemachi: In anticipation of its grand opening this summer, the Hotel is offering an Introductory Offer package featuring 15 percent savings on the room rate, food and beverage and spa and JPY 10,000 Hotel credit with a minimum three nights stay. This offer may be booked online. Meetings, Corporate Events, Weddings and Other Social Occasions at Four Seasons

Exemplary Four Seasons service, from event conceptualization through meticulous execution, assures meeting planners, event hosts and wedding couples a worry-free experience from start to finish. With more than 1,300 square meters (14,000 square feet) of event space including a ballroom and four smaller meeting rooms on the building's 3rd floor available, Four Seasons can host events for up to 600 guests.

For pre-opening inquiries and site tours, email [contactus.otemachi@fourseasons.com](mailto:contactus.otemachi@fourseasons.com).



"Four Seasons at Otemachi showcases next-generation luxury and lifestyle as we quite literally elevate the hospitality experience to a new level in the city," says Rainer Stampfer, Four Seasons President, Hotel Operations - Asia Pacific. "Paired with Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi, our well-established hotel in the nearby Central Station district, we are truly spoiling our guests for choice in one of the world's most dynamic destinations."

Housed within the top six floors of a new, 39-storey tower by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Four Seasons at Otemachi is both a restful haven for travellers and a magnet for the city's sky-high social scene, with an top-floor spa sanctuary and 25 meter (82 foot) pool as well as four distinctly original dining and drinking concepts - three of which are designed by renowned SPIN Design Studio.

A feast for the senses, the Hotel's interiors evoke an origami-like sense of discovery through layered design motifs envisioned by interiors firm Denniston. Under the masterful touch of lead designer Jean-Michel Gathy, Japanese essence influences meld seamlessly with a modern aesthetic. In each of the 190 guest rooms and suites, commissioned artworks by Namiko Kitaura bring a feeling of lightness and animation - in a nod to the flowing fabrics of Japanese fashion icon Issey

and the palate, amid the visual and aromatic delights of Tokyo-based floral artist Nicolai Bergmann. Restaurants and bars at Four Seasons at Otemachi include Est, presenting the innovative French cuisine combined with Japanese precision of Michelin-starred Chef Guillaume Bracaval; Pigneto, a relaxed Italian dining experience with four show kitchens and an outdoor terraza facing the Imperial Palace Gardens; Virtu, a unique bar concept perhaps best described as contemporary Tokyo meets Old World Paris; and The Lounge for indulging



# Classifieds

Monday, February 24, 2020

**Kuwait Times**  
 Now you can browse  
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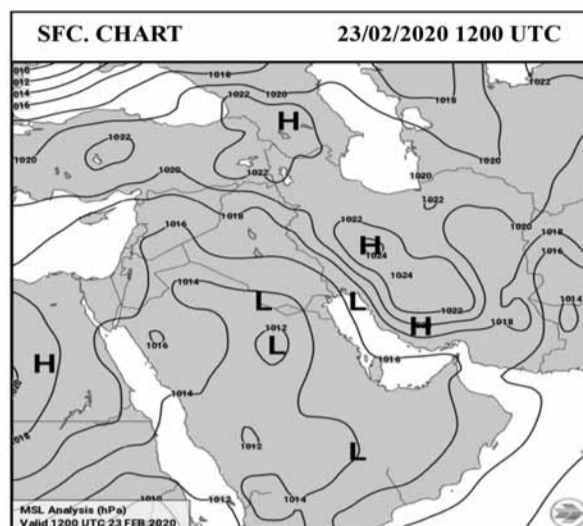
## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY NIGHT:** Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate south easterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 10 - 32 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain and a chance for fog forming over some

**BY DAY:** Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 15 - 45 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on.

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings
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STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.
KUWAIT CITY	22 °C	18 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	25 °C	15 °C
ABDALY	27 °C	14 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	27 °C	15 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	22 °C	16 °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	19 °C	17 °C
NUWAISIB	26 °C	14 °C
WAFRA	27 °C	13 °C
SALMY	29 °C	14 °C



4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	02/24	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on	28 °C	15 °C	SE	15 - 45 km/h
Tuesday	02/25	Warm and Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on	30 °C	19 °C	SE-SW	15 - 50 km/h
Wednesday	02/26	Dusty and A significant decrease in temperature	21 °C	14 °C	SW-NW	30 - 60 km/h
Thursday	02/27	Fair	22 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	12 - 35 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:00
Sunrise	06:19
Zuhr	12:01
Asr	15:17
Sunset	17:44
Isha	19:00

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	27 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	82 %
MIN. RH	25 %
MAX. Wind	S 39 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

## Hospitals

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

## Clinics

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

## CHANGE OF NAME

I have changed my name from Iqbal Kader Nawab (old) to Mohd Iqbal Nawab Ali Shaikh (new) through Maharashtra Gazette No-M-19139997 dated 23/01/2020 CL-449. (C 5645)

**My son,** Mohammed Raqeeb, DOB: 05/07/2015, holder of Indian Passport No. T5333305 residing at No-18, Venkatesa Naicken 1st Anna road, Chennai, Tamilnadu - 600002, shall henceforth be known as Mohammed Raqeeb (Surname - Mohammed Shafullah, Given name - Mohammed Raqeeb) Mohammed Shafullah (father). (C 5646) 24-2-2020

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

**I, Charesma** Kotapati Passport No. K5706852, D/o Kotapati Lingamma Naidu,

**EMERGENCY**  
  
**112**

Automated enquiry about the  
 Civild card is **1889988**

## Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

### Flight Schedule

### DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Monday 24/2/2020				Departure Flights on Monday 24/2/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
PIA	239	Sialkot	00:05	AIC	982	Ahmedabad/Chennai	00:05
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	JZR	215	Jeddah	00:05
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	MSC	412	Asyut	00:15
JZR	716	Sohag	00:35	QTR	1093	Doha	00:25
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	KAC	1605	Tehran	00:30
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	PIA	240	Sialkot	01:05
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
KAC	102	London	00:55	IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
KAC	504	Beirut	01:05	JZR	111	Doha	01:55
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	KAC	363	Colombo	02:00
RJA	642	Amman	01:40	KAC	285	Dhaka	02:00
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	KAC	677	Dubai	02:10
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	THY	773	Istanbul	02:10
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	JZR	119	Dubai	02:25
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
KAC	1602	Tehran	02:15	IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
JZR	724	Alexandria	02:55	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
KAC	1604	Tehran	03:30	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	KAC	621	Doha	04:20
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	JZR	713	Sohag	04:30
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	JZR	707	Luxor	04:40
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
JZR	702	Asyut	04:50	JZR	701	Bahrain	05:50
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	THY	771	Istanbul	06:25
KAC	382	Delhi	05:00	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	DHX	173	Bahrain	06:40
KAC	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	113	Doha	06:40
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	RJA	643	Amman	06:55
KAC	1606	Tehran	05:10	JZR	233	Taif	07:00
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
JZR	654	OSS	05:25	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	UAE	874	Dubai	07:15
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	KAC	413	Bangkok	07:30
JZR	502	Lahore	05:35	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	05:45	RBG	214	Sohag	07:50
UAE	873	Dubai	05:50	IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	KAC	173	Munich	08:20
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:55	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	JZR	001	LGW	08:40
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00
BAW	157	London	07:05	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	BAW	156	London	09:30
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	KAC	545	Doha	09:30
RBG	213	Sohag	07:10	QTR	1085	Doha	09:45
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15	KAC	561	Amman	09:45
JZR	120	Dubai	07:35	KAC	101	London	09:45
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:25	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
KAC	622	Doha	08:30	KAC	751	ELQ	10:00
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	117	New York	10:00
JZR	102	Bahrain	08:55	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
KAC	334	Trivandrum	09:00	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
JZR	114	Doha	10:20	JZR	611	Tbilisi	10:45
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
AXB	395	Kozhikode	10:50	JZR	305	Istanbul	11:10
JZR	714	Sohag	10:50	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
JZR	708	Luxor	10:55	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
AXB	889	Mangalore/Bahrain	11:10	AXB	396	Kozhikode	11:50
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
KAC	352	Kochi	11:35	JZR	139	AAN	12:05
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	AXB	890	Mangalore	12:10
SYR	341	Damascus	12:00	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
IAW	1257	Baghdad	12:00	IAW	1258	Al Najaf	13:00
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	JZR	115	Doha	13:00
JZR	234	Taif	12:10	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25	SYR	342	Damascus	13:00
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	GFA	210	Bahrain	13:05
FDB	8065	Dubai	13:15				
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35				

# Top central bankers unsettled by shifting sands of inflation

**RIYADH/WASHINGTON:** Central bankers from the United States, Japan and the euro zone meeting in the desert kingdom of Saudi Arabia this weekend had their own shifting sands to cross - those of elusive inflation. The problem facing all three is that price growth has long stopped behaving as expected, as aging populations and technological advances prevent inflation from meeting their cherished 2 percent target despite aggressive stimulus measures.

This is leading to a deep rethink by the world's most powerful central banks, starting from how they define their goal and what tools they use to achieve it - a process that was becoming even more urgent as the world braced for the economic fallout of the coronavirus outbreak. The meeting of finance leaders from the world's 20 top economies in Riyadh provided a chance for Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, ECB President

Christine Lagarde and Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda to compare notes. Lagarde was due to meet Powell later yesterday, having had a brief exchange with Kuroda the previous day.

"The major central banks all face similar problems, including how to deal with another economic downturn," said an executive of one of the banks present at the G20 meeting. "They've been discussing this topic for a while. It's about time they come up with some form of conclusion," he said on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Kuroda has plenty of lessons to offer on the dangers of keeping subdued price growth unattended for too long. He deployed a heavy dose of stimulus in 2013, only to see inflation stagnate at levels well below its 2 percent target. Mindful of such dangers, the Fed is in the midst of its framework review that focuses on how it should

pursue 2 percent inflation using tools such as forward guidance. In its own review, the ECB is all but certain to overhaul its inflation goal, defined as a rate of price growth "below but close to 2 percent," to signal it does not see that level as a ceiling. Inflation can be economically and politically destructive if prices rise too fast but a moderate pace, such as 2 percent, is seen as needed to enable companies to raise wages and create a virtuous cycle for the economy.

Critics doubt whether tweaks to the definition of price goals would be effective in battling headwinds from demographics and technological innovation. Older populations tend to consume less while new technologies foster greater efficiency at a lower cost. Together they can be powerful forces leaning against inflation. To tackle this, the Fed has looked into ideas such as a "make up strategy," under which a central bank promises to

allow inflation to run above target to make up for times of weakness in the economy.

But that would tie the hands of future policymakers - a risky strategy. "It works beautifully in models," Thomas Barkin, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. "It makes me nervous in practice." Many BOJ officials, too, are wary of doing another framework review and doubt any tweak to the inflation target will help people believe more strongly that prices will rise. "There are doubts within the BOJ on whether pledging to achieve higher inflation could change public perceptions dramatically, especially if inflation is still distant from the current target," said a source familiar with its thinking.

With no clear breakthrough on other tools central banks have at their disposal, managing public expectations is now among their strongest weapons. And yet the

rising cost of prolonged low interest rates, from soaring property prices to vanishing returns for pension funds, means central banks cannot just stand by hoping inflation will perk up some day. "The side effects are more acute now and I think we should tone down our communication that benefits far outweigh the costs," an ECB policymaker said on condition of anonymity.

Rejecting the idea that interest rates could stay low forever, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva likened policymakers' complacency to a frog who doesn't realise it is swimming in gradually heating water until it is too late. "This is the risk that we are facing," she told a conference this week held on the sidelines of the G20 meeting. "That an incremental pileup of debt in a low interest environment doesn't give us a good signal to ... jump out of the boiling water." — Reuters

## Iran quake kills nine in Turkey

**ISTANBUL:** A magnitude 5.7 earthquake in northwestern Iran yesterday killed at least nine people in neighboring Turkey and injured dozens more on both sides of the border, authorities said. The epicenter of the quake, which struck at 9:23 am (0553 GMT), was near the Iranian village of Habash-e Olya, less than 10 km from the border, according to the US Geological Survey. The earthquake had a depth of six kilometers, said Tehran University's Seismological Centre.

In Turkey, it was felt mostly in the eastern district of Baskale in Van province on the Iran border. Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said nine people were killed, speaking to reporters from the quake scene in Van. Four of the dead were children. "We have right now no citizens trapped under the rubble," he said. Images showed collapsed adobe houses in several

snow-covered villages in Van province. In Gurginar village, search and rescue teams were seen on top of the rubble pile, watched by anxious locals.

Van, which was hit by a 7.1 magnitude quake in 2011 killing more than 500 people, was struck by tragedy again this month when two avalanches left 41 people dead. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said 37 people were injured and nine of them were in critical condition. He said that 25 ambulances, one rescue helicopter and teams of medics were rushed to the quake region. Turkish officials said some schools were also damaged in several villages.

The impact of the quake in Iran was less severe, according to latest reports. It injured at least 51 people in Iran's West Azerbaijan province, 17 of whom had been hospitalized, the country's emergency services said. The same source also said there was damage to buildings in 43 villages. Yesterday's earthquake was felt in several Iranian cities, including Khoy, Urmia, Salmas and Osku, state media reported, citing West Azerbaijan's crisis management center.

Both Iran and Turkey sit on top of major tectonic plates and see frequent seismic activity. In Nov 2017, a 7.3-magnitude quake in Iran's western province of Kermanshah killed 620 people. In 2003, a 6.6-magnitude quake in southeastern Iran decimated the ancient mud-brick city of Bam and killed at least 31,000 people. Iran's deadliest quake was a 7.4-magnitude tremor in 1990 that killed 40,000 people in northern Iran, injured 300,000 and left half a million homeless.

In December and January, two earthquakes struck near Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant. Iran's Gulf Arab neighbors have often raised concerns about the reliability of the country's sole nuclear power facility, which produces 1,000 megawatts of power, and the risk of radioactive leaks in case of a major earthquake. Turkey is also prone to earthquakes and over 40 people died in January after a 6.8-magnitude quake struck Elazig in eastern Turkey. In 1999, a devastating 7.4 magnitude earthquake hit Izmit in western Turkey, killing more than 17,000 people including about 1,000 in the country's most populous city, Istanbul. — AFP



**BASKALE, Turkey:** A Turkish child kneels by a destroyed house in Van province after an earthquake struck northwestern Iran yesterday. — AFP

## Sanders sweeps Nevada; Biden...

Continued from Page 1

The 78-year-old senator was leading the Democratic pack with 46 percent of the vote, followed far behind by former vice president Joe Biden at 19.6 percent and Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, at 15.3 percent. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar trailed at, respectively, 10.1 percent and 4.8 percent.

Sanders was quick to claim victory, saying his "multi-generational, multi-racial coalition" was "going to sweep this country". Dean said the senator's result in a state far more typical of America's demographic variety than the two earlier-voting states was "incredibly impressive". But he quickly added that a more definitive result will come only after voters in 14 states cast ballots on March 3, or "Super Tuesday".

Before that comes South Carolina, which votes on Feb 29. Biden's once-strong prospects had faded sharply for weeks, but he said Saturday that he felt "really good" about his second-place showing in Nevada and shouldn't be counted out. His team is banking on a strong showing in South Carolina, where Biden has enjoyed support among a majority-black Democratic electorate.

But after Sanders came in virtually tied for first in Iowa and then won last week in New Hampshire, his undeniable victory in Nevada places him squarely in the driver's seat, at least for now. He leads national polls by an 11 point margin over Biden and by 13 points over Mike Bloomberg, the former New York mayor who skipped the early voting states to focus on Super Tuesday.

Sanders' progressive policies, including universal healthcare, higher taxes on the wealthy and an increase in the minimum wage, have struck a chord with millions of Americans. But they have raised alarm among some Democrats that he will make an easy target for President Donald Trump as a radical leftist, and that if he heads the Democratic ticket in November the party

could face sweeping losses.

Trump on Saturday issued a sarcastic-sounding congratulations on Twitter to the man he calls "Crazy Bernie". Asked if the Democrats' majority in the House of Representatives might be threatened if Sanders turned out to be Trump's rival in November, one powerful South Carolina Democrat said that it might.

"It would be a real burden for us in these states or congressional districts that we have to do well in," said James Clyburn, the House Democratic whip. "In those districts, it's going to be tough to hold onto these jobs if you have to make the case for accepting a self-proclaimed Democratic socialist."

Buttigieg, while congratulating Sanders on his Nevada victory, offered a stern warning against picking someone who he said sees "capitalism as the root of all evil" to go up against the populist president. Pressure seems certain to grow on some of the lower-polling Democratic moderates to withdraw to allow others to coalesce around a centrist who might fare better against Trump.

Republican campaign advisor Mark McKinnon, speaking on CNN, predicted that the lower polling candidates will be flushed out of the race after Super Tuesday. But the centrist alternatives face steep challenges, he added: Bloomberg performed notably poorly in Wednesday's Democratic debate, and "Biden does not have the resources."

Progressive candidate Elizabeth Warren, speaking late Saturday in Washington state, which votes March 10, vowed to stay in the race despite a third straight mediocre showing. She renewed her attacks on Bloomberg, accusing him of trying to "buy this election". Bloomberg, co-founder of the Bloomberg LP media company, has plowed a record \$438 million of personal funds into his campaign.

McKinnon said, meantime, that if Sanders compiled a large enough lead after Super Tuesday it would make it hard for other Democrats to oppose his nomination at the national convention in July, even if he has not won a clear majority of delegates. "There's something going on here that defies the conventional wisdom," he said: A 78-year-old man attracting highly energized young voters. Sanders, he said, "is creating a passion among voters." — AFP

city yesterday, asking people not to shake hands as part of a coronavirus prevention campaign. Iran's cyberpolice meanwhile warned that anyone putting "fake clips" online related to the virus would be punished. Iran has yet to confirm the origin of the outbreak, but one official had speculated that it was brought in by Chinese workers. But academics expressed concern over the ability of Iran - currently grappling with a major economic crisis and hit by swingeing US sanctions - to contain the outbreak.

"It is unlikely that Iran will have the resources and facilities to adequately identify cases and adequately manage them if case numbers are large," said Paul Hunter, a medical professor at the University of East Anglia in Britain. He also noted that the "situation in Iran has major implications for the Middle East," in a context where the region is grappling with multiple conflicts. "During armed conflicts borders between countries become porous... and health-care facilities are often targeted and destroyed."

Other regional countries yesterday also took major precautionary measures to counter the virus potentially spreading from Iran. Jordan said it would bar entry to citizens of China, Iran and South Korea and other foreigners travelling from those countries. Jordan's minister of state for media affairs, Amjad Adayleh, said the decision was part of "preemptive measures... following the rise in cases of coronavirus" in the three countries. He said the ban would be "temporary" and imposed on all non-Jordanians. — Agencies

## Walls, mud packs, monkey removal for Trump in India

Continued from Page 1

attempt to conceal reality. "So Modi has supposedly made everything good and there's development everywhere, right? But he's hid us behind here," Sarania told AFP. "We're made invisible. So the gutter we live in, he (Trump) won't see us. That's why they're building this."

Scores of banners and hoardings with pictures of Trump, Modi and Melania Trump have been put up across the city, projecting the "Namaste Trump" rally as a historic event in US-India relations. The route will be lined with thousands of people - well short of the 6-10 million Trump says he has been told will attend - as well as stages for performers and images of independence hero Mahatma Gandhi.

Ahmedabad officials are also keen to avoid a repeat of when then-US secretary of state John Kerry's cavalcade hit one of India's ubiquitous stray dogs during a 2015 visit. The local Cattle and Dog Nuisance Control Department (CDNCD) has constituted a crack team to remove dogs and errant cows - another common sight in Indian cities - in a three-kilometer radius of the route.

A local NGO and the state forest department have also been roped in to keep birds and bands of monkeys

out of Air Force One's way on the runway at Ahmedabad airport. "In the past 10 days, we have caught 45-odd monkeys. They come in search of food," Raag Patel from the Nature Conservation Foundation said. The captive monkeys are put in cages with food, sent to a "distant location" and released, Patel said.

Next stop for the Trumps will be sunset at the Taj Mahal in Agra, south of New Delhi, and here too workers have been busy making the world-famous Islamic mausoleum more beautiful still. Back in the 17th century, some 20,000 laborers, sculptors, calligraphers and stone cutters, along with 1,000 elephants, took 16 years to construct the white marble monument. Time, and also air pollution, have however taken their toll, turning parts of the Taj Mahal yellow, necessitating several rounds of treatment with coatings of mud packs that are then peeled off.

For the Trumps, the replicas of the graves of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and his favorite wife Mumtaz Mahal - for whom the Taj Mahal was built - are getting the beauty treatment too, and for the first time. "We completed the mud-pack treatment on Thursday," Vasant Swarnkar from the Archaeological Survey of India told AFP. "It was already planned but the treatment was brought forward for Trump's visit." Authorities have also released vast volumes of water into the Yamuna river flowing adjacent to the Taj in order to lessen the usual whiff of raw sewage and industrial effluent. "This move may not make the Yamuna's water fit for drinking, but could reduce foul smell from the river," said Arvind Kumar, an engineer from the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board. — AFP

## Israel team in UAE; Pope...

Continued from Page 1

"I'm very excited, it's a nice country. We come here with a good team," Israeli cyclist Omer Goldstein told AFP ahead of the race. "It's special that I've arrived here because normally Israelis cannot (come) to this country... I invite all the Israelis to this country." The team said they were surprised by the warm reception they received in the UAE, where expatriates make up about 90 percent of the population. "After the initial shock to see the 'Israel Start-Up Nation logo,' some of them waved with friendly smiles and even asked for selfies," the team said after a visit to a Dubai cycling park.

Israel has been quietly moving closer to some Gulf Arab countries on the basis of shared security interests and a common rival - Iran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who visited Oman in 2018, frequently voices confidence that a decades-old Arab boycott - over treatment of the Palestinians and occupation of Arab lands - is thawing. Since then there have been other milestones in relations with the Gulf nations. Israeli Sports Minister Miri Regev toured the UAE's famed Sheikh Zayed mosque, Israel's communications minister delivered a speech in Dubai, and the Israeli national anthem was played at a judo competition in Abu Dhabi.

Meanwhile, Pope Francis yesterday warned against "inequitable solutions" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying they would only be a prelude to new crises, in an apparent reference to US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace proposal. Francis made his comments in the southern Italian port city of Bari, where he travelled to conclude a meeting of bishops from all countries in the Mediterranean basin. "The Mediterranean region is currently threatened by outbreaks of instability and conflict, both in the Middle East and different countries of North Africa, as well as between various ethnic,

religious or confessional groups," Francis said.

"Nor can we overlook the still unresolved conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, with the danger of inequitable solutions and, hence, a prelude to new crises," he said. The participants included Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the head of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, whose jurisdiction includes Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan. It was believed to be the first time the pope, who has often defended both Palestinian rights and Israel's need for security, has spoken in public about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since Trump announced the plan on Jan 28.

The plan would recognize Israel's authority over West Bank Jewish settlements and require Palestinians meet a series of conditions for a state, with its capital in a West Bank village east of Jerusalem. Although Trump's stated aim was to end decades of conflict, his plan favored Israel, underlined by the Palestinians' absence from his White House announcement with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side.

The Palestinians and Arab League foreign ministers have rejected the plan and the Palestinian Authority has cut all ties with the United States and Israel. Palestinians, with broad international backing, want East Jerusalem as the capital of a future independent state, while Israel views the whole city its "united and eternal" capital.

The pope expressed concern in 2018 when the United States announced the moving of its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, saying the city's "status quo" should be respected. Francis has called for all to honor UN resolutions on the city. "There is no reasonable alternative to peace, because every attempt at exploitation or supremacy demeans both its author and its target. It shows a myopic grasp of reality, since it can offer no future to either of the two," Francis said, speaking in general about the Middle East. Francis again warned against populist politicians who he said used "demagogic terms" such as "invasion" when talking of migration. "To be sure, acceptance and a dignified integration are stages in a process that is not easy. Yet it is unthinkable that we can address the problem by putting up walls," he said. — Agencies

## Iran's neighbors impose travel...

Continued from Page 1

China - the epicenter of the outbreak - reported another 97 deaths in its daily update yesterday, taking its total to 2,442, plus 648 new infections. Nearly 80,000 people have been infected worldwide, the vast majority in China. But official figures indicate the death rate is proportionately much higher in Iran than China, standing at nearly one in five of the confirmed infections.

Iran's health minister, Saeed Namaki, said the treatment of COVID-19 cases would be free. "In every city, one hospital will be dedicated to treating coronavirus cases," he said, adding that this number would be greater in bigger cities like the capital. Tehran's city hall has ordered the closure of snack shops and water fountains in metro stations, officials said. Tehran municipality spokesman Gholamreza Mohammadi said buses and underground trains were being disinfected. Mohsen Hashemi, head of Tehran's municipal council, said, "If the number of infections increases in Tehran, the whole city will be quarantined."

Posters were also being put up across the sprawling



Sports

# Explosive Heat honor iconic guard Wade, crush Cavaliers

## Suns beat Bulls on huge game by Ayton

MIAMI: Hot-shooting Miami produced its best half in franchise history and romped over the visiting Cleveland Cavaliers 124-105 on a Saturday night when the Heat retired the jersey of iconic guard Dwyane Wade. Playing without top scorer Jimmy Butler (personal reasons), the Heat made 14 of their first 17 shots and raced out to their best half ever by leading 82-52 at the break. Kendrick Nunn tallied 24 points and eight assists to lead seven Miami players who scored in double figures. The Cavaliers were paced by Cedi Osman's 19 points, seven rebounds and seven assists, while Collin Sexton added 17 points and Tristan Thompson scored 16. At halftime, the Heat honored Wade — their 13-time All-Star — whose No. 3 jersey was retired and raised to the rafters at American Airlines Arena. Wade, 38, helped Miami to three NBA championships and is the organization's all-time leader in games, points, assists and steals.

**PHOENIX SUNS 112 - CHICAGO BULLS 104**  
Behind 28 points and 19 rebounds from Deandre Ayton, visiting Phoenix rallied from down 10 points at halftime to beat Chicago. The Bulls led by as many as 17 points in the second quarter. Coby White came off the bench to set the pace, finishing with a career-high 33 points. But the Suns chipped away before halftime, then set the tone for the second half by scoring the third quarter's first 13 points. A 10-point deficit became a three-point lead in less than four minutes. Phoenix took its first lead since the first quarter when Devin Booker knocked down a 3-pointer, one of the five he made on the night en route to a team-high 29 points. Booker also collected five rebounds and five assists.

**HOUSTON ROCKETS 120 - UTAH JAZZ 110**  
James Harden scored 38 points, Russell Westbrook added 34 and Houston beat Utah on the road for the second time in four weeks. Harden added five rebounds and seven assists, and it was his sixth 3-pointer with 2:13 remaining that silenced the Jazz once and for all. Eric Gordon and Ben McLemore scored 12 points apiece off the bench for the Rockets, who finished 20 of 48 from behind the arc. Donovan Mitchell paced the

Jazz with 31 points while Jordan Clarkson added 22 off the bench. Utah posted a whopping 64 paint points, but that wasn't enough to offset the Rockets' shooting.

**ATLANTA HAWKS 111 - DALLAS MAVERICKS 107**  
John Collins tied his career high with 35 points and Trae Young scored 13 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter to help host Atlanta overcome an 11-point deficit in the period to defeat short-handed Dallas. Dallas opted to rest Luca Donicic and Kristaps Porzingis on the second end of a back-to-back. The Mavericks also lost Jalen Brunson, who started in place of Donicic, with a right shoulder sprain early in the first quarter. The Mavericks' Tim Hardaway matched his season high with 33 points, including six 3-pointers. Seth Curry scored 22 points and made four 3s. Collins was 13-for-18 from the floor, including 3-for-3 on 3-pointers, and added 17 rebounds. Cam Reddish scored 20 for the Hawks, who won their second straight.

**MILWAUKEE BUCKS 119 - PHILADELPHIA 76ERS 98**  
Giannis Antetokounmpo collected 31 points, 17 rebounds and eight assists to lift host Milwaukee to a wire-to-wire win over Philadelphia. Antetokounmpo shot 12 of 17 from the field for the Bucks, who have won 21 of 24 games since dropping a 121-109 decision to Philadelphia on Christmas Day. Khris Middleton added 25 points and nine rebounds as the Bucks sent road-challenged Philadelphia to its sixth straight loss away from home. To make matters worse for Philadelphia was the early departure of All-Star Ben Simmons, who aggravated a back injury on a layup midway into the first quarter. He promptly retreated to the locker room and did not return, scoring just five points in five minutes. He will undergo an MRI on his lower back on Sunday.

**BROOKLYN NETS 115 - CHARLOTTE HORNETS 86**  
Reserve Timothe Luwawu-Cabarrot's 21 points and Caris LeVert's 17 points led eight players in double-fig-



MIAMI: Solomon Hill #44 of the Miami Heat shoots the ball against the Cleveland Cavaliers at American Airlines Arena in Miami, Florida. —AFP

ure scoring as Brooklyn dominated host Charlotte en route to a victory. Garrett Temple (15 points), Taurean Prince (14), Joe Harris (12), Jarrett Allen (12), DeAndre Jordan (12) and Spencer Dinwiddie (10) also reached double digits. PJ Washington posted 16 points. Malik Monk had 15 points, Cody Zeller had 14 with nine rebounds and Miles Bridges added 13 points for Charlotte. Terry Rozier had 10 points.

**SACRAMENTO KINGS 112 - LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS 103**  
Kent Bazemore scored a season-high 23 points off

the bench, while De'Aaron Fox and Bogdan Bogdanovic added 20 points each as Sacramento defeated host Los Angeles. Harry Giles III had 14 points and 12 rebounds, while Harrison Barnes chipped in 13 points for Sacramento. Nemanja Bjelica contributed 10 points and seven rebounds. Fox had a team-high eight assists for the Kings, who have won five of their last seven. Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points and grabbed eight rebounds for the Clippers, who lost their third in a row. Lou Williams finished with 24 points and Montrezl Harrell had 16 points and 10 rebounds off the bench for Los Angeles. —Reuters

## Townsend praises Hogg leadership through tough time

ROME: Gregor Townsend praised captain Stuart Hogg's leadership through a "tough time" as the full-back scored Scotland's first try of the Six Nations to spark a 17-0 win over Italy in Rome on Saturday.

Hogg had squandered a try against Ireland with his errors also costing his team against England. But after a confidence-boosting performance with Exeter last weekend the full-back scored a stunning solo effort in the Stadio Olimpico.

The Scots came away from Rome with three tries with Chris Harris and Adam Hastings also touching down in the second half. "He marked his captaincy with a win and also with a great try," said Townsend.

"He's been full of positive energy and shown good leadership through a tough time losing games and other distractions. His decision making at the back and putting more pressure on Italy was very good."

"His lowest point was probably how

cold he was in the press conference after that England game but getting back to Exeter last week was a really good thing. "He just looked professional and full of energy and scored a great try for them and a great try for us today."

Scotland lost to Ireland and England without scoring a try, and had a disappointing World Cup campaign. But they came away from the Stadio Olimpico without conceding a point to the Italians in Rome for the first time in the Six Nations.

"The nothing (0) is more important (than the win)," said Townsend of the score. "When you come away from home against any team and you don't concede a try and you don't concede a point then you put in a very good defensive performance."

"Our best performance was against Ireland but today was a win and that means a lot more than against Ireland. "Maybe this can give us momentum going into the last two games." Scotland next host France at Murrayfield before travelling to Wales for their final game.

Townsend himself has been under-fire after a disappointing World Cup and the exile of fly-half Finn Russell after a falling out for breaching team protocol. He added that there was "still selection competition even though we



ROME: Scotland's full back Stuart Hogg clears a ball during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Italy and Scotland at the Olympic stadium in Rome. —AFP

won today". "We'll look at what we need to do better and if that means bringing in some other players." Hogg praised his side for being "in control, calm and composed". "I believed in the boys from the very beginning," he said. "We haven't performed the way we wanted to in the last couple of games."

"This group is now on track, it's a huge confidence boost for us," said Hogg. "Today we executed and the exiting thing is we can get better, we're going to enjoy that one."

"I said to the boys afterwards it wasn't perfect by any means, but nothing ever is going to be perfect, but our attitude was spot on." —AFP

## Italy, Scotland women's Six Nations postponed

ROME: The women's Six Nations clash between Italy and Scotland scheduled for late yesterday has been postponed because of the surge in the number of cases of the coronavirus Italy, tournament organisers have announced.

"The Women's Six Nations match between Italy and Scotland scheduled to be played today (Sunday) will not take place." Six Nations Rugby said in a statement.

"Six Nations Rugby are looking at options with the FIR and Scottish Rugby to reschedule this fixture at a later date." The match had been scheduled to take place in Legnano, north of Milan in the Lombardy region, which has been the epicentre of the outbreak of the so-called COVID-19 virus in Italy.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte had announced late on Saturday evening that all sporting events in the Veneto and Lombardy regions of northern Italy would be suspended yesterday. Three men's Serie A football matches yesterday also have been postponed including title-chasing Inter Milan's match against Sampdoria at the San Siro.

Atalanta v Sassuolo and Hellas Verona v Cagliari were also pushed back to avoid the spread of the virus with over 100 confirmed cases

in an outbreak that has claimed two lives in Italy. Inter's home Europa League match scheduled for Thursday against Bulgarian club Ludogorets is now also in doubt.

AC Milan also announced the postponement of its women's team match against Fiorentina. Saturday saw more than 40 amateur and youth matches in the regions called off because of virus fears. The Serie B game between Ascoli and Cremonese was also postponed.

The number of coronavirus cases in Italy has risen to over 100, Lombardy regional president Attilio Fontana said yesterday. Fontana told SkyTG24 television there were 89 cases in Lombardy alone. The authorities had said there were 79 cases in Italy, but that number has continued to grow. —AFP

## Brignone seizes World Cup lead

CRANS-MONTANA: Federica Brignone claimed the overall World Cup lead after powering to a comfortable victory in yesterday's combined event at Crans-Montana. The Italian posted a total time of one minute and 56.24 seconds after excellent super-G and slalom runs, beating Austria's Franziska Gritsch by 0.92sec.

Her overall World Cup hopes were further boosted when title rival Petra Vlhova failed to finish the slalom, costing the Slovakian crucial points. Olympic super-G champion Ester Ledecka finished third.

Brignone now leads American star Mikaela Shiffrin by 73 points in the overall standings with 11 races remaining. Shiffrin, bidding for a fourth straight big crystal globe, has not competed since the death of her father at the start of the month and is yet to announce when she will return to the circuit.

Vlhova is now 159 points adrift of Brignone. Brignone grabbed the early lead with a super-G run of 1min, 15.62sec, before proving her technical skills with the quickest slalom effort of the day in 40.62sec.

The 29-year-old's 15th career World Cup win was all but confirmed when Vlhova made her costly error. The World Cup season continues with a super-G at La Thuile in Italy on February 29, with another combined competition the following day at the same venue. —AFP



CRANS-MONTANA: Italy's Federica Brignone celebrates during the podium ceremony after winning the women's Slalom event at the FIS Alpine Ski World Cup Combined in Crans-Montana yesterday. —AFP

## Thomas seizes one-stroke WGC Mexico lead

MEXICO: Justin Thomas fired a six-under par 65 to seize a one-stroke lead over fellow American Patrick Reed and South Africa's Erik van Rooyen after Saturday's third round of the WGC Mexico Championship.

World number four Thomas, the 2017 PGA Championship winner, opened and closed with bogeys but made eight birdies in between to stand on 15-under 198 after 54 holes at Chapultepec Golf Club.

"I would have liked to have birdied the first hole to have seen what would have happened — I hit four bad shots on that hole," Thomas said. "I've gotten better just in general. I feel like I'm playing well enough where if I don't play them all well I can play four or five in a row and get pretty hot."

Thomas has managed three top-10 finishes at the Mexico event, including a runner-up effort to Phil Mickelson in 2018, but he yearns to finally capture the trophy. "I really want that first place," Thomas said. "I've been close a couple times. I definitely feel like I have a little bit of unfinished business here."

"I know I have to play well tomorrow but I want it." Reed, the 2018 Masters champion, closed with a bogey to settle for a share of second with van Rooyen after both shot 67 to finish on 199.

Spain's Jon Rahm shot a course-record 10-under 61, with a one-bounce ace at the par-3 17th, to share fourth on 202 with world number one Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland and American Bryson DeChambeau.

England's Paul Casey and Tyrrell Hatton shared seventh on 203. Thomas opened with a bogey, going well right of the cart path off the tee, but answered with birdies on the next two holes, sinking a 16-foot putt at the par-3 third, and made another from seven feet at the par-5 sixth.

He began the back nine with back-to-back birdies, made two more at the 14th and par-5 15th then dropped his approach just inside 14 feet at the par-3 17th and made the birdie putt. Another bogey at 18, where Thomas missed a par putt from six feet, opened the door for Reed, but he couldn't charge through.

Reed had back-to-back birdies to start the back nine and again at 14 and 15 but he found the right rough off the 18th tee and a greenside bunker, then blasted out to the fringe and came up short on a 17-foot par putt.

Rahm birdied six of the first seven holes before making a three-putt bogey from 45 feet at the par-4 eighth. He birdied the par-4 10th, par-3 13th and 15 before holing out from the 17th tee.

"I think a lot of us like to talk sometimes about how unlucky we get — today I got fortunate," Rahm said. "I hit the right shots and I got the right bounces and I took advantage of it."

He said he knew it could be a special day when he had four birdies to open his round. "When I basically had tap-in, tap-in, tap-in, and 10 feet for a birdie," said Rahm, who said his goal was "to get as close as possible to the leaders." —AFP

## Sports

# Boult fired up as N Zealand have India on the ropes

## India had their opportunities to clip New Zealand's wings

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on day three of the first Test between New Zealand and India at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday:

<b>India 1st innings 165</b> (A. Rahane 46; K. Jamieson 4-39; T. Southee 4-49)	
<b>New Zealand 1st innings</b> (overnight 216-5)	
T. Latham c Pant b Sharma	11
T. Blundell b Sharma	30
K. Williamson c sub (Jadeja) b Shami	89
R. Taylor c Pujara b Sharma	44
H. Nicholls c Kohli b Ashwin	17
B. Watling c Pant b Bumrah	14
C. de Grandhomme c Pant b Ashwin	43
T. Southee c Shami b Sharma	6
K. Jamieson c Vihari b Ashwin	44
A. Patel not out	4
T. Boult c Pant b Sharma	38
Extras (b1, lb1, w6)	8
<b>Total</b> (all out, 100.2 overs)	348
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-26 (Latham), 2-73 (Blundell), 3-166 (Taylor), 4-185 (Williamson), 5-207 (Nicholls), 6-216 (Watling), 7-225 (Southee), 8-296 (Jamieson), 9-310 (de Grandhomme), 10-348 (Boult)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Bumrah 26-5-88-1 (6w), Sharma 22.2-6-68-5, Shami 23-2-91-1, Ashwin 29-1-99-3	
<b>India 2nd innings</b>	
P. Shaw c Latham b Boult	14
M. Agarwal c Watling b Southee	58
C. Pujara b Boult	11
V. Kohli c Watling b Boult	19
A. Rahane not out	25
H. Vihari not out	15
Extras: (w2)	2
<b>Total</b> (four wickets; 65 overs)	144
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-27 (Shaw), 2-78 (Pujara), 3-96 (Agarwal), 4-113 (Kohli)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Southee 15-5-41-1, Boult 16-6-27-3, de Grandhomme 14-5-25-0, Jamieson 17-7-33-0 (2w), Patel 3-0-18-0.	

WELLINGTON: New Zealand quick Trent Boult declared himself "happy to be back" as he bagged three wickets to leave India struggling for survival at stumps on day three of the first Test in Wellington yesterday. India, faced with a 183-run first-innings deficit, were 144 for four at the close, still 39 in arrears after rollicking innings by Boult and Kyle Jamieson pushed New Zealand to 348.

Ajinkya Rahane was unbeaten on 25 with Hanuma Vihari on 15, and spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said India were far from raising the white flag, although with only six wickets remaining, he saw a score around 350 as necessary to save the Test.

Boult, back in Test cricket after breaking a hand during the Boxing Day Test in a disastrous series for New Zealand in Australia, took a back seat in India's first innings when Jamieson and Tim Southee took four wickets apiece to roll the tourists for 165.

But he came to the fore on day three, first with the bat and then with figures of three for 27 as India, the world's top-ranked side, looked lost in New Zealand conditions. "I'm just happy to be back out there, it's been a little frustrating on the sidelines," the left-arter said. "If we can get a couple more early in the first hour (today) or so, we should be in a good position." Boult credited changing the angle of delivery as a key weapon to upset the Indian batsmen. "We know it's a very good wicket generally and day three and four is the best time to bat. If I do my job, we won't be chasing too much."

Ashwin believed the pitch would give more in the final two days, bringing an emphasis on his spin if India can set a strong enough target. "The Test match cricket, it begins now," he said.

"If you can get as close to the first innings score as they did then we might present ourselves an opportunity to do something, but that's very far away in the game and we have to take it every ball at a time because there is enough in the surface."

India lost Prithvi Shaw early in their second innings to give Boult his first wicket and he claimed Cheteshwar Pujara with the last ball before tea. Mayank Agarwal



WELLINGTON: New Zealand's Trent Boult (R) bowls with India's Ajinkya Rahane during day three of the first Test cricket match between New Zealand and India at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. —AFP

went for 58 soon after the resumption and Boult removed Virat Kohli to have India at 113 for four.

India had their opportunities to clip New Zealand's wings. They opened the day with two wickets in the first three overs to have New Zealand 225 for seven, just 60 runs ahead. But lusty hitting from Jamieson with

an entertaining 44 off 45 balls and Boult adding 38 off 24, along with a more sedate 43 from Colin de Grandhomme saw New Zealand's last three wickets add 123 runs. Ishant Sharma was the most successful of the Indian bowlers with five for 68 while Ashwin took three for 99. —AFP

## Washington star Ovechkin scores 700th NHL goal

NEW YORK: Washington Capitals star Alex Ovechkin became only the eighth player in NHL history to reach 700 career goals on Saturday by striking in the third period against the New Jersey Devils.

The 34-year-old Russian left winger reached the milestone 4:50 into the last session, taking a pass from countryman Evgeny Kuznetsov and blasting a slapshot into the net from the faceoff circle to the left of New Jersey goaltender McKenzie Blackwood.

"It means a lot," Ovechkin said. "Not a lot of players did it in the history of the game. It's nice to be in that company. It's a big moment for the organization."

The goal, which equalized at 2-2 in what proved to be a 3-2 New Jersey victory, prompted Ovechkin to lift his arms into the air and smile before being mobbed by his teammates in an on-ice celebration.

"As soon as I got the puck I didn't try to rush it," Ovechkin said. "I did my work when I got in the zone and they find me in front of the net." Fans at the Newark, New Jersey, arena gave Ovechkin a standing ovation for the achievement.

"When you get closer, you're thinking about when is it going to happen," Ovechkin said. "If I didn't score it today we still have 20 games. I hit the net. It's over. So move on." Capitals captain Ovechkin joined an exclusive 700-goal club that includes the all-time record holder Wayne Gretzky with 894 goals and second-place Gordie Howe on 801 followed by Jaromir Jagr (766), Brett Hull (741), Marcel Dionne (731), Phil Esposito (717) and Mike Gartner (708).

"It's pretty good company," Ovechkin said. "I'm happy to be there." Ovechkin managed the feat in 1,144 games, the second-fastest player to crack 700 after Gretzky, who did it in only 886 games. He is the second-youngest to reach 700 NHL goals after Gretzky, who did it at age 29.

Ovechkin, who led Washington to the 2018 Stanley Cup title, became the fastest NHL player to advance from 600 to 700 career goals, doing so in only 154 games. The goal was Ovechkin's 42nd of the campaign, which put him one shy of season co-leaders Auston Matthews of Toronto and David Pastrnak of Boston. It was Ovechkin's fifth goal against the Devils this season.

Ovechkin, an eight-time NHL goals champion, had scored only once in Washington's past six games after netting 14 goals in the previous seven contests. He broke a season-longest five-game goal drought with the 699th of his career and 41st of the season on Thursday in a 4-3 home overtime loss to the Montreal Canadiens. —AFP

## Nishioka rallies to reach Delray Beach final

MIAMI: Unseeded Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan rallied for a 1-6, 6-4, 6-0 victory over sixth-seeded Ugo Humbert Saturday to reach the ATP Delray Beach final. Nishioka, apparently refreshed by a second rain delay, roared through the final set to advance to his second career final.

He won his only prior title match at Shenzhen in 2018, a he'll face either second-seeded Milos Raonic of Canada or fourth-seeded American Reilly Opelka for the trophy. The Raonic-Opelka semi-final was moved to yesterday morning because of rain.

## Bangladesh dominate Zimbabwe

DHAKA: Najmul Hossain and skipper Mominul Haque hit half-centuries as Bangladesh replied strongly to Zimbabwe in their one-off Test in Dhaka yesterday. Najmul made 71 off 139 balls while Mominul was unbeaten on 79 as Bangladesh reached 240-3 at stumps on the second day, trailing Zimbabwe by 25 runs in the first innings. Pace bowler Abu Javed earlier finished with a career-best 4-71, as Zimbabwe were bowled out for 265 in the opening session, after the visitors resumed on 228-6.

Najmul, who struck seven fours in his fluent innings, led Bangladesh's initial batting charge after Victor Nyauchi removed opener Saif Hasan for eight to give Zimbabwe an early breakthrough. He was involved in partnerships of 78 and 76 runs with Tamim Iqbal and Mominul on his way to a maiden Test fifty in only his fourth match.

"I think I had the chance to make the innings longer because the wicket was good. Still I would say apart from the out, I batted well as long I was at the crease," said Najmul. Tamim made 41 runs before he edged Donald Tiripano to wicketkeeper Regis Chakabva.

Debutant Charlton Tshuma dismissed Najmul for his maiden Test wicket as Chakabva claimed a third catch behind the stumps. Mominul, who hit nine fours, and Mushfiqur saw off the day without further damage as they shared 68 runs in an unbroken fourth-wicket stand. Mushfiqur, who returned to the side after skipping the previous Test against Pakistan, remained unbeaten on 32. Zimbabwe captain Craig Ervine said they were let down by their bowling.

"We didn't hit the good areas consistently enough. Obviously tomorrow we will like to come back strongly and break the partnership as early as possible," he said. Zimbabwe earlier added 37 runs to their overnight score before Jayed and left-arm spinner Taijul Islam wrapped up their innings. Jayed dismissed overnight batsman Tiripano for eight when he nicked an edge to wicketkeeper Liton Das in the seventh over. The same bowler trapped Ainsley Ndlovu leg before for a duck in his next over. Taijul had Charlton Tshuma for a duck before he dismissed the other overnight batsman Regis Chakabva for 30 to end with 2-90. Skipper Craig Ervine was the mainstay of Zimbabwe's innings with 107, while off-spinner Nayeem Hasan nabbed 4-70 for Bangladesh. —AFP

Nishioka, 24 and ranked 63rd in the world, is already projected to surpass his career-best ranking of 58 tomorrow. After reaching that mark in March of 2017 Nishioka tore a left knee ligament and dropped as low as 380th in the world in April 2018 before starting to climb his way back.

Nishioka, who rallied to beat American Brandon Nakashima in the quarter-finals, saved six of eight break points he faced and won 27 of 37 points in the deciding set to beat the in-form Frenchman, who triumphed in Auckland in January.

Meanwhile, world number four Dominic Thiem of Austria missed a chance to reach a career-best third in the ATP rankings with a Rio Open quarter-final loss Saturday to Italy's Gianluca Mager.

Mager, a 128th-ranked qualifier playing in only his eighth career tour-level match, defeated 2017 Rio champion Thiem 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 in a match that was halted Friday by rain. Had Thiem reached the semi-finals in his

2020 clay-court debut, he would have overtaken Roger Federer for third in Monday's ATP rankings. Thiem was down a set and a break when rain stopped the match Friday with Mager leading 7-6 (7/4), 2-1. Mager served for the match in the ninth game of the second set but Thiem broke to pull level at 5-5, only to have the Italian claim the final two games and the match after one hour and 55 minutes on the court.

Mager booked a semi-final date against 106th-ranked Hungarian lucky loser Attila Balazs, who outlasted 133rd-ranked Spanish qualifier Pedro Martinez 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 in another rain-hit quarter-final.

Saturday's other semi-final pitted Chilean third seed Cristian Garin and fifth-seeded Borna Coric of Croatia, but rain again prevented those matches from being completed. When the semi-finals finally went on court late Saturday, Mager won the first set against Balazs 7-6 (7/4), and they were level at 3-3 when rain halted play again. Garin was up 6-4, 4-4 on Coric in their match, with both to resume later. —AFP



DHAKA: Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim (R) plays a shot as Zimbabwe's Regis Chakabva (L) looks on during the second day of a Test cricket match between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. —AFP

## Bangladesh call up Naim, Afif for Zimbabwe ODIs

DHAKA: Bangladesh have called up uncapped batsmen Mohammad Naim and Afif Hossain for their 15-man squad for the first two one-day internationals of a three-match series against Zimbabwe next month.

Naim and Afif have played Twenty20 for Bangladesh, but were not part of the ODI side to be led by pacer Mashrafe Mortaza. Mashrafe was retained as captain despite concerns over his future, and will lead the side for the first time since

the World Cup last year.

Batsman Liton Das and all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin also return to the ODI side after missing the previous series against Sri Lanka in July. "It is great to have Mortaza back as his experience and leadership is vital to our one day cricket," said Bangladesh Cricket Board official Minhajul Abedin.

"Saifuddin is also key to the team's balance." The first two ODIs against Zimbabwe will be held in Sylhet on March 1 and 3.

The teams are currently playing a one-off Test in Dhaka.

**Bangladesh ODI Squad:** Mashrafe Mortaza (Capt), Tamim Iqbal, Nazmul Hossain, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Mithun, Liton Das, Taijul Islam, Afif Hossain, Mohammad Naim, Al Amin Hossain, Mohammad Saifuddin, Shafiqul Islam, Mehidy Hasan and Mustafizur Rahman. —AFP

## Sports

# Fernandes lifts Man Utd, Arsenal clinch victory against Everton

## Jota double for Wolves pushes Norwich deeper into trouble

**LONDON:** Manchester United moved onto the shoulder of fourth-placed Chelsea yesterday after brushing aside lowly Watford as Wolves and Arsenal also staked their claims for Champions League football next season.

With runaway leaders Liverpool looking certain to win the Premier League, attention has switched to the race for European places, with just 10 points separating fourth-placed Chelsea from Southampton, in 12th spot.

New signing Bruno Fernandes opened his goalscoring account for United at Old Trafford from the penalty spot before impressive second-half goals from Anthony Martial and Mason Greenwood sealed a 3-0 win.

It means United, who have struggled to find consistency all season, are now in fifth place on 41 points, just three adrift of Chelsea.

United paid tribute to the late Harry Gregg, hero of the 1958 Munich air disaster, before kick-off at Old Trafford, where Fernandes calmed the nerves in a superb individual display.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer praised his new signing, who picked up the man-of-the-match award for his display against Watford, languishing second from bottom of the table.

"He has done fantastic," said the Norwegian boss. "He has given everyone a boost. He wants the ball all the time, he wants to conduct the play. "I am very pleased for him. He has done something to the crowd. He shows the attributes of a Manchester United player. He is a great addition to the squad."

Portugal midfielder Fernandes is under no illusions over his task as United look to return to the lucrative Champions League after a season away.

"Everyone knows we want to get into the Champions League places. I am here to help the team conquer this place and keep winning games," he told the BBC. Wolves, in eighth place, are just two points

behind United after a convincing 3-0 win against bottom-club Norwich at Molineux.

Diogo Jota scored twice and Raul Jimenez poached his 21st of the campaign early in the second period to leave Norwich seven points adrift of safety and looking doomed.

Wolves boss Nuno Espirito Santo said his side had managed the game well. When asked about challenging for a Champions League spot, he said: "We're going to stay focused because the difficulty is to sustain your performances through the season."

"After that, we'll see, but it's about building your team and getting them ready to compete whenever, wherever."

In the day's late kick-off, Arsenal recovered from a terrible start to hand Carlo Ancelotti's Everton their first Premier League defeat since New Year's Day.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin finished acrobatically after Arsenal failed to deal with a free-kick in the first minute. Arsenal were level in the 27th minute when Eddie Nketiah finished expertly past Jordan Pickford from Bukayo Saka's cross and six minutes later they were ahead when Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang raced clear and finished coolly.

Everton equalised in first-half stoppage time when Richarlison got the faintest of touches to a header from Yerry Mina to poke past Bernd Leno but Arsenal retook the lead when Aubameyang scored his second moments after the re-start.

Arsenal survived a late scare to climb to ninth in the table, two points behind Wolves. As it stands, fifth place could be enough to earn a Champions League spot because second-placed Manchester City have been banned from Europe's elite competition for two seasons, pending an appeal.

On Saturday, Chelsea strengthened their grip on a top-four place by beating London rivals Tottenham 2-1 on a day overshadowed by controversial VAR decisions. Officials ruled that Spurs midfielder Giovani Lo



**MANCHESTER:** Manchester United's French striker Anthony Martial (R) competes with Watford's Moroccan-born Italian defender Adam Masina (L) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Watford at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, yesterday. —AFP

Celso did not deserve to be sent off for a stamp on Cesar Azpilicueta that Chelsea boss Frank Lampard called a "leg breaker".

There were also incidents involving the technology in Bournemouth's defeat at Burnley and Manchester

City's win at Leicester.

Elsewhere, there were wins for Crystal Palace and Southampton while high-flying Sheffield United drew 1-1 with Brighton. Liverpool host struggling West Ham at Anfield today. —AFP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Liverpool v West Ham United beIN Sports	23:00
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA	
Eintracht Frankfurt v FC Union Berlin beIN Sports	22:30

## Women's Euro 2021 to kick off at Old Trafford

**LONDON:** England will kick off the 2021 women's European Championship at Old Trafford as part of an ambitious target to sell 700,000 tickets for the event and smash previous attendance records. The final of the 16-team tournament between July 7 and August 1 next year will take place at Wembley with eight other stadiums across England hosting the other 29 matches.

"To kick-off at the Theatre of Dreams in Manchester and to have the final at the iconic Wembley Stadium shows just how far the game has come," said UEFA's head of women's football and former German international Nadine Kessler.

"This is what women's football deserves. To play in such stadia is what you strive for — as a player, coach, referee and a fan." England's Football Association is hoping to ride the momentum of the Lionesses' run to the semi-finals of last year's World Cup.

A UK television audience of 11.7 million watched England's defeat in the last four to world champions the United States. Attendances at Women's Super League games have increased this season on the back of that success, with big crowds in particular for a number of fixtures played at the likes of Stamford Bridge, Anfield, the Etihad and Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

England's 2-1 friendly defeat by Germany at Wembley fell just short of a European record for a women's match as nearly 78,000 attended. Sheffield, Brentford, Brighton, Leigh, Rotherham, Milton Keynes, Southampton and Manchester City's Academy stadium will host 29 of the 31 matches with capacities ranging from 4,700 to 32,000.

The plan to sell 700,000 tickets is an ambitious one. At the 2017 Euros in the Netherlands, which the hosts won to boost crowd numbers, only 240,000 tickets were sold. The largest attendance at last year's World Cup was 58,000 and the previous record for a match at the women's Euros is 41,000.

However, having witnessed the massive transformation in the popularity of the women's game in England, Sue Campbell, the FA's director of women's football is hopeful of "raising the bar" once again.

"We want with UEFA to make this the most successful tournament," said Campbell. "Euro 2021 is an opportunity to build on that platform and take it to another level. "What we hope for the tournament is to raise the bar yet again for the women's game in England. We thought we had raised it pretty high in the last few years but we want to lift it again. "More fans watching; more women playing; more women coaching; more women refereeing." —AFP

## Bordeaux's bargain Hwang Ui-jo takes on PSG's stars

**BORDEAUX:** When Bordeaux visit Paris Saint-Germain yesterday they will counter the home team's costly collection of stars with a player they picked up cheaply last summer. Hwang Ui-jo was approaching his 27th birthday when Bordeaux bought him from Gamba Osaka in Japan for just two million euros last July.

He has scored five goals and caught the eye with his technique and work rate. Hwang was not even in South Korea's squad for the World Cup in Russia in 2018. Fans in South Korea were disappointed when Hwang was named one of three over age players for the Asian Games squad later that summer. Oh Jae-suk, a South Korean international who was a team-mate in Osaka, defended Hwang. "Ui-jo is a striker with many strengths," Oh told Korea Daily at the time. "He's a style of player who runs a lot, and he focuses a lot more when he's given a chance to score. After he got added to the Asian Games team, he quit surfing the web, has only been thinking about football and is hoping to help the team."

The focus paid off. Hwang scored nine goals in seven matches as South Korea won the tournament. He also scored 31 goals in 71 matches in two seasons with Osaka and Bordeaux made their move. His first three goals for his new club were from outside the box each more beautiful than the last. His last two, including the opener in a 2-2 draw with Amiens last week, with his head.

Not bad for player on a new continent, who hardly speaks French and has not had a break since January last year and has to fly half way round the world on every international break to play for his country.

The club have been quick to exploit the potential of a new market. For their derby match against Nantes in November, a match broadcast live in South Korea they added the players' names in Korean on the back of the shirts. Sales in South Korea have risen sharply.

Bordeaux Coach Sousa says language is not a

## Messi scores 4 as Barca jump above defeated Madrid

**MADRID:** Lionel Messi scored four goals and Barcelona reclaimed top spot in La Liga as Real Madrid suffered a surprise defeat by Levante on Saturday, a week before the Clasico. Madrid's nightmare afternoon was made worse by another injury to Eden Hazard, who was forced off in the second half of their 1-0 defeat in Valencia and is now doubtful to face Manchester City on Wednesday in the Champions League. "It doesn't look good," said Real coach Zinedine Zidane afterwards.

Messi, meanwhile, ridiculed talk of a drought by scoring four goals against Eibar after four games without one, while emergency signing Martin Braithwaite made two assists off the bench, teeing up Messi and then Arthur Melo in injury-time.

Their 5-0 rout, coupled with Madrid's defeat, means Barca move back to the summit of La Liga, two points ahead of Zidane's side ahead of next Saturday's showdown at the Santiago Bernabeu. "We've had good times this season and now this is a bad time," said Zidane. "Now we have a week where everything is at stake."

It amounts to a considerable shift in momentum, with Barcelona away at Napoli in the first leg of the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday.

Madrid host City a day later and the plan had been for Hazard to regain form and fitness in what was only his sec-



**GIRONDINS DE BORDEAUX:** File photo taken on August 24, 2019 Bordeaux's South Korean midfielder Ui-jo Hwang plays with the ball during the French L1 football match between Dijon FC0 and FC Girondins de Bordeaux at the Gaston Gerard stadium, central France. —AFP

problem. "The squad is fantastic with him, helps him a lot with his integration and we are very happy with everything he's doing." Sousa said he is in contact with former Portugal team-mate Paulo Bento, the coach of South Korea about Hwang. "He's the player in the squad who makes the most breaks, with the highest intensity, with early calls and good timing." Sousa adding that there are areas where Hwang could be better.

"He needs to improve in the final area, either through dribbling, centring or shooting. He needs to be icier to make the best decision. That's the difference between a good player and a top player."

Former Bordeaux and France striker Philippe Fargeon compared the work Hwang does when the opposition has the ball with Edinson Cavani. "It's always good for a team to see a striker doing that job," Fargeon said. "Look at Cavani, who is a striker, who doesn't necessarily take part in the development of the game but who is very popular with his colleagues because they know they can count on him as their first defensive line of defence." Today, depending on how PSG shuffle their axes, Hwang could even find himself going toe-to-toe with Cavani. —AFP

ond start since returning from three months out with a broken right foot. But the Belgian sat in the dug-out with an ice pack around the same foot after going off and Zidane suggested it was a repeat injury after the match.

"It can be weak where you've had an injury," he said. "It's sore now but we will see tomorrow after more tests."

Madrid were shaken by Hazard's departure and Levante capitalised as Jose Luis Morales banged a shot into the top corner from the angle, even if Thibaut Courtois pulled out of a save he should have made.

For Madrid, playing catch-up again next weekend will be a particularly heavy psychological blow, especially given the series of off-field problems engulfing Barcelona in recent weeks. Yet on the pitch, Messi showed no sign of distraction as the 32-year-old completed the second fastest of his now 36 league hat-tricks, after less than 40 minutes at Camp Nou.

"There's nothing left to do but stand up and applaud," Eibar wrote on Twitter afterwards. "I won't wash my kit after hugging Messi," said Braithwaite.

Braithwaite's arrival from Leganes drew criticism after Barcelona capitalised on a curious La Liga rule that allows clubs to sign outside of the transfer window if they have lost a player to serious injury. Leganes, without their top scorer, were beaten earlier by fellow strugglers Celta Vigo but Braithwaite made the perfect start with his new team.

Messi quickly got to work, scoring a brilliant first goal in the 14th minute after collecting the ball centrally, around 30 yards out. He had three Eibar defenders in front of him but found a way through, nutmegging Anaitz Arbilla before chipping delicately into the corner. The second came in the 37th minute as Sergio Busquets found Arturo Vidal, who feathered a flick into Messi's path. Messi surged forward, past his stumbling opponents, and fired in. —AFP

## Jesus strikes as Man City beat Leicester

**LEICESTER:** Gabriel Jesus struck late to give Manchester City a 1-0 win at Leicester on Saturday, strengthening their hold on second place behind champions-in-waiting Liverpool despite more woe from the penalty spot.

Pep Guardiola's men have endured a turbulent week after they were banned from European club competitions for two years for breaches of financial fair play rules. But a second-half winner from substitute Jesus after Sergio Aguero had failed to convert a penalty put them 17 points clear of fifth-placed Tottenham and sends them into their midweek match against Real Madrid in good spirits.

City looked like they might have to settle for a draw after squandering their fourth penalty in a row in the Premier League, with each being missed by a different player. "We have missed four penalties in a row but maybe we will shoot a penalty when we need it to win something," Guardiola told the BBC. "The keepers are good too, but the next one we are going to score."

The City boss said his team were in good shape for their Champions League last-16 first-leg tie in Spain. "We are playing the kings of the competition, we will see, we will try to enjoy it and do our game," he added.

City, who still trail leaders Liverpool by 19 points, bossed possession in a lively opening spell at the King Power Stadium but the home side should have taken an early lead when Jamie Vardy was put through.

The pacy forward, who has not scored since December after an electric spell, was preparing to celebrate but saw the ball rebound agonisingly off the base of the post to safety. A minute later, former Leicester favourite Riyad Mahrez went close, striking a left-footed shot from outside the box that was palmed away by Kasper Schmeichel.

Aguero had the ball in the net on the stroke of half-time but the goal was ruled out for off-side. Both sides maintained their intensity after the break and Schmeichel produced a fine save, diving down to his right to keep out a Kevin De Bruyne shot.

The decisive moment appeared to come just after the hour mark when Manchester City were awarded a penalty after a VAR check confirmed that Leicester's Dennis Praet had handled the ball in the first half.

Aguero blasted the ball down the middle but Schmeichel kept it out with his legs, moments later denying the Argentine hitman with his left foot. Guardiola replaced Aguero with Jesus with less than a quarter of an hour to go and the change paid quick dividends as the Brazilian stretched to poke the ball past the diving Schmeichel after an assist from Mahrez in the 80th minute.

Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers said he was "bitterly disappointed" with the result, which leaves his side seven points adrift of City, and felt his side should have had a penalty of their own when De Bruyne appeared to block a free-kick with his hands in the first half.

"We were always a threat in the game," he told Sky Sports. "Of course they have big quality, but I was so pleased with how we defended. "There's no magic formula, you've just got to work hard. The players gave everything tonight. We're in a great, great position in the league so it's just staying positive." —AFP

**25** Brignone seizes World Cup lead



**26** Boulton fired up as NZ have India on the ropes



**27** Fernandes on the spot as Man United climb to fifth



## Fury crushes Wilder in title rematch

**LAS VEGAS:** Tyson Fury reigns again as a heavyweight world champion after battering Deontay Wilder to a stunning seventh-round stoppage in their World Boxing Council title rematch. Fourteen months after their dramatic split-decision draw, Britain's Fury dominated the American champion — who had blood dripping from his left ear and leaking from his mouth when referee Kenny Bayless called a halt as Wilder's corner threw in the towel.

"The king has returned to the top of the throne," said Fury, who had dropped Wilder in the third and fifth rounds as he remained unbeaten while handing Wilder the first defeat of his career. The self-styled "Gypsy King" from northern England — who was carried to the Las Vegas ring on a golden throne — had put on a boxing masterclass in their first fight on December 1, 2018, but he was clearly ready to brawl from the opening bell on Saturday.

A massive right from Fury knocked down Wilder in the third leaving him on wobbly legs and although he went down again moments later it was ruled a slip.

A huge left to the body had Wilder down again in the fifth, and Fury was raining blows on Wilder when Bayless called a halt at 1:39 of the seventh round after one of Wilder's corner team hurled a white towel into the ring to save him from further punishment.

A point deduction in the fifth round for

holding was barely a blip for a dominant Fury. Two of the judges had the Briton winning every round, while the third judge gave one round to Wilder. The 34-year-old American suffered his first defeat in 44 fights, falling to 42-1 with 1 drawn and 41 knockouts.

The "Bronze Bomber" was unable to surpass Muhammad Ali's record of 10 successful heavyweight title defenses. "Even the greatest have lost and come back," Wilder said. "I make no excuses. This is what big-time boxing is all about."

Fury regained a piece of the heavyweight title more than four years after beating Wladimir Klitschko for the WBA, IBF and WBO belts — and after depression, drink and drug problems had threatened to end his career. "I just want to say a big shout out to Deontay Wilder," said Fury, who improved his own unbeaten record to 30-0 with one drawn and 21 knockouts. "He manned up. He really did show heart of a champion."

"I hit him with a clean right hand and dropped him, and he got back up and battled on into round seven. "He is a warrior, he will be back, he will be champion again." As the pro-Fury crowd of 15,816 at the MGM Grand cheered, Wilder briefly protested the stoppage. "A WARRIOR"

"I just wish that my corner would have let me went out on my shield," he said. "I'm a

warrior." Wilder's fierce punching power had been on full display when he knocked Fury down twice in their first fight in Los Angeles — the Briton miraculously climbing off the canvas in the 12th round to hang on for a share of the spoils.

With new trainer Javan "Sugarhill" Steward in his corner, and more than 16 pounds heavier than the first encounter at 273 pounds, Fury was on the attack early, backing Wilder up with his jab and landing several hard shots in the opening round.

Fury failed to produce the second-round knockout he had predicted, but he was clearly in control. The fight, arguably the biggest heavyweight collision since Lennox Lewis bludgeoned Mike Tyson into submission on the banks of the Mississippi River in 2002, drew a star-studded crowd.

Super Bowl Most Valuable Player Patrick Mahomes was ringside, so were Mark Davis, owner of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders and Raiders coach John Gruden. Retired NBA greats Magic Johnson and Jerry West were on hand, as was current Golden State Warriors star Draymond Green.

Former heavyweight world champions Mike Tyson, Lennox Lewis and Evander Holyfield were acknowledged in the ring before the bout — a nod to the fact that boxing's one-time glamour division was back in



**LAS VEGAS:** British boxer Tyson Fury celebrates after defeating US boxer Deontay Wilder in the seventh round during their World Boxing Council (WBC) Heavyweight Championship Title boxing match at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. — AFP

the spotlight. Top Rank president Todd duBoef told ESPN that with gate receipts of \$16.9 million Saturday's fight broke the record for a heavyweight fight in Las Vegas, passing the \$16.8 million set by the title rematch between Lewis and Holyfield in 1999.

It's a far cry from the record \$72.2 million

in gate receipts generated by the Floyd Mayweather-Manny Pacquiao clash in 2015.

But Wilder-Fury III would be another big draw — and set the stage for a mega unification fight against Britain's Anthony Joshua, the WBA IBF and WBO champion, for the undisputed title. — AFP



# FEBRUARY

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