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At least 56 mourners killed in stampede at Soleimani funeral

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KERMAN, Iran: Iranian mourners gather around a vehicle carrying the coffin of slain top general Qasem Soleimani during the final stage of funeral processions in his hometown yesterday. — AFP

KERMAN/BAGHDAD: At least 56 people were killed in a stampede as tens of thousands of mourners packed streets for the funeral of a slain Iranian military commander in his hometown yesterday, forcing his burial to be delayed by several hours, state media said. General Qasem Soleimani's burial began in the early evening in the southeastern Iranian city of Kerman, four days after his killing in a US drone strike in Iraq that plunged the region into a new crisis and raised fears of broader conflict.

"A few minutes ago his body was transferred to the martyrs section of Kerman cemetery," the semi-official news agency ISNA reported, adding that Soleimani's interment had begun. Soleimani, who commanded the elite Quds Force, was responsible for building up Tehran's network of proxy armies across the Middle East. He was a pivotal figure in orchestrating Iran's long-standing campaign to drive US forces out of Iraq.

A senior Iranian official said Tehran was considering several scenarios to avenge his death. Other senior figures have said the Islamic Republic would match the scale of the killing when it responds, but that it would choose the time and place. Yesterday's stampede broke out amid the crush of mourners, killing 56 people, state television said, raising the toll from 50 previously. More than 210 people were

injured, an emergency services official told the semi-official Fars news agency.

"Today because of the heavy congestion of the crowd unfortunately a number of our fellow citizens who were mourning were injured and a number were killed," emergency medical services chief Pirhossein Kolivand told state television. The streets of Kerman overflowed with mourners, while others took refuge on hillsides around the city, where the general was to be buried at the martyrs' cemetery.

"The enemy killed him unjustly," the Revolutionary Guards' top commander, Major General Hossein Salami said, adding that the process of "expelling the United States from the region has begun". "Our will is firm. We also tell our enemies that we will take revenge, and that if they (strike again) we will set fire to what they love," he told the sea of black-clad mourners. Schoolgirls joined chants of "Death to Trump" from the crowd.

Soleimani was a national hero to many Iranians, whether supporters of the clerical leadership or not. Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, said 13 "revenge scenarios" were being considered, Fars news agency reported. Even the weakest option would prove "a historic nightmare for the Americans", he said.

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Assembly delays grilling of Aseeri for two weeks

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly yesterday agreed to delay the debate of the grilling against Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Ghadeer Al-Aseeri for two weeks after the minister requested the postponement. Islamist MP Adel Al-Damkhi, who filed the grilling, accused the minister of undermining lawmakers and their voters by ridiculing their statements.

The minister had already demanded an explanation over a part of the grilling, saying it was not clear. MPs have accused the minister, who is in the Cabinet for the first time, of tweeting support for anti-government protests in Bahrain in 2011. The grilling is expected to be debated at the next session on Jan 21.

During the session, HHI the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah demanded that statements

made in the last session by opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri should be deleted. The lawmaker insisted that he only criticized the ruling family like other Kuwaitis, adding that the Assembly should not allow anyone, including ruling family members, to undermine the rights of the Kuwaiti people. The Assembly however agreed to remove the statements from its minutes.

MPs later accepted a government proposal to allocate two hours every month to debate issues concerning citizens despite the rejection of some lawmakers, who argued that this is not a proper way of resolving problems. The Assembly also approved a letter by MP Riyadh Al-Adasani calling on the government to refer the case of a former MP, who acknowledged receiving money from the government, to the Anti-Corruption Authority for investigation.

Adasani said the former MP had publicly admitted receiving the money and saying that other lawmakers had also taken it, and accordingly should be referred to the authority. MP Saleh Ashour said referring the case to the Anti-Corruption Authority would amount to interfering in the case, which is being investigated by the public prosecution, but Adasani denied it had been referred to the prosecution.

Continued on Page 24

Putin in surprise visit to Assad as Mideast boils

DAMASCUS: Russian President Vladimir Putin met Syria's Bashar Al-Assad yesterday during an unprecedented visit to Damascus as the prospect of war between Iran and the United States loomed over the region. In one of the highest-profile assassinations in the troubled Middle East's recent history, Washington killed top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani Friday, triggering vows of bloody revenge from Tehran and its allies.

On his first visit to the capital since the start of the Syrian conflict nearly nine years ago, Putin greeted the Russian forces stationed there on the occasion of the Orthodox Christmas. Russia's 2015 military intervention was decisive in saving Assad's regime and Putin hailed the latest advances made by Syrian government forces during his visit.

"In his conversation with Assad, Putin noted that we can now say with confidence that a huge distance has been travelled towards restoring Syrian statehood and the country's territorial integrity," Russian news agencies



DAMASCUS: A handout picture released yesterday shows Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin visiting the historical Umayyad Mosque in the Old City of the Syrian capital. — AFP

quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying. Government and allied forces barely controlled a fifth of the country before Moscow stepped in but have now clawed back most of the territory lost at the beginning of

Continued on Page 24

India suffers hottest decade on record

NEW DELHI: The past decade was India's hottest on record, with extreme heat directly killing about 350 people last year, the national meteorological department's chief said yesterday. India has faced some of the fastest-rising threats from climate change, environmentalists say, with increases in blistering heat, powerful cyclones, drought and flooding. Between 2010 and 2019, temperatures were 0.36 degrees Celsius above the 1981-2010 average, making it the hottest decade

since records began in 1901, according to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD).

Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, IMD's director general of meteorology, said it was difficult to pinpoint a definite cause for any single incident of record-breaking temperatures, but global warming and climate change were definitely "factors to consider". "The reasons are climate change, global warming but I cannot say specifically because there is no such study to attribute that 'X' occurred due to 'Y,'" Mohapatra told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Such "attribution science", which can help link specific extreme events to climate change, is on the rise

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Local

Amir receives Kuwaiti officials; Crown Prince meets envoys

Sheikh Sabah mourns victims of Australia wildfires



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



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



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Stefan Mobs.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Kuwait U L Mohammed Jauhar.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Ambassador of Greece to Kuwait Konstantinos Piperigos.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness then received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince also received the Ambassadors of Germany Stefan Mobs, Sri Lanka U L Mohammed Jauhar and Greece Konstantinos Piperigos on the occasion of taking office. Head of protocols department at His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah attended the meetings. Furthermore, His Highness the Crown Prince received Kuwait's Consul General in Hong Kong Salah Hamdan Al-Seif. He also hosted Kuwait's Ambassador to India Jassem Ibrahim Al-Najem.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his deepest sympathies yesterday over the victims of raging wildfires in Australia, caused by soaring temperatures and strong winds. His Highness the Amir extended his condolences in a cable he sent to Australia's Governor-General David Hurley, saying he was distraught over the tragic loss of life caused by the natural disaster. 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 sent similar cables to Australia's Governor-General.

Separately, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to President of India Ram Nath Kovind expressing sincere grief over victims of a cold wave that prevailed in North India. In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished mercy for the deceased and speedy recovery for the injured. His Highness the Crown



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Kuwait's Consul General in Hong Kong Salah Hamdan Al-Seif.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Kuwait's Ambassador to India Jassem Ibrahim Al-Najem.

Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-

Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Indian President. —KUNA

Amiri Diwan Minister visits St Mark Coptic Orthodox Church



KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah visited yesterday the St Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Kuwait on the occasion of Christmas Day. —KUNA



Local

Govt agrees to discuss public sector Kuwaitization with MPs

Moneychangers closed for involvement in suspicious remittances

By A Saleh and Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The government agreed to discuss Kuwaitis' employment and the measures to be taken to nationalize all public sector jobs, as requested by lawmakers, well-informed sources said. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the sources added that the government requested allocating two hours a month to discuss one of the basic issues and leave regular parliament sessions to discuss other laws and bills on the parliamentary committees' agendas. Further, the sources said Kuwaitizing public sector jobs had been previously discussed in parliament, and that this was why the government requested the two hours to review the executive measures taken by the government to reduce the number of expat employees and keep them at minimal levels, as well as measures taken to increase the number of citizens working in the private sector.

Suspicious remittances

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) yesterday announced closing down a number of moneychangers involved in suspicious remittances and money transfers. MoCI added money laundering and commercial control inspectors toured a number of money exchanges to make sure they fully abide by related laws and regulations.

Shisha ban

The Interior Ministry and Kuwait Municipality agreed on commencing the implementation of the Municipal Council's decision banning shishas indoors, said informed sources, noting that various municipal offices had been notified to start the implementation of the ban by the end of this month. The sources added that coordination is in progress to use police force when needed against violators along with closure and immediate fines.

Nafisi's case

Dr Abdullah Al-Nafisi issued a statement commenting on a court order to summon him for interrogation in a case filed against him for what he says was expressing his opinions. Nafisi stressed that he was as shocked as "others in Kuwait and Islamic countries worldwide" over the case filed by the foreign ministry and the travel ban issued against him. "I was not notified with the case filed on September 12, 2019 before January 5, 2020," he underlined, pointing out that he plans to attend the hearing whenever and wherever the court decides in order to defend himself and demand acquittal.



Nafisi ready to stand in court

Court cases

The court of cassation yesterday issued a final sentence seconding a previous verdict issued by the court of appeal fining a local publicity and advertisement company's legal representative KD 5,000, a two-month closure of the company, confiscating all the equipment used in the case and publishing the verdict in two local dailies. Notably, the case was filed against the company's legal representative for violating the patent rights of a local music composer by using music he had composed for a patriotic song in a commercial the company made for a local restaurant.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Cabinet members vote during a parliament session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Meanwhile, the criminal court yesterday sentenced three defendants to seven years in prison and five years in prison for a fourth defendant, in addition to ordering they refund the money they had taken for forging Kuwait citizenship. Separately, the court of cassation yesterday annulled a Public Authority of the Disabled decision in which it declined a disabled citizen's request to receive disability allowances. The court ordered paying the citizen allowances for medium permanent kinetic disability.

Non-Kuwaiti doctors

In a bid to help some categories of medical college

graduates, Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday issued a ministerial decision allowing non-Kuwaiti doctors and other medical profession practitioners to take their training during the first year of appointment. The decision indicates that the exempted graduates include children of Kuwaiti women, Kuwaitis' spouses (who are still married), bedoons (stateless) registered with the central apparatus for illegal residents, children of military martyrs registered with the martyrs bureau, as well as graduates of Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training from other nationalities who are born in Kuwait and hold valid residency visas.



KUWAIT: Chief of the National Security Bureau Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah yesterday discussed with Cristian Tudor, head of European Union delegation to Kuwait, issues of common concern. The two sides, during a meeting, examined cooperation and means of boosting bilateral relations, the bureau said in a statement. They also talked about topics of mutual concern on the regional and international arenas. — KUNA

Kuwait, Saudi hire consultant to assess Dorra gas field

DUBAI: Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have asked an international consultant to study the development plan for the Dorra off-shore gas field and assess the share of the gas for each country from the joint project, Kuwaiti Al-Rai newspaper reported yesterday.

Such a development would indicate that the two Gulf OPEC producers are moving forward with the project, which they shelved in 2013 after disagreeing over how to share the gas back on land. Both countries need the field to satisfy their growing gas consumption for power generation and boost exports. The independent consultant, which Kuwaiti Al-Rai did

not name, will study the production volumes, storage options and cost of development for the field, the newspaper said, citing unnamed sources.

Dorra, which is located in the divided zone between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, also known as the Neutral Zone, has an estimated 10-11 trillion cubic feet of gas and around 300 million barrels of oil. In December, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait agreed to end a five-year dispute over the shared Neutral Zone in a deal that will allow production to resume at two oilfields that can pump up to 0.5 percent of the world's oil supply.

Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said last month that a new project would start soon at Dorra. Two Saudi and Kuwaiti companies can complete the project in the area, which has a promising large quantity of gas, the minister said. Dorra has long been a bone of contention between Kuwait and Iran, which also lays claim to part of the field. An industry source told Reuters that Riyadh and Kuwait could develop the Dorra gas field away from the area that Iran claims. — Reuters

KUWAIT: Customs officers at terminals 1 (T1) and 5 (T5) of Kuwait International Airport arrested two passengers who arrived in Kuwait with possession of hashish yesterday. Both suspects were sent to concerned authorities for further action. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun



Violence against children on the rise in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Health Ministry's child protection office received 2,139 complaints in regards to violence against children between 2015 and 2019, Kuwait's Al-Jarida daily reported yesterday quoting ministry sources. The office received 650 complaints last year compared to 100 in 2015,

which indicates that the rate of violence against children in Kuwait is on the rise, the sources added, noting that the office received 300 complaints in 2016, 490 in 2017 and 599 in 2018. On the types of complaints received, the sources explained that physical violence were the most among cases filed, followed by negligence and sexual assault respectively. Meanwhile, the sources said there is increased awareness in society regarding the importance of reporting cases of violence against children, but argued that more effort is needed especially by spreading awareness through social media.

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Souq Al-Mubarakiya beautifully decorated during the holiday season. — Photo by Mustafa Al-Bader (KUNA)

Kuwaiti ministers briefed on 2020-2021 state budget

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Minister of Finance and Acting State Minister for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel and several officials of the Ministry of Finance and Kuwait Investment Authority apprised the Cabinet of the main features of the draft state budget for the fiscal year 2020-2021. The Cabinet expressed appreciation for efforts made by the Ministry of Finance in preparing the draft budget, hoping that the desired goals would be achieved. It decided to refer the draft budget to the Cabinet's Economic Affairs Committee to study it and make recommendations and proposals to rationalize spending and diversify sources of income.

It reviewed the recommendations made by the Cabinet's Legal Affairs Committee regarding the two draft laws approving an agreement appended to the Partitioned Neutral Zone Agreement and the Submerged Divided Zone Agreement adjacent to the Divided Zone between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and a draft law approving a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the State of Kuwait and the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It decided to approve the two draft laws and referred them to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to review them and refer them to the National Assembly.

Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel briefed the Cabinet about the outcome of the recent visit to Kuwait by Qatari Minister of State for Energy Affairs and Managing Director and CEO of Qatar Petroleum Saad Al-Kaabi during which an agreement was signed between Kuwait and Qatar on Kuwait's purchase of up to three million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) annually for a period of 15 years to meet the growing demand for energy in the country, especially from electricity and other energy sectors.

Regional developments

At the beginning of its weekly meeting held on Monday at the Seif Palace under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah briefed the Cabinet about the outcome of his recent trip to Saudi Arabia, where he visited Kuwaiti forces participating in Yemen's Restoration of Hope Operation.

The Cabinet then mulled the recent rapid developments in the region, and voiced grave concerns about the continuing escalation and its serious repercussions on regional security and stability. In this regard, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh and representatives of relevant ministers, senior security and military leaders informed the government about the preparations and precautionary measures taken by various government agencies to face any emergency at this delicate time in the region. This came a day following the meeting chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister and attended relevant government ministers to review regional developments and discuss government preparations for any scenario.

Following their presentation, the Cabinet hailed their plans and measures and asked them to continue their efforts to help preserve the state's sovereignty, security and stability. The government urged vigilance and cautiousness to face all possibilities. It demanded cooperation and coordination among all government agencies to preserve the security and stability and guarantee the availability of all basic needs of citizens and residents. The Cabinet advised citizens to embody national unity and offer the required assistance to government agencies to establish security and stability in the country and to retain their safety and interests. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti government called on the international community to assume its responsibility towards maintaining the security and stability of this vital region. It called on all parties to exercise restraint to overcome the current critical stage in the region, wishing everlasting security, stability and prosperity for sisterly and friendly countries.

The Cabinet also discussed political affairs in the light of reports related to the overall current developments in the political arena at the Arab and international levels. In this regard, the Cabinet condemned the terrorist attack on a bus in northwestern Burkina Faso, which resulted in a number of deaths and injuries. It reiterated Kuwait's firm denunciation of all acts of violence and terrorism, whatever their motives and objectives. The Cabinet also expressed sympathy for the continued wildfires in the Australian province of Victoria. — KUNA

Local

‘We’re going to war, bro’: Fort Bragg’s 82nd Airborne deploys to Middle East

Kuwait first stop for 3,500 US paratroopers sent to region



In this image released by the US Defense Department, 82nd Airborne paratroopers march to board a civilian aircraft bound for the US Central Command area of operations from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, on January 4, 2020.

FORT BRAGG: For many of the soldiers, it would be their first mission. They packed up ammunition and rifles, placed last-minute calls to loved ones, then turned in their cell phones. Some gave blood. The 600 mostly young soldiers at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, were headed for the Middle East, part of a group of some 3,500 US paratroopers ordered to the region. Kuwait is the first stop for many. Their final destinations are classified.

“We’re going to war, bro,” one cheered, holding two thumbs up and sporting a grin under close-shorn red hair. He stood among dozens of soldiers loading trucks outside a cinder block building housing several auditoriums with long benches and tables.

Days after US President Donald Trump ordered the drone killing of Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani, raising fears of fresh conflict in the Middle East, the men and women of the US Army’s storied 82nd Airborne Division are moving out in the largest “fast deployment” since the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

US Army Major General James Mingus waded through the sea of camouflage-uniformed men and women as they prepared to leave the base near Fayetteville on Sunday. He shook hands with the troops, wishing them luck.

One soldier from Ashboro, Virginia, said he wasn’t surprised when the order came. “I was just watching the news, seeing how things were going over there,” said the 27-year-old, one of several soldiers Reuters was allowed to interview on condition they not be named. “Then I got a text message from my sergeant saying ‘don’t go anywhere.’ And that was it.”

Risks seemed to be pushed to the back of the minds of the younger soldiers, though many packed the base chapel after a breakfast of eggs, waffles, oatmeal, sausages and

1,000 doughnuts. One private took a strap tethered to a transport truck and tried to hitch it to the belt of an unwitting friend, a last prank before shipping out.

‘This is the mission’

The older soldiers, in their 30s and 40s, were visibly more somber, having the experience of seeing comrades come home from past deployments learning to walk on one leg or in flag-draped coffins.

“This is the mission, man,” said Brian Knight, retired Army veteran who has been on five combat deployments to the Middle East. He is the current director of a chapter of the United Service Organizations military support charity. “They’re answering America’s 9/11 call,” Knight said. “They’re stoked to go. The president called for the 82nd.”

There was lots of wrestling holds as the troops tossed their 75-pound (34 kg) backpacks onto transport trucks. The packs hold everything from armor-plated vests, extra socks and underwear, to 210 rounds of ammunition for their M-4 carbine rifles.

A sergeant pushed through the crowd shouting for anyone with type-O blood, which can be transfused into any patient. “The medics need you now. Move,” he said, before a handful of troops walked off to give a little less than a pint each.

Uncertainty prevails

While members of the unit - considered the most mobile in the US Army - are used to quick deployments, this was different, Lieutenant Colonel Mike Burns, an Army spokesman. “The guys are excited to go but none of us know how long they’ll be gone,” Burns said. “That’s the toughest part.”

Soldiers were ordered not to bring cell phones,



FORT BRAGG: In this image released by the US Defense Department, equipment assigned to 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division is loaded into aircraft bound for the US Central Command area of operations from Fort Bragg, North Carolina on January 4, 2020. — AFP

portable video games or any other devices that could be used to communicate with friends and family back home, out of concern that details of their movements could leak out. “We’re an infantry brigade,” Burns said. “Our primary mission is ground fighting. This is as real as it gets.”

A sergeant started rattling off last names, checking them off from a list after “heres” and “yups” and “yos.” For every fighter, there were seven support crew members shipping out - cooks, aviators, mechanics, medics, chaplains, and transportation and supply managers. All but the chaplains would carry guns to fight.

A senior master sergeant, 34, said: “The Army is an all-volunteer force. We want to do this. You pay your taxes and we get to do this.” The reality of the deployment

wouldn’t sink in until the troops “walk out that door,” he said, pointing to the exit to the tarmac where C-4 and C-7 transport planes and two contract commercial jets waited.

His call came when he was on leave in his hometown of Daytona Beach, Florida, taking his two young daughters to visit relatives and maybe go to Walt Disney World. “We just got there and I got the call to turn right around and head back to base,” he said. “My wife knows the drill. I had to go. We drove right back.” On a single order, hundreds of soldiers jumped to their feet. They lined up single file and marched out carrying their guns and kits and helmets, past a volunteer honor guard holding aloft flags that flapped east in the January wind. — Reuters



US troops from the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division board a bus as they head out for a deployment to the Middle East on January 4, 2020 in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.



A rifle is seen as US troops from the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division wait to be deployed to the Middle East January 4, 2020 from Fort Bragg, North Carolina.



In this image released by the US Defense Department, paratroopers and equipment assigned to 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division load aircraft bound for the US Central Command area of operations from Fort Bragg, North Carolina on January 4, 2019.



US troops from the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division wait at Green Ramp before they head out for a deployment to the Middle East on January 4, 2020 in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.



In this image released by the US Defense Department, equipment assigned to 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division is loaded into aircraft bound for the US Central Command area of operations from Fort Bragg, North Carolina on January 4, 2020.



In this image released by the US Defense Department, US Air Force personnel at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, load 82nd Airborne Division equipment onto a C-17 Globemaster aircraft bound for the US Central Command area of operations, on January 4, 2020.



Philippines prepares to evacuate workers in ME over rising tensions

Iranians report being stopped, facing delays at US border

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KERMAN: An Iranian nurse cries after reuniting with her son (left) who was at the procession funeral of Iran's top military general Qasem Soleimani, following a stampede in the southeastern Iranian city of Kerman which left 50 people dead yesterday. —AFP

Solemn ceremony in Iran turns tragic

Kerman hospital presents a scene of chaos and despair

KERMAN, Iran: "We'll give our lives for General Soleimani and we'll avenge him," said the survivor of a stampede that crushed to death dozens of mourners in the Iranian city of Kerman. Citizens thronged Qasem Soleimani's hometown yesterday, many of them baying for blood to avenge the US air strike that killed the Iranian military commander. But the solemn funeral procession turned tragic when crowds overwhelmed the streets, leading to a crush that claimed more than 50 lives and forced the postponement of the general's burial.

"People rushed at us so hard that I had to run away, but a bike went over my foot and broke it," Arsalan Farzamimoghadam, a 28-year-old survivor, told AFP at a Kerman hospital. "America can't do a damn thing, and we'll get our revenge," he added, seemingly undeterred about the deadly chaos as

he groaned in pain.

A hugely popular figure in Iran, Soleimani was killed Friday in a US drone strike in Baghdad. The assassination ordered by US President Donald Trump triggered a fresh spike in tensions between Tehran and Washington and raised fears of a new Middle East war. Outside Kerman's Bahonar hospital a woman wailed uncontrollably after losing a loved one, with her family trying to console her.

Nearby, a nurse cried with joy as her teenage son-presumed to be missing in the ceremony—was found by friends and returned to her.

'So many people'

An enormous sea of people dressed in black brought Kerman to a standstill, mirroring scenes already witnessed in Ahvaz,

Tehran, Qom and Mashhad. "No compromise, no submission, revenge!" they yelled as they tried to catch a glimpse of Soleimani's coffin. As the funeral cortege passed, mourners threw scarves on top of the truck carrying the casket to have them blessed by the blood of a "martyr". The crowd shifted slowly as the truck edged forward.

In a nearby alley, people were pushed back violently as the cortege passed, another survivor told AFP, with the crowd trampling on dozens of men, women and children. "Some held hands together, trying to open a path to Shariati Street (which was closed), and then pushed the people back into an alley," said Ali Salaji. "There were so many people in the alley, all thrown on top of each other, and killed."

Ali said he tried to protect a woman and her young daughter from the stampede by

shielding them, but they died under his body before medics arrived. The medics "couldn't do any more. When they finally lifted me I passed out", he said. Outside the hospital, a man put up lists with names of the dead and injured as worried families searched for loved ones.

'We are all Soleimani'

A war veteran on the sidelines of the procession paid tribute to the slain general.

"He was a great man. We can't all be like him... It's near impossible to replace him, but his flag won't fall," said Hemmat Dehghan. "We are all Soleimani," the 56-year-old war veteran told AFP. "Revenge, only revenge. Revenge however officials see fit. We've fallen from our horse but not from our principles." Chants in isolated areas suddenly turned to a chorus of "revenge, revenge!" as

drummers started beating to a rhythm usually played in mourning for Imam Hussein, the Shiite martyr.

Some took to rooftops to escape the tightly packed streets which were dotted with huge crimson flags, daubed with "severe revenge" in bold, black font. A huge poster adorning the side of a four-storey shopping mall similarly read "Severe revenge awaits" Soleimani's killers.

But not everyone called for a military conflict with the US. "War is certainly a last resort. Nobody supports war," said Dorani, a 45-year-old woman who gave only her surname. "This was America's ruse, to anger Iranians and drag us to war, but it won't work," she said, adding she would do whatever the supreme leader orders. "Today is the funeral of Iran and Islam's great general, and us Kermanis are immensely proud." —AFP

Allied with far-left, Spain's Sanchez stays on as PM

MADRID: Spain's parliament yesterday narrowly confirmed Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez as prime minister for another term, paving the way for the country's first-ever coalition government since its return to democracy in the 1970s. Sanchez, who has stayed on as a caretaker premier since inconclusive elections last year, won 167 votes in the 350-seat assembly compared to 165 against, with a decisive 18 abstentions by Catalan and Basque separatist lawmakers.

He plans to form a minority coalition government with hard-left party Podemos this time around, in what would be the first coalition government in Spain since the country returned to democracy following the death of longtime dictator Francisco Franco in 1975.

Podemos' pony-tailed leader Pablo Iglesias broke into tears after the results of the vote were announced and his lawmakers chanted the party's slogan "Yes we can!". "A period of moderation, progress and hope opens up today," Sanchez tweeted shortly after the vote. On Sunday, Sanchez lost a first attempt after falling short of the required absolute majority of 176 seats in a first confidence vote in parliament.

Spain, the eurozone's fourth-largest economy, has been in political gridlock without a proper government for most of the past year after two inconclusive elections in April and November.

Catalan tensions

Sanchez's Socialists won the November 10 poll but were weakened, taking 120 seats — three fewer than in April — in an election which saw upstart far-right party Vox surge into third place. Sanchez quickly struck a deal with Podemos, which has never governed nationally, to form a coalition government despite having previously said that such a tie-up with the far-left party would keep him awake at night.

The two parties are pledging to lift the minimum wage, raise taxes on high earners and large businesses, and repeal elements of Spain's controversial 2012 labor market reforms that made it easier to fire workers — measures which business leaders warn will hurt job creation. With the two parties' combined total of 155 seats still falling short of a majority, Sanchez also secured the



MADRID: Spanish caretaker prime minister, socialist Pedro Sanchez, is congratulated by Spanish far-left Unidas Podemos coalition leader, Pablo Iglesias (right), after winning a parliamentary vote to elect a premier at the Spanish Congress (Las Cortes) in Madrid yesterday. —AFP

support of several smaller regional groups as well as the abstention of Catalan separatist party ERC's 13 lawmakers and those of Basque separatist party Bildu's five MPs. As part of his deal with the ERC, Sanchez agreed to open a formal dialogue with Catalonia's separatist regional government on the future of the wealthy north-eastern region, and to then submit the results of the talks to Catalan voters. The political situation in Catalonia remains in flux following a 2017 independence referendum which Madrid declared unconstitutional. The Catalan independence push triggered Spain's most serious political crisis post-Franco.

'Worst radicals'

Spain's center-right parties and Vox accused Sanchez of putting national unity at risk through his pact with the Catalan separatists. The leader of the main opposition conservative Popular Party (PP), Pablo Casado, warned ahead of the vote that Spain was set to have "the most radical" government. "Surrendering to the worst radicals may make you prime minister but

you will not be able to govern," Casado said during a rare weekend session of parliament called to debate Sanchez's bid to be reappointed premier.

Sanchez's narrow margin for victory led Podemos lawmaker Aina Vidal, who is in severe pain with cancer and had to miss the weekend vote, to turn up for yesterday's crucial session despite her illness.

"The political landscape remains tricky," ING analyst Steven Trypsteen said. "The new government (is)... a minority government, the Catalan tensions could flare up again... and the fiscal situation makes it difficult to increase spending a lot." Until 2015, Spain had essentially a two-party system pitting the Socialists against the PP but the rise of new parties has led to a more fragmented parliament that has made it harder to form a government.

Sanchez came to power in June 2018 after ousting his PP predecessor Mariano Rajoy in a no-confidence vote but he was forced to call elections in April after Catalan separatists including the ERC refused to back his draft budget. —AFP

Indian court orders bus rapists hanged on January 22

NEW DELHI: An Indian court yesterday ordered the execution on January 22 of four men convicted of the infamous 2012 gang rape and murder of a Delhi university student.

Six people were originally charged with taking part in the brutal attack aboard a city bus, but one was released after a brief detention as a juvenile, while another committed suicide while awaiting trial. On Tuesday Delhi court judge Satish Kumar issued a warrant ordering the four on death row to be executed on January 22 at 7:00 am. The condemned men still have one avenue of appeal remaining, and they can also petition the Indian president for mercy.

Jyoti Singh, 23, was attacked in December 2012 while returning home after visiting the cinema with a male friend. Her assailants took turns to rape and violate her with a metal rod as the bus drove around the capital, before dumping her and the beaten-up friend in a roadside ditch.

Singh died of her injuries nearly a fortnight after the attack in Singapore, where she had been flown for specialist treatment. Tens of thousands of Indians took to the streets in protest, and the case led to a major overhaul of laws surrounding sexual assault. It also spawned an award-winning documentary as well as a Netflix series. Singh's family said they were pleased with the ruling.

"This judgment will reinstate women's faith in the judiciary," Jyoti's mother Asha Devi told journalists. "My daughter will finally get justice." Her father Badrinath Singh described it as a "good decision for the entire country". "But our struggle will continue for many other daughters who are in a similar situation across India," he added. Indian media reports say Tihar prison, where the four are incarcerated, recently held a dummy execution to test the gallows. —AFP

International

US ties with Iraq and allies take hit after drone strike

Around 5,200 US soldiers are currently stationed across Iraqi bases

BAGHDAD: A deadly US drone strike in Baghdad has rocked America's ties with allies on the ground, left diplomats scrambling to contain the fallout and Iraqi officials outraged at the airspace violation. The strike on the outskirts of Baghdad's airport early Friday killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani and top Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, among others.

The US has hailed it as a win for "peace and stability" in the region, in contrast to Western diplomats and US military officials in Baghdad. None had received prior warning of the pre-dawn strike and learned of it when they woke up, sending them into crisis talks to salvage ties with Iraqi officials.

"The strike was such a surprise to all of us," one Western diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Speaking to the Americans now is extremely complex. We're talking a lot together as the European Union but the Americans have their own problems now," the diplomat said. Most ambassadors were still outside Baghdad for end-of-year holidays on the day of the strike, so political staff still in Iraq began a flurry of outreach to Iraqis. They declined to comment due to the sensitive nature of current ties with Washington but expressed outrage at a statement by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. "Frankly, the Europeans haven't been as helpful as I wish that they could be," Pompeo told Fox News hours after the drone strike. "The Brits, the French, the Germans all need to understand that what we did, what the Americans did, saved lives in Europe as well," he said.

'Major fissures'

Even at the military level, the strike strained ties between the United States and its other partners in the coalition fighting the Islamic State jihadist group. "As for our Western allies, in the grand scheme of things, it appears we screwed them over," a top US defense official deployed in Iraq told AFP.

Some 5,200 US soldiers are stationed across Iraqi bases to support local troops preventing a resurgence of IS. They make up the bulk of the broader coalition includ-

ing troops from dozens of countries, invited by the Iraqi government in 2014 to help combat the jihadists.

On Sunday, in reaction to the strike, Iraq's parliament voted in favor of rescinding that invitation and ousting all foreign troops. The following day, a US general told the Iraqi government troops were preparing to depart "in due deference" to the decision but the Pentagon denied the withdrawal. It only added to the chaos, with diplomats from coalition countries, saying they had not been looped into the letter to Iraq's military, which the US said was a "draft". The US-led coalition and even NATO had already suspended training and anti-IS operations for security concerns in the wake of the assassination of Soleimani.

A second US military official told AFP the strike had made ties with coalition partners "extremely tense". "They would not look us in the eye. Imagine being a part of this team, and one guy decides to strike out on his own," the second official said. Daily interactions with Iraqi officials had also become strained, as the strike was roundly condemned by Baghdad as a violation of its sovereignty. "This has caused major fissures in our relationships with them," the top defense official said. An Iraqi security source said it had created a "crisis of trust" between US troops and Iraqi forces. "They've largely stopped talking to each other," the source said.

'Allies under threat'

In the days following the strike, rockets have hit the high-security Green Zone, home to a host of embassies, and military bases where coalition forces are stationed.

"Whether intentional or not, the US has put its allies on the ground—both civilian and military—under threat," said Robert Ford of the Middle East Institute. Ford was a diplomat at the US embassy in Iraq between 2004-2006 and 2008-2010. He said that Washington's failure to coordinate with its own military assets on the ground and its allies had "left them holding the bag". Donald Trump's administration "is asking European allies to sign a blank check to support whatever the US does, even though US



NAJAF: Mourners carry the coffin of slain Iraqi paramilitary chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis towards the Imam Ali Shrine in the shrine city of Najaf in central Iraq during a funeral procession on Saturday. — AFP

has not been able to articulate a long-term game plan for Iran," said Ford. The behavior of the White House mirrors the lead-up to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, said Jean-Pierre Filiu, a Middle East specialist and former French diplomat. Now, as then, the US was "completely

blind" to the repercussions of its military actions in Baghdad, he told AFP. "The most disturbing thing in the American escalation is the absence of any proper Iraqi strategy, which can only destabilize the US's allies in the anti-jihadist coalition," he said. — AFP

In face of Iraq turmoil, Kurds wait before placing bets

BAGHDAD: Things are moving fast in federal Iraq, as pro-Iran factions flex their muscles and authorities seek to oust foreign troops. Amid the chaos, Iraq's Kurds are watching apprehensively before placing their bets. Caught between the US and Iran and wary of being accused of seeking independence from Baghdad, the autonomous government of northern Iraq's Kurdish region (KRG) has kept relatively mum on latest developments.

They include a US drone strike that killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad and a federal parliament vote to oust foreign troops, all against the backdrop of months of anti-government rallies.

But statements from the KRG and from Iraq's President Barham Saleh, himself a Kurd, have been limited to calls for restraint and "respecting the sovereignty of Iraq". And on Sunday, not a single Kurdish lawmaker attended the federal parliament's vote to oust foreign troops, declining to take a stance on the controversial issue. "Iraq's Kurds have adopted the short-term strategy of waiting," Kurdish specialist Adel Bakawan told AFP. He said Kurdish authorities were "speaking to everyone" in closed-door meetings, but waiting for the dust to settle before stating their position.

"They want to see what direction events will take and won't pick one side or another until the situation becomes clearer," Bakawan said. Iraq has long had close ties to both the US and Iran, but diplomatic relations with Washington have dimmed in recent years as Tehran's clout in Baghdad has soared. KRG capital Arbil has also been caught in the tug-of-war for influence, with Kurdish armed forces supported by both countries and political parties split along the same lines.



ARBIL: An Iraqi woman buys food at a roadside stall near the citadel of Arbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq. — AFP

'Emotional' decision

The Kurdish region earned de facto autonomy during the 1991 Gulf War over Kuwait, later formalized in the constitution crafted after the 2003 US-led invasion. "The existence of an autonomous Kurdish region is thanks to the direct intervention of the US," said Bakawan. But at the same time, Soleimani "had personal ties with all Kurdish parties," he added. Soleimani was killed early Friday in a US drone strike outside Baghdad's international airport, along with top Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis.

Iraq's government was so outraged that within days, MPs voted to urge the cabinet to kick out all foreign forces. Warned they would be considered "traitors" if they did not support the ouster, Kurdish lawmakers did not attend Sunday's vote as they largely see a US military presence in Iraq as a healthy counterweight to Iran. "Iraq must not become a battlefield to settle scores or political conflicts," pleaded Vian Sabri, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) bloc in the federal parliament.

Even members from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

(PUK), which is seen as closer to Iran, boycotted the session. "Shiite deputies took a radical decision for the future of all of Iraq, under the influence of emotion," said a top PUK official, on condition of anonymity.

"There are a number of violations of Iraq's sovereignty and we should take measures to stop them all, not target a single party," the party official said.

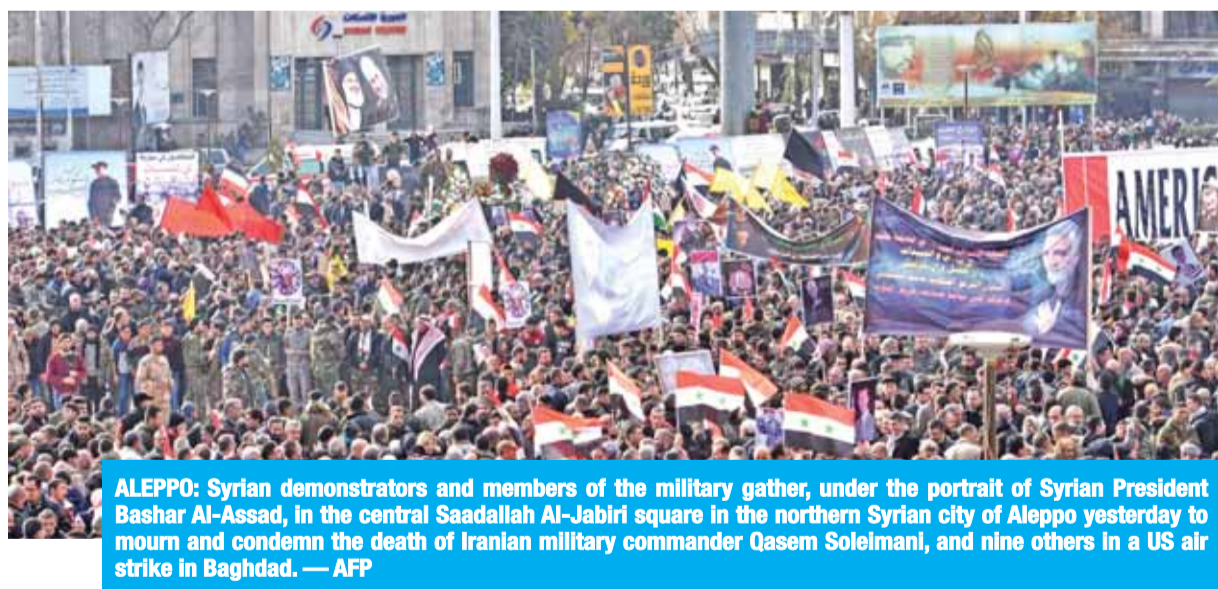
Some 5,200 US troops are stationed across Iraq to back local forces preventing an Islamic State group resurgence. They make up the bulk of the broader coalition including troops from dozens of countries, invited by the Iraqi government in 2014 to help combat IS.

Prudence pays off?

Late Monday, an American general told Baghdad that US troops were preparing to depart "in due deference" to parliament's decision, but the Pentagon denied a pull-out. An ouster of foreign troops would likely rattle Arbil, as the US-led coalition worked closely with Kurdish peshmerga fighters to clear jihadists from swathes of the north. And with Iran-US tensions soaring, Kurdish figures fear they could lose their hard-won autonomy, which grants them many more rights than their kin in neighboring Syria, Turkey and Iran. Even before the US strike, Iraq had been rocked by its own domestic political crisis. Three months of anti-government protests in Baghdad and across the Shiite-majority south prompted Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi to step down.

He had been seen as a major ally to the KRG, making his resignation a stinging blow to their standing in Baghdad. But as Washington distances itself from an ever-more hostile Baghdad, Kurdish prudence could pay off.

Seen as more reliable partners to the US and a safe haven for entrepreneurs, diplomats and humanitarians, the KRG could ultimately become Washington's best asset in Iraq. "International and even regional powers have an interest in securing and even developing this state within a state that is the Kurdistan regional government," said Bakawan. — AFP



ALEPPO: Syrian demonstrators and members of the military gather, under the portrait of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, in the central Saadallah Al-Jabiri square in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo yesterday to mourn and condemn the death of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani, and nine others in a US air strike in Baghdad. — AFP

Allow cross-border aid into Syria, UN pleads as millions trapped

GENEVA: More than three million Syrian civilians are trapped in a war zone in the northwest of the country and utterly dependent on cross-border aid, the United Nations said yesterday, as it urged states to extend the mandate for that aid which expires in days. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said last month that Russia and China had blood on their hands after the two countries blocked a UN Security Council resolution that would have allowed cross-border humanitarian deliveries for a further 12 months.

Since 2014, the United Nations has sent 30,000 trucks with life-saving food and medicines into Syria from Turkey,

Iraq and Jordan at four places annually authorized by the Security Council. Jens Laerke of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

The humanitarian situation has become more acute with at least 300,000 civilians now on the run in Idlib, following a sharp escalation in hostilities in December, he said. More than 3 million civilians remains trapped in the war zone, the vast majority women and children, and "they currently have nowhere to go", Laerke said. It is critical to renew the provisions of the Security Council resolution, which expires on Friday, he said. "Across northern Syria 4 million people in need are supported by the UN cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism in total. And that includes 2.7 million in the northwest who rely solely on the operation for their assistance. "We have made our position very clear, there is no plan B." The latest mass displacement follows weeks of renewed bombardment by Russian and Syrian government forces. "Air strikes and shelling are now taking place in many towns and villages on a near daily basis," Mark Cutts, UN deputy regional humanitarian coordinator for the Syria crisis, said in a statement voicing alarm at the "deteriorating humanitarian situation in Idlib". — Reuters

US eyes sanctions over growing Russian support for Venezuela

WASHINGTON: The United States will take action in response to growing Russian support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, a senior US official warned Monday. US President Donald Trump's administration has sanctioned Maduro's regime and called it a dictatorship after he was re-elected in 2018 in elections widely seen as fraudulent. "We are looking at additional sanctions, personal sanctions, economic sanctions that we think will bring more pressure," Elliot Abrams, the State Department's Venezuela envoy, told reporters.

Abrams, who did not specify what the sanctions would be, said the US had been looking closely at Russia's role in Venezuela and would not allow the level of support to go unchecked. Abrams said Russia was mainly interested in "the oil economy" in Venezuela, while Maduro has grown increasingly reliant on Moscow over the past year.

"Russian companies are now handling more than two-thirds, more than 70 percent of Venezuelan oil," Abrams said. "So the Russian role is increasingly important." Abrams did not speculate on whether Russia was involved in pushing Maduro to take control of the opposition-majority National Assembly on Sunday, which Washington currently considers the only democratic body in Venezuela.

Police had prevented opposition leader and self-proclaimed interim president Juan Guaido from entering the parliament, and in his absence Luis Parra, a corruption-tainted opposition lawmaker, declared himself parliament speaker. Maduro holds actual power but Guaido's claim to the presidency is recognized by more than 50 countries, including the United States and many European nations.

Among Maduro's remaining supporters are Russia, North Korea and Cuba. Abrams admitted that the US had underestimated the support Maduro received from Russia and Cuba, saying that the two countries had supplied Venezuela with thousands of intelligence agents. — AFP

Iran weighs response to Soleimani killing

DUBAI: Iran's leaders have promised to avenge the killing of General Qasem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Quds Force, by the United States.

Here are some of Tehran's options: Military Power

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and US President Donald Trump talk tough but neither have indicated an interest in all-out war although the possibility of military confrontation cannot be ruled out. If Khamenei calls for restraint, he could look weak at home and among regional proxies. So he may opt for small-scale retaliation.

Karim Sadjadpour, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said Khamenei must carefully calibrate the reaction. "A weak response risks losing face, an excessive response risks losing his head." A US Defense Intelligence Agency report in December said Iran relies on three main military capabilities - its ballistic missile program, naval forces that can threaten navigation in the oil-producing Gulf region, and militia proxies in countries such as Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Iran says it has precision-guided missiles, cruise missiles and armed drones capable of hitting US military bases in the Gulf and reaching Tehran's arch-enemy Israel. Tehran or its proxies could attack oil tankers in the Gulf and Red Sea, shipping routes for oil and other trade linking the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal.

Blocking The Strait Of Hormuz

A military confrontation or heightened tensions could disrupt shipping via the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world's oil production passes. Any interruption could drive up oil prices sharply. Iran cannot legally close the waterway unilaterally because part of it is Oman's territorial waters. However, ships pass through Iranian waters, which are under the responsibility of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Navy. Tehran could use missiles, drones, mines and speedboats to confront the United States and its allies. US officials say closing the Strait would be crossing a "red line" and America would take action to reopen it.

Asymmetric Tactics And Proxies

US forces in the Middle East could be endangered. Iran mainly relies on asymmetric tactics and its proxies to counter more sophisticated US weaponry. Iran has passed on weaponry and technical expertise to allies. Yemen's Houthis have used Iran-made missiles and drones to bomb airports in Saudi Arabia. The United States and Saudi Arabia accuse Iran of attacking oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz last year and say Tehran was behind attacks on Saudi oil facilities. Tehran denies this. Iran-backed militias in Iraq have attacked bases where US forces are located. In June, Iran downed a US drone with a surface-to-air missile, bringing to two sides to the brink of direct conflict.

Timing

Iran is unlikely to rush into action, said Ali Alfoneh, senior fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "Iran has no choice but to strike back and retaliate for assassination of Major General Soleimani," he said. "But the Islamic Republic is patient and the timing and nature of that strike is not yet known to us."

Iran's Long Reach

Iran and its allies could project power beyond the region. In 1994, a member of the Lebanese movement Hezbollah bombed the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Society building in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people. Argentina blamed Iran and Hezbollah for the attack. They deny any responsibility. — Reuters

International

Iranians report being stopped, facing delays at US border

Muslim group says provided assistance to 60 travelers who were detained

WASHINGTON: Dozens of Iranians and Iranian-Americans have reported being harassed or questioned for hours at the US border following heightened tensions over the US killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Muslim advocacy group, said it had provided assistance to more than 60 travelers who were detained at length over the weekend and questioned about their political views at Washington state's border with Canada.

Many of them were reportedly denied entry to the US due to a lack of capacity for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) to detain them. One 24-year-old only identified as Crystal by CAIR said she was detained and interrogated for more than 10 hours with her family at the Peace Arch Border Crossing in Blaine, Washington, before being released early Sunday.

She said when the family asked why they were being detained, CBP agents said, "It is just the wrong time for you guys." "These reports are extremely troubling and potentially constitute illegal detentions of United States citizens," said Masih Fouladi, executive director of CAIR's

Washington chapter. "We are working to verify reports of a broad nationwide directive to detain Iranian-Americans at ports of entry so that we can provide community members with accurate travel guidance."

However, CBP officials have disputed the reports, saying that long delays at the border were due to increased traffic because of the holiday season and a shortage of staff to process travelers. They also insist that the agency does not discriminate based on religion, race or ethnicity.

'Constitutional and moral problems'

"Social media posts that CBP is detaining Iranian-Americans and refusing their entry into the US because of their country of origin are false," CBP spokesman Michael Friel told AFP. He added that reports that the Department of Homeland Security and CBP had issued a directive to bar Iranian-Americans from entering the country were also false.

A security official who did not wish to be identified said that the increased delays Iranian-Americans faced at the border were related to CBP "operating with an

enhanced posture at its ports of entry to safeguard our national security." The delays at the border have been condemned by public officials, with many accusing the Trump administration of overreach.

"Washingtonians who happen to be Iranian-American were detained at the Canadian-US border for extended periods of time for no other reason than their ethnicity or country of origin," Washington Governor Jay Inslee said in a statement. "This is wrong and rife with constitutional and moral problems," he added. "No one should be treated differently due to where they come from, how they look or what language they speak."

Senator Elizabeth Warren, a top Democratic candidate in the US presidential race, said she found the reports "deeply disturbing." "Iranian Americans have the same rights as all other US citizens and should be treated with dignity and respect at our border-not bigoted, xenophobic scrutiny," she said in a tweet.

The increased scrutiny at the border comes after Iran vowed to avenge Soleimani's killing in a drone strike ordered by US President Donald Trump. —AFP



Many Iranian-Americans were reportedly denied entry to the US due to a lack of capacity for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) to detain them. —AFP

Brexit in sight as British MPs scrutinize divorce deal

LONDON: Britain moves a step closer to a historic departure from the European Union yesterday, after more than three years of bitter division and political drama, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson brings his Brexit deal back to parliament without the threat of defeat, deadlock or delay.

Lawmakers began three days of debate on legislation to enshrine Johnson's divorce deal, with few hurdles to its passing expected after he won a comfortable majority at recent elections. The air of inevitability that Brexit was finally about to happen contrasts starkly with the repeated postponements and rejections of the previous deal of his predecessor Theresa May that plunged Britain into political and economic uncertainty.

The lack of anticipated drama has instead seen focus shift to potential conflict between the United States and Iran. But the Conservative leader is still up against the clock. Both the UK and European parliaments must ratify the deal before Britain's January 31 departure date, when a so-called transition phase to the end of the year will kick in.

MPs gave their initial approval to the Withdrawal Agreement Bill in a vote on December 20, a week after Johnson

secured a majority of 80 in the 650-seat House of Commons.

They now have three days of debate before the bill passes to the unelected House of Lords for further scrutiny next week. Opposition lawmakers and troublesome peers will try to amend the text but with such a comfortable majority, Johnson is virtually certain of getting it through on time. In a sign of his confidence, Johnson's government announced it would hold a new post-Brexit budget vote on March 11, to "seize the opportunities that come from getting Brexit done".

The main opposition Labour party was meanwhile focused on the start of a campaign to replace veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn as leader. His divisive leadership and ambivalence over Brexit were blamed for Labour's stinging defeat and loss of support in its heartlands of northern England. Britons voted in the 2016 referendum to end more than four decades of integration with the EU, but it has taken nearly four years of infighting and two general elections to implement the result. Johnson now looks set to finally make it happen, even if a potentially bigger battle awaits on future ties with the EU. The British premier will hold his first meeting with the new European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, in London today.

Both sides are keen to prepare for talks on their future trading relationship, although these cannot start formally until Britain leaves the EU. The Brexit deal includes a transition period in which ties remain unchanged in practice until December 31, 2020, to provide continuity until a new economic partnership can be agreed. —AFP

Austria's Kurz world's youngest chancellor

VIENNA: The leader of Austria's conservatives Sebastian Kurz was sworn in yesterday as the world's youngest democratically elected leader, at the head of an unlikely coalition with the Greens following the collapse of his previous alliance with the far-right. Vowing to "protect the climate and the borders", the 33-year-old has become chancellor of the Alpine country's first government to include the Greens, an arrangement called "exotic" and "unlikely" by Austrian media.

Speaking at a handover ceremony with his predecessor Brigitte Bierlein, Kurz said it was "good to be able to continue working for Austria" and promised: "We will strive every day to give our best."

Kurz's People's Party (OeVP) and the Greens agreed last week to govern together after the last administration with the far-right fell apart in a corruption scandal. Both the OeVP and the ecologist party made key gains in September's snap polls. President Alexander Van der Bellen reminded the new government that "citizens have great expectations of you," adding that "trust must be rebuilt".

The new government aims to please both parties by pushing for Austria to be carbon neutral

by 2040 and also continuing previous strict anti-immigration measures. Some observers think that if successful the alliance could become a model for other European countries as nations across the continent grapple with populist sentiments but also climate change.

'Best of both worlds'

Kurz-whose conservative OeVP has been in government for more than three decades—has defended the undertaking as combining "the best of both worlds". The OeVP has 10 ministers in the new coalition, while the Greens have four with its party chief Werner Kogler, 58, taking on the vice-chancellorship.

Among the ministers being sworn in yesterday more than half are women, including the defence minister. Many are in their 30s and 40s.

A Green politician and former activist will front an enlarged environment ministry, which includes traffic, energy and technology as well. The Greens have also nominated an openly lesbian party veteran to hold the culture portfolio, while a Green legal expert of Bosnian origin, who arrived in Austria as a child refugee, will head the justice ministry.

No 'love marriage'

But for all that's new, it's not a "love marriage", according to analyst Johannes Huber. "As he (Kurz) says at every opportunity, they are very different parties", which have always been rivals rather than allies on a national level until now, Huber told AFP.

And their detractors are many,



VIENNA: Austria's President Alexander van der Bellen (left) shakes hands with Austria's designated Chancellor Sebastian Kurz during a swearing-in ceremony of the new coalition government yesterday. —AFP

including some in their own ranks. The Far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) — the third strongest party in parliament after the OeVP and the Social Democrats (SPÖ) — was quick to denounce Kurz's "swing to the left" and the "dangerous experiment" out of which "nothing good" can come for the country of 8.8 million people.

The SPÖ too criticized the new government's program, saying social questions hadn't been addressed well enough. Kurz first became the world's youngest chancellor in a government with the FPÖ from December 2017 until May last year, driving a hard line against immigration and brushing off a steady stream of racist and anti-Semitic incidents involving his far-right colleagues.

But then the FPÖ leader and vice-chancellor became engulfed in a graft scandal, leading to the collapse of the coalition and snap

elections. Disappointed FPÖ supporters dealt the party a setback in the polls, many shifting their votes to the OeVP which won 37.5 percent—an increase of almost six points from 2017. The Greens, who failed to get into parliament in a shock result in 2017, garnered 13.8 percent as climate change replaced immigration as a top voter concern.

Party officials have said they have had to make "painful" compromises to reach the agreement with the powerful conservatives. "The Greens are very pragmatic... It is important for the party to take on responsibility on a national level," Huber said.

Kurz has promised Austrians a stable government for the next five years. However, "the new coalition has not provided a complete answer on how they plan to finance their fiscal plans," according to analyst Katharina Koenig of Oxford Economics. —AFP

Killing Charlie: The attacks that heralded France's year of terror

PARIS: "Nothing will ever be as before", predicted Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo after two gunmen massacred cartoonists at the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine in Paris five years ago.

The attack on the weekly—with its long history of mocking Islam and other religions—was the first in a series of assaults that have claimed more than 250 lives since January 7, 2015, mostly at the hands of young French-born jihadists. It sent shockwaves through France, exposing divisions in the multicultural modern Republic and sparking an intense debate about Muslim integration and press freedom. The Kouachi brothers who killed 12 people in their strike on Charlie Hebdo claimed to be avenging the magazine's publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) deemed offensive by many Muslims.

"We avenged. We killed Charlie Hebdo!", they shouted triumphantly as they ran through the streets. Within three days, the death toll in the rampage of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated siblings and accomplice Amedy Coulibaly had risen to 17, including four people at a kosher supermarket and three police officers.

'I am Charlie'

The Kouachis failed in their bid to "kill" Charlie Hebdo: despite losing its top talent the magazine remained afloat thanks to an outpouring of solidarity. "I wanted the paper to continue to exist. For me it couldn't just stop like that because of what happened," said Pierrick Jun, a cartoonist who joined the magazine just months after the attack. This



PARIS: In this file photo taken on January 11, 2015, members of the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine team join Renald Luzier, known as Luz, (5 left) and editor-in-chief Patrick Pelloux (7 left) as they take part in a Unity rally "Marche Republicaine" in Paris in tribute to the 17 victims of a three-day killing spree in the French capital. —AFP

week the magazine published a defiant anniversary issue remembering the attack and also denouncing what it said was a new kind of politically correct censorship by those who "believe themselves to be the kings of the world behind their keyboard and smartphone." But the attacks did expose deep divisions in France: even a nationwide minute of silence observed by four million people under the slogan "Je suis Charlie" (I am Charlie) could not project a nation united in mourning.

Students at around 200 schools, many of them in neighborhoods with big immigrant populations, boycotted the tribute, accusing Charlie Hebdo of Muslim-baiting. Then prime minister Manuel Valls drew widespread criticism by linking the rise of extremism to France's "geographical, social and ethnic apartheid". President Emmanuel Macron reprised the theme during his 2017 election campaign.

But despite his talk of ending the "house arrest" of young people trapped in high-rise suburban housing projects, the breeding grounds of several of the jihadists who have

attacked France since 2015, their conditions remain largely unchanged. A major Odoxa survey in November showed a majority of residents in housing projects still feeling abandoned by the state and discriminated against by employers.

'Loss of innocence'

The three days of attacks in January 2015 culminated in a deadly hostage-taking by Coulibaly at the Jewish supermarket, confirming fears that French Jews had become a top target for homegrown Islamist radicals. Coming three years after an Islamist gunman shot dead a teacher and three children at a Jewish school in Toulouse, the attack compounded the feeling that "everywhere, at any time, we were a target." France's chief rabbi Haim Korsia told AFP.

For Korsia it marked "a sort of loss of innocence" in the 500,000-strong French Jewish community, Europe's largest, which had until then seen the biggest threat as being from the far right. —AFP

CONSUMER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT

RECALL INFORMATION

TOYOTA

Model Name: FORTUNER
Model Year: 2017 -2020

RECALL REASON	Cooling fan Caution Label Correction
REMEDY	AISayer will contact the involved vehicle customers and to inform them to bring to our service centers as the necessary parts are available. All the repairs will be free of charge, both Parts and Labor.
CONTACT	<p>MOHAMED NASER ALSAYER & SONS EST. CO. W.L.L. HOTLINE: 1803803 WWW.TOYOTA.COM.KW Please book an appointment to serve you better Mobile: 97211792 (call & whatsapp)</p>

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International

Philippines prepares to evacuate workers in ME over rising tensions

Around 2.3 million people from Philippines working in region

MANILA: The Philippines is preparing to evacuate thousands of Filipinos working in the Middle East as regional tensions rise following the killing of a top Iranian commander by the United States. About 2.3 million people from the Philippines are working in the Middle East as domestic helpers, construction workers, engineers and nurses.

President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered the armed forces to prepare air and naval assets for the evacuation of Filipinos in Iraq, Iran and nearby Arab countries, his spokesman Salvador Panelo said yesterday. Saying he was deeply worried about the prospect of a "protracted war", Duterte told reporters he sent a special envoy to Tehran and Baghdad to get assurances that Filipinos would be provided safe passage in case of evacuation. "We have so many Filipinos working mainly in the Middle East. I am nervous. Iran seems to be hell-bent on a retaliation, which I think will come," Duterte said in a speech on Monday.

There are close to 7,000 Filipinos working and living in Iraq and more than 1,000 in Iran, according to government data. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, who heads a newly created committee to prepare the evacuation, said the government is readying aircraft to ferry

Filipinos in Iraq and Iran who wish to come home or be evacuated to safer areas.

"We can send transportation to fetch them," Lorenzana told reporters, adding that hiring a cruise ship was among the things the government was considering to safely evacuate those who would wish to be repatriated. Iran is considering 13 scenarios to avenge Friday's killing of Qasem Soleimani by a US drone attack in Iraq, a senior Tehran official said yesterday as the general's body was brought to his hometown for burial. Filipinos in the Middle East sent home \$5.4 billion in remittances in January to October last year, accounting for a fifth of total remittances for that period, making the region a major source of foreign exchange inflows which help drive growth in the consumption-led Philippine economy.

In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah advised Malaysians to defer nonessential travel to the region, "in particular areas where the security situation is critical", and for citizens in the region to register with their nearest foreign mission. "The ministry advises all Malaysians residing, or currently travelling to the region to be more vigilant and take the necessary precautions to ensure their safety and security," Saifuddin told at a press conference. — Reuters



About 2.3 million people from the Philippines are working in the Middle East as domestic helpers, construction workers, engineers and nurses. — AFP file photo

Japan issues arrest warrant for Ghosn's wife

TOKYO: Tokyo prosecutors yesterday issued an arrest warrant for Carlos Ghosn's wife Carole for allegedly lying in testimony, as officials sought ways to bring the fugitive car industry boss back for trial on financial misconduct charges. The perjury arrest warrant accuses Carole Ghosn of falsely claiming not to know, or to have met, people connected to a company that received payments from Nissan Motor, part of which it subsequently transferred to a firm owned by Ghosn.

Separately, a senior Ministry of Justice official said staff were poring over Lebanese laws to find a way to return Ghosn and that Japan "will do whatever it can" to have him face trial.

The former Nissan and Renault SA chairman is scheduled to hold a news conference today, his first such appearance since his arrest in November 2018 and his dramatic flight last month to Lebanon, his childhood home. "Last time Carlos Ghosn announced a press confer-



BEIRUT: A handout picture provided by the Lebanese photo agency Dalati and Nohra yesterday shows President Michel Aoun (left) meeting with Japanese Ambassador Takeshi Okubo at the presidential palace in Baabda. — AFP

ence and got re-arrested. This time, the day before he is announced to speak out freely for the first time, they issued an arrest warrant for his wife Carole Ghosn," a spokeswoman for Ghosn told Reuters in Beirut.

Claims

Ghosn is expected to detail some of the claims he has made against Nissan since his arrest. Citing an interview with Ghosn, Fox Business reported that he said he has "actual evidence" and documents to show

there was a Japanese government-backed coup to "take him out". He plans to identify those he believes responsible, the broadcaster said. In earlier court filings seen by Reuters and statements released by his lawyers in Japan, Ghosn has claimed that he was unseated to destroy any possibility of a merger between Nissan and Renault, accusing Nissan executives of colluding with Japanese prosecutors and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry officials.

Ghosn's legal team in Japan also said prosecutors withheld evidence, citing concerns voiced by Nissan that it included sensitive information about operations and employees. Nissan said Ghosn's flight from Japan would not affect its policy of holding him responsible for "serious misconduct".

"The company will continue to take appropriate legal action to hold Ghosn accountable for the harm that his misconduct has caused to Nissan," the automaker said in a statement.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary, Yoshihide Suga, yesterday, described Ghosn's escape to Beirut as "regrettable" and said Tokyo had asked Lebanon for help, although he declined to say what exactly Japan had asked of Lebanon. "It's necessary to carefully consider the legal systems of both countries," he told a news conference, Lebanon does not normally extradite its citizens. — Reuters

News in brief

Earthquake in Indonesia

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia: A strong earthquake jolted Indonesia's northwest yesterday, but no tsunami warning was issued and there were no immediate reports of injuries or damage. The 6.2 magnitude quake struck at a depth of 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) just off the coast of Simeulue island, west of Sumatra, according to the US Geological Survey. Indonesia's weather and geophysics bureau said there was no tsunami threat. People panicked and ran outside their homes when the quake hit. "We are now watching at the beach to monitor the movement of seawater," Simeulue resident Ahmadi told AFP. No casualties or infrastructure damage have been reported so far. — AFP

Thais asked to shower less

BANGKOK: Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha yesterday urged people to turn off taps and shower less to cope with a drought afflicting northern and central Thailand. Last week, Bangkok's water authority said the capital's tap water was becoming saline as seawater pushed up the depleted Chao Phraya river, a source of much of central Thailand's water. The cabinet agreed yesterday to spend 3 billion baht (\$100 million) on boreholes and pipes to extract ground water to relieve a drought that is expected to worsen in the next few months, a government spokeswoman told reporters. Thailand's dry season started in November and usually lasts through April, although this year authorities say it could go on through June. A drought has been declared in 14 provinces in the central, northern and northeastern farming regions. — AFP

Pakistan military jet crashes, 2 die

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistan military aircraft crashed near an air base yesterday, killing two pilots, an air force spokesman said. The FT-7 jet came down on a routine training mission near the central district of Mianwali, the spokesman added. He named the pilots as Squadron Leader Haris bin Khalid and Flying Officer Ibaad-ur-Rehman and said a board of inquiry would look into what caused the crash. — Reuters

S Korea's Moon seeks Kim visit to Seoul

SEOUL: South Korean President Moon Jae-in yesterday called for better relations with the North so leader Kim Jong Un can visit Seoul, despite Pyongyang's abandonment of its nuclear and missile test moratoriums. Moon's appeal came after Kim threatened a demonstration of a "new strategic weapon" at a four-day ruling party meeting last week, where he never mentioned South Korea.

Since the breakdown of Kim's summit with US President Donald Trump in Hanoi last year—which left nuclear negotiations largely deadlocked—Pyongyang has repeatedly lashed out at the South, saying it has "nothing to talk" about any more with Seoul.

One senior official has gone as far as describing the South's presidency as a "shy dog barking more wildly". But Moon, who has long favored engagement with the nuclear-armed North, doubled down on his dovish approach.

"I hope South and North Korea can make efforts together so that the conditions for Chairman Kim Jong Un's reciprocal visit can be arranged at an early date," Moon said in his annual New Year address.

The invitation for Kim to visit Seoul dates from the two leaders' last summit, in Pyongyang in September 2018, when the peninsula was basking in a diplomatic rapprochement. Analysts suggested Moon's call was now unrealistic. "I'm willing to meet repeatedly and talk ceaselessly" with the North, Moon said in his half-hour speech, which was broadcast live.

He also suggested Pyongyang and Seoul should consult on fielding a unified team at the Tokyo Olympics in July, which would march together at the opening ceremony. The two Koreas' athletes took part together at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in the South two years ago, and subsequently formed a series of joint teams in other events.

A possible joint bid for Seoul and Pyongyang to co-host the 2032 Summer Games has even been mooted, with Moon yesterday calling the prospect "a golden opportunity for the South and North to show to the world that we are one people". — AFP

Firefighters race to contain blazes as heatwave looms across Australia

SYDNEY: Firefighters raced to contain massive bushfires in southeastern Australia yesterday, taking advantage of a brief drop in temperatures and some much-needed rainfall before another heatwave strikes later this week. Exhausted volunteers cleared ground vegetation and carried out controlled burns before temperatures and winds were expected to pick up again by Friday. "It really is about shoring up protection to limit the damage potential and the outbreak of the fires over the coming days," said New South Wales Rural Fire Service commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

He described current conditions as "much more favourable" but warned "we are expecting hotter weather to return later in the week". Dozens of vast blazes continue to burn out of control across the east of the country and there are growing fears that two fires in New South Wales and Victoria could connect to form another uncontrollable megablaze.

Rainfall on Monday offered modest relief, but it was not heavy enough in most areas to extinguish the fires, and in some places it hampered firefighters' preparations by making back-burning more difficult.

Twenty-five people have died since the start of the disaster in September, more than 1,800 homes have been destroyed, and some eight million hectares (80,000 square kilometers) has burned, an area the size of Ireland or South Carolina. Smoke from the fires has been spotted more than 12,000 kilometers (7,400 miles) away in Chile and Argentina, weather authorities in the South American countries said. The cost of the disaster is still not clear, but the Insurance Council of Australia said claims worth Aus\$700 million (\$485 million) had already been filed and the figure was expected to climb significantly.

The government has earmarked an initial Aus\$2 billion (\$1.4 billion) for a national recovery fund to help devastated communities. The human toll was again laid bare yesterday, as firefighters held a memorial in Sydney for 36-year-old colleague Andrew O'Dwyer who died battling blazes in late December.

Volunteers in bright orange fire suits lined the road as his cortege passed—with the coffin draped in a Rural Fire Service flag.

Conditions in the next week are not expected to match the worst days of the crisis, but Fitzsimmons told public broadcaster ABC it was important not to "get lulled into a false sense of security". Many of the blazes are too big to be put out, so only sustained rainfall would end the crisis. There were some faint signs yesterday that a reprieve may be on the way, as tropical cyclone Blake brought heavy rain to the northwestern coast. Blake is not expected to have an impact on the bushfires raging in other parts of the massive country, but could signal a change in hot and dry conditions that have fuelled the fires. — AFP



WAGAH: Indian Border Security Force personnel (dressed in brown) and Pakistani Rangers (dressed in black) take part in the Beating Retreat ceremony at the India-Pakistan border in Wagah, some 35 km from Amritsar on Monday. — AFP

Pakistan parliament extends term of army chief

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's parliament yesterday approved extending the term of the army chief for another three years despite the objections of some parties, which accuse the military of heavy-handed tactics in its anti-militant operations along the Afghan border. Pakistan has been ruled by the powerful military for about half its history and tension between civilian governments and the top generals often dominates politics. Any effort by a military chief to consolidate power is viewed with suspicion.

But critics of Prime Minister Imran Khan say his government enjoys the support of the military which is why the government approved the extension for Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa in August. The government cited a worsening national security situation with old rival India as justification for the extension for Bajwa at the end of the usual three-year term.

But in a surprise ruling, the Supreme Court struck down the extension in November, ordering the government and army to produce legal provisions and arguments for the reappointment, pitting the judiciary against the govern-

ment and powerful military. The government responded by drafting legislation which the lower house of parliament approved yesterday, clearing the way for the extension. It must still be approved by the upper house, which is expected. "All parties shunned their differences and stood united in the best national interest," Information Minister Firdous Ashiq Awan told reporters outside the parliament.

The two main opposition parties have a long history of clashing with the military but nevertheless backed the legislation, largely, analysts say, to avoid a damaging confrontation. Two smaller parties and some members of parliament from troubled northwestern districts along Afghan border opposed it. They accuse the military of committing rights abuses during its anti-militant operations. The army rejects such accusations.

"This parliament's majority is fake, this prime minister is fake," said Asad Mahmood, parliamentary leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) religious political party, which says it unfairly lost seats in the northwest to Khan's party. "We will not support any such amendment in the law by a fake parliament."

The military sets defense and security policy and also dominates foreign affairs. Recently, it has also had a role in framing economic policies. Opposition activists and rights groups have also accused the military under Bajwa of meddling in politics, limiting civil liberties and muzzling the media. The military denies interfering in politics or curbing freedoms. — Reuters

Analysis

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Women take centre stage in India protests

As a crowd of protesters swelled around them under the watchful eyes of dozens of policemen in riot gear, a cluster of young female students in burqas stood outside their university in New Delhi shouting anti-government slogans. "What is happening in the country is wrong," Shabana, a 21-year-old student at Jamia Millia Islamia University, said through the veil covering her face. Jamia Millia is a major public university in the capital where a large number of Muslims study. "They can't suppress our voices."

As protests in India against a new citizenship law that critics say targets Muslims grow by the day, they have drawn many women and girls - some housewives, some students with hijabs covering their hair, and others in full-length burqa robes - in a rare sign of public anger against the government. The women can be seen painting graffiti on university walls, organising rallies and gathering funds for posters and food for protesters.

Shabana, who would only provide her first name, said she had been moved to act after some of her friends had been injured when police stormed the Jamia campus to break up a protest involving hundreds of students last weekend. At least 200 students were injured as police fired tear gas and used batons to disperse the crowd. The police have denied using excess force. "I had to lie to my parents, but I'm still here, because this is important. We need to speak out," Shabana said at the rally yesterday. "I was horrified when I saw their injuries."

The protests, some of the most widespread in India in recent years, erupted on Dec 11 after Parliament passed the controversial law, which protesters say is an attack on India's secular foundations. The Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi insists the new law is essential as it eases the path for minorities from neighboring countries to gain Indian citizenship. But critics say it is biased as it excludes Muslim immigrants.

'We are not scared'

Many protesters Reuters spoke to over the past week are Muslim women and girls from conservative backgrounds. Some said they had to sneak out of their homes to join the protests. "My mother stops us from stepping out, but if we do not show strength now, then how will we encourage others to step out?" said Nazia, a 13-year-old schoolgirl protesting outside the university. In the past, women have played a prominent role in many Indian protests, including those that broke out following the brutal rape of a young woman on a Delhi bus in 2012.

But the current displays of public anger include people not usually seen out protesting. Social norms have often restricted participation by Muslim women in the public arena in India. Most girls and women interviewed declined to give their full names as they did not want their families to know they were involved in the protests. Shumaila, a 24-year-old PhD scholar at the Jamia university, said that many women from around the surrounding neighborhood had also come out in solidarity with the students. One of them was Nadia Khan, a 35-year-old housewife who said: "The government has forced us to come out on the streets." "We are not scared of the government or the prime minister. We are ready to take a bullet in our chest," she said. "We know how to fight for our rights."

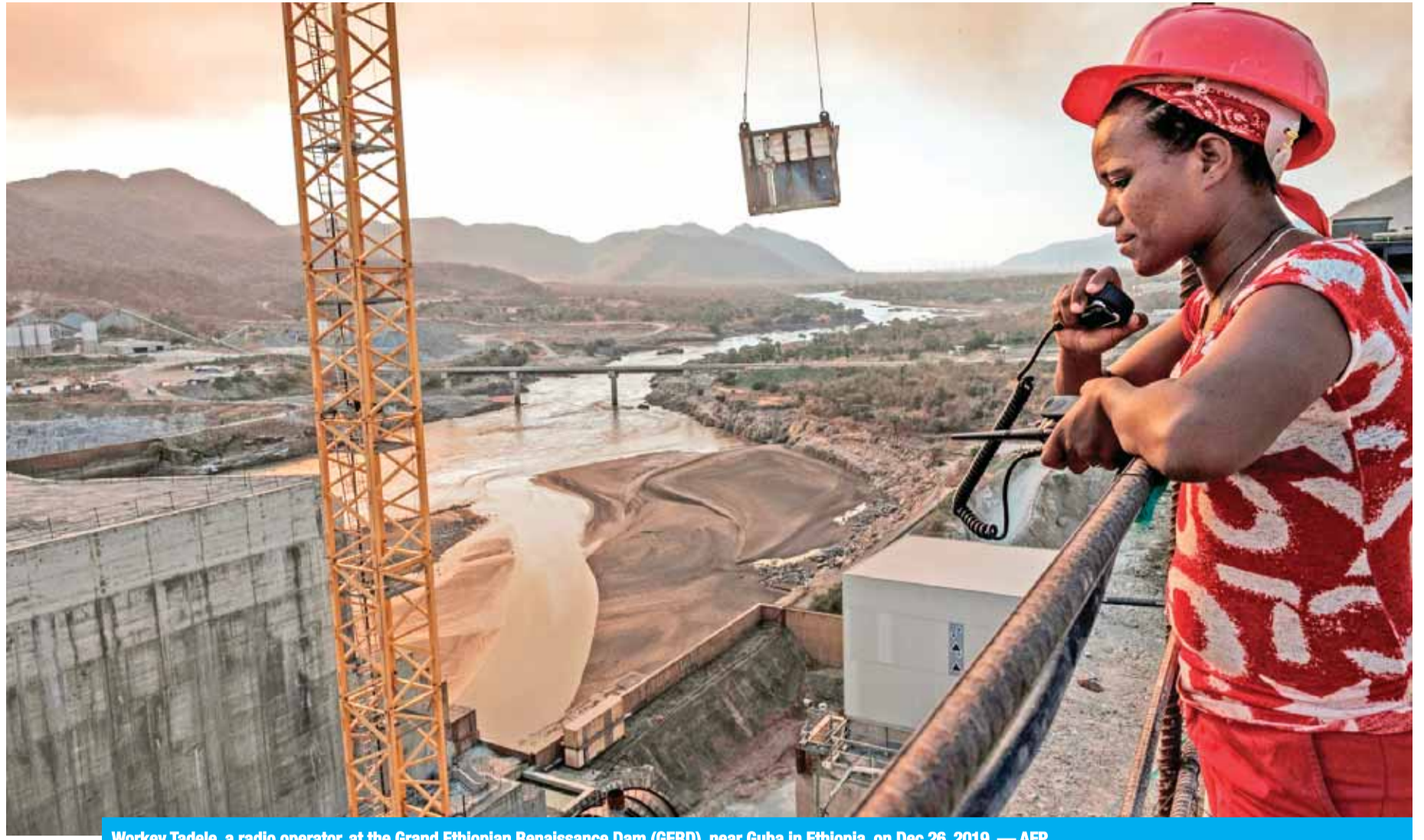
Among the most striking images of the protests that began in India's northeast before mushrooming across the country, was one of three young women pointing fingers in the air and shouting slogans from the top of a wall outside the Jamia campus last week, with a throng of protesters around them. One of those women, Chanda Yadav, comes from the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, where she says she was raised in a conservative environment in which women's voices were suppressed.

"There were restrictions on everything from the kind of clothes I wore to what time I would come home from school," said Yadav. "I would always argue with my family over it. My uncles would often say, 'Shut up, you've got a big tongue!'" Yadav, 20, is now a Hindi language masters student at the Jamia university, and her voice, as she stood alongside two hijab-clad school-mates, was among the loudest at the protest. Yadav said she was a Hindu, but felt strongly that all Indians needed to come forward to oppose the law. "This is not the issue of just one community," said Yadav. "What they are doing to Muslims today could happen to anyone tomorrow." — Reuters



Participants hold placards as they take part in a 'Burqa and Bindhi' protest against India's new citizenship law in Bangalore on Jan 5, 2020. — AFP

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Workey Tadele, a radio operator, at the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), near Guba in Ethiopia, on Dec 26, 2019. — AFP

Power-starved Ethiopia rallies around Nile dam

Cell phone batteries constantly dying, health centres bereft of modern equipment, a dependence on flashlights after sundown - Kafule Yizyaw experienced all these struggles and more growing up without electricity in rural Ethiopia. So five years ago, he leapt at the chance to work on a project designed to light up his country and the wider Horn of Africa region: The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a 145-metre-high, 1.8-kilometre-long concrete colossus that is set to become the largest hydropower plant in Africa.

"Our country has a huge problem with electricity," Kafule, 22, told AFP recently while taking a break from reinforcing steel pipes that will funnel water from the Blue Nile River to one of the dam's 13 turbines. "This is about the existence of our nation and, in my opinion, it will help us break free from the bondage of poverty." The dam is expected to begin producing energy by the end of this year.

Across Ethiopia, poor farmers and rich businessmen eagerly await the more than 6,000 megawatts of electricity officials say it will ultimately provide. Yet as thousands of workers toil day and night to finish the project, Ethiopian negotiators remain locked in talks over how the dam will affect downstream neighbours, principally Egypt. The next round of negotiations starts Thursday in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, and is likely to renew focus on Cairo's fears that the dam could bring water and food insecurity for millions of Egyptians. Ethiopians at the dam site say they are doing their best to focus on the task at hand, though they bristle at suggestions that their country is overstepping in its bid to harness the Blue Nile for its development. "When we do projects here it's not to harm the downstream countries," said deputy project manager Ephrem Woldekidan. "There is no reason that the downstream countries should complain (about) it because this is our resource also."

Rising Nile tensions

The Nile River's two main tributaries - the Blue and White Niles - converge in the Sudanese capital Khartoum before flowing north through Egypt toward the Mediterranean Sea. Egypt depends on the Nile for about 90 percent of its irrigation and drinking water, and says it has "historic rights" to the river guaranteed by treaties from 1929 and 1959. Tensions have been high in the Nile basin ever since Ethiopia broke ground on the dam in 2011.

The International Crisis Group warned last March that the countries "could be drawn into conflict" given that Egypt sees potential water loss as "an existential threat". In October, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, fresh from winning the Nobel Peace Prize, assured lawmakers that "no force can stop Ethiopia from building the dam" and said "millions" of troops could be mobilised to defend it if necessary. The United States stepped in to jumpstart a tripartite dialogue with Sudan that is supposed to resolve the dispute by Jan 15. The biggest initial hurdle is the filling of the dam's reservoir, which can hold 74 billion cubic metres of water. Egypt is worried Ethiopia will fill the reservoir too quickly, reducing water flow downstream. After the latest round of talks in Sudan last month, Sudanese irrigation minister Yasser Abbas said there had been "progress" on the issue but no breakthrough.

Kevin Wheeler, an engineer at the University of Oxford who has studied the dam, said he was hopeful a deal on the filling period could be reached by January 15, but that additional issues would emerge down the line. "Coordinated operations between the reservoirs along the Nile are likely to be an ongoing discussion that may continue for years, decades, and centuries to come, particularly as populations grow, development continues, and global

climate patterns continue to change," Wheeler said.

Ethiopia's push for power

Thousands of farmers have allegedly been displaced since work on the dam began. The US-based NGO International Rivers has accused Ethiopia of disregarding the dam's environmental impacts, which remain understudied. The group has voiced concern about "great degradation" that, along with changing weather patterns due to climate change, could "result in irregular episodes of flooding, drought and mudslides".

Ethiopia has responded to such statements by noting that a study group including experts from Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan has been tasked with assessing social and environmental impacts. Meanwhile, officials in Addis Ababa are focusing on the country's push for power. Ethiopia is striving for universal electricity access by 2025, though currently more than half the population of 110 million lives without it.

Even in Addis, power is patchy, and the city suffered weeks of blackouts during the most recent period of electricity rationing in May and June 2019. Dawit Moges, head of a medical laboratory, said the cuts drove up his generator costs and, because they were not predictable, led to delayed results and unreliable blood sample readings. "You've collected specimens, you're processing the specimens and boom, there is no power. All those specimens, you may not be sure about the results," he said, adding that he hoped the dam would yield a steady power supply. "I want it to be completed as soon as possible and go into production." The same is true for Harsh Kothari, head of Mohan Group, which runs five manufacturing units producing everything from shoes to electric cables and barbed wire. — AFP

In Iraq, Trump threat brings bitter flashbacks

US President Donald Trump's threat to sanction Iraqis "like they've never seen before" if Baghdad kicks out American troops has brought back haunting memories of a decade under international embargo. "If the US imposes sanctions on Iraq, the dinar will plummet and we'll be sent back to the past, to the days of the economic embargo," said Hisham Abbas, an Iraqi shopping in a commercial district of the capital.

On Sunday, Iraq's parliament voted to urge the government to oust foreign troops from its soil, among them some 5,200 US troops helping local forces beat back militants. Trump quickly slammed the decision. "If they do ask us to leave - if we don't do it in a very friendly basis - we will charge them sanctions like they've never seen before," he said. "I'll make Iranian sanctions look some-

what tame." Under ex-dictator Saddam Hussein, Iraq was put under crippling global sanctions and an oil embargo seen as the toughest in history, cutting off trade and financial interactions with the outside world. Its GDP was slashed in half, the Iraqi dinar collapsed and dozens of factories shuttered, leaving families relying on ration cards and slim salaries. The measures were lifted in the years following the US-led invasion in 2003 and Iraq's economy has slowly tried to reintegrate with the rest of the world. It is now OPEC's second-biggest crude producer and living standards have risen - most Iraqis own imported clothes, phones, cars and computers.

Sanctions 'nuclear option'

But after Trump's comments, bitter memories of shortages and collapsed currencies came rushing back. "Everything the Iraqi people suffered in the 1990s will come back. The economic embargo will come back," worried Saleh, a middle-aged Iraqi with a thick mustache. "It'll be like the era of Saddam Hussein, and worse. There won't be any cash left," said Samer, another shopper. The US has been particularly angered in recent months by repeated rocket attacks targeting the US embassy and American troops. In response to those attacks, a senior US official at

the Baghdad embassy told AFP months ago that Washington was considering a range of ways to ramp up pressure on Iraq. "One possibility is sanctions, and limiting the cash that comes into Iraq. That would be the nuclear option," the official said. The US has already blacklisted Iraqi nationals, armed groups and even banks for their ties to Tehran and has hinted more sanctions are coming.

But they have so far left alone Iraq's oil revenues, which make up more than 90 percent of the state's budget. US and Iraqi officials previously told AFP that an oil embargo, like the one imposed now on Iran, would be too hurtful to a country considered an ally by Washington. The US has so far sought to shield Iraq from the impact of its energy sanctions on Tehran by granting Baghdad a waiver to keep importing Iranian electricity.

But Sunday's vote could change all that. "One of the steps the international community could take would be halting financial interactions with Iraq," speaker Mohammad Halbusi told MPs during the session. "We would no longer be able to keep up our commitments to Iraqi citizens," he warned. In his comments on Sunday, Trump went further than just sanctions, threatening to make Iraq reimburse Washington for a "very extraordinarily expensive" base hosting US troops. — AFP

Trump gambles big as commander in chief

As a real estate magnate and politician, Donald Trump has always loved breaking rules and putting on a show. Now in Iran he's following the same pattern - only this time as commander in chief of the world's biggest military. Whether negotiating skyscraper deals or conducting a trade war with China, Trump can resemble a flamboyant and highly unpredictable poker player. As he said in his autobiographical book "The Art of the Deal," the role thrills him. "Money was never a big motivation for me, except as a way to keep score. The real excitement is playing the game," he wrote.

The difference now is that he's playing with drones, warplanes, cruise missiles and other lethal cards in a game that risks plunging the United States into yet another Middle Eastern war. With last Friday's stunning drone strike against key Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, outside the airport in the Iraqi capital Baghdad, Trump yet again upended the status quo - and alarmed his critics. The attack was "wildly counterproductive," said John Mueller, a foreign policy expert at Ohio State University.

Soleimani has been a top US enemy during two decades of conflict in the region. But Trump's predecessors, Barack Obama and George W. Bush, are said to have held off from killing the wily commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps for fear of the consequences. As pointman for Tehran's wide-ranging regional network of official and covert military alliances, Soleimani was far more than just a general - he was one of the most impor-

tant figures in Iran. His killing, Mueller said, "will unify people on the side of the mullahs" just when their theocratic, deeply anti-US regime is increasingly unpopular.

Trump, as usual, pronounced himself free of such concerns. "He should have been taken out many years ago!" the president tweeted soon after the killing. "General Qasem Soleimani has killed or badly wounded thousands of Americans over an extended period of time, and was plotting to kill many more... but got caught!"

Reckless or refreshing?

Trump justified his trade war with China in much the same way. For decades, other presidents were too weak to dare to take on Beijing's unfair trade practices, he claimed. With nuclear-armed North Korea, another long-running US foreign policy headache, Trump again threw out precedent. After first threatening "fire and fury" against the isolated dictator, he went on to declare leader Kim Jong Un a good friend, betting that his own charisma and personal touch would succeed where harsher policies had failed.

The results in both cases are mixed. A thaw has been declared in the trade war, but China remains far from reforming its economy, while the outwardly more friendly North Korea has steadily consolidated its nuclear power status. Now the Iran drama sees that Trump doctrine being applied for the first time to a crisis with the real risk of imminent war.

And Trump's detractors are nervous

that he has blundered, or will blunder, into disaster. "The moment we all feared is likely upon us," Democratic Senator Chris Murphy tweeted at the weekend. "An unstable President in way over his head, panicking, with all his experienced advisers having quit, and only the sycophantic amateurs remaining. Assassinating foreign leaders, announcing plans to bomb civilians. A nightmare."

The top Democrat in Congress, Nancy Pelosi, has announced plans to vote on a war powers resolution aimed at putting a check on Trump's military actions to avert a "serious escalation" with Iran. The president's backers, however, say his blunt style and risk-taking policies are exactly what the United States needs. "This was long overdue," said Thomas Spoehr, a retired army lieutenant general who heads defense studies at the Heritage Foundation think tank.

Following recent attacks against US troops in Iraq and the embassy in Baghdad, Trump had to strike back hard or end up ruining US credibility, Spoehr argued. "America's reputation, its respect in places like the Middle East, depends on our ability to stand up," he said. "When people cross American red lines... they know there's going to be a response."

Spoehr pointed to Trump's moving of the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem - a gesture seen by much of the world as highly provocative to the Palestinians - as more proof the president has the right instincts.

Predictions that the switch would "set the region on fire" proved far-fetched, Spoehr said. Trump "doesn't constrain himself with normal conventional wisdom". — AFP



Business

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13 India asks refiners to stop buying Malaysian palm oil

14 Lexus unveils first EV, the UX 300e



السوق الرئيسي					السوق الرئيسي					السوق الرئيسي								
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KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait approved the listing of the company's shares in the Kuwaiti market setting April 19, 2020 as a preliminary date for listing. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Boursa Kuwait to list shares during Q2 2020

National Investment Company appointed as official listing advisor

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait, the first stock exchange owned by the private sector in the Middle East, approved the listing of the company's shares in the Kuwaiti market, setting April 19, 2020 as a preliminary date for listing. The company will be taking the necessary measures to obtain the approval of the Capital Markets Authority for the official listing. Additionally, the National Investment Company has been appointed as the official listing advisor.

According to the applicable rules, Boursa Kuwait shares will be traded on the over-the-counter (OTC) platform for

unlisted securities starting January 15, 2020 and until applying for an official listing on the stock exchange.

The measurable steps and achievements made by Boursa Kuwait during the past few years, such as expanding the range of products and services, developing an attractive environment for liquidity by providing more promising investment opportunities, expanding the investor base, and introducing regulatory reforms, in addition to the amendment and simplification of listing rules to suit the needs of individual and corporate investors, have led the com-

pany to occupy a prominent position among global stock exchanges. The growing reputation of Boursa Kuwait as an attractive capital market destination has become a key driver of investments.

Boursa Kuwait's Board of Directors and senior management have played a vital role in raising awareness of the importance of listing on the stock exchange and encouraging public-sector companies to be listed, reflecting positively on the development of the Kuwaiti market.

The privatization process of Boursa Kuwait was carried out in two phases.

During the first phase, which took place in February 2019, the bidding for the purchase of 44 percent of shares in the company was won by the alliance of the National Investment Company, the First Investment Company, and Arzan Finance and Investment Company, in addition to the Athens Stock Exchange. The second phase was completed in December when 50 percent of the company's shares were offered for public subscription to Kuwaiti citizens between October 1 and December 1. The offer for shares was oversubscribed by more than 8.5 times.

Samsung unveils AI-powered digital avatar

LAS VEGAS: A Samsung lab yesterday unveiled a digital avatar it described as an AI-powered "artificial human," claiming it is able to "converse and sympathize" like real people. The announcement at the opening of the 2020 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas touted a new kind of artificial intelligence called NEON, produced by the independent Samsung unit Star Labs.

The technology allows for the creation of customized digital beings that can appear on displays or video games and could be designed to be "TV anchors, spokespeople, or movie actors" or even "companions and friends," according to the California-based unit of the South Korean giant. "NEONs will be our friends, collaborators and companions, continually learning, evolving and forming memories from their interactions," said Pranav Mistry, chief executive of the lab. The NEON creators said the new virtual humans are the product of advances in technologies including neural networks and computational reality.

According to Star Labs, NEON is inspired "by the rhythmic complexities of nature and extensively trained with how humans look, behave and interact." The avatars "create life-like reality that is beyond normal perception to distinguish, with latency of less than a few milliseconds."

While digital avatars have long been able to be programmed for specific tasks such as role players in games, NEON goes further by enabling interactions that can incorporate human emotion. Although the artificial humans may borrow features from real people, "each NEON has his or her own unique personality and can show new expressions, movements, and dialogs," the company said.



LAS VEGAS, Nevada: The Mercedes-Benz Vision AVTR concept car is displayed during a keynote address at CES 2020 at Park Theater at Park MGM on Monday in Las Vegas. It was the world premiere unveiling of the vehicle. —AFP Photos

New kind of deepfake?

The announcement comes amid a proliferation of AI-manipulated computer videos known as "deepfakes," and growing concerns how they could be used to deceive or manipulate. Some analysts fear these fakes could be misused during an election campaign to exacerbate political tensions. Jack Gold, analyst at J. Gold Associates, said Samsung may be ahead of the pack if it can develop avatars that can show emotions and expressions.

"We have to wait and see what this means," Gold said. "But it has major implications for many fields like customer service, help desk functions, entertainment, and of course could also be used to 'fake' a human interacting with a live person for bad or illegal purposes."

Avi Greengart of the consultancy Techspontential said the avatars could be realistic but also "creepy." "Leaving aside how impressive the technology is, will NEON be used in ways that people like, just tolerate, or



LAS VEGAS: Neon, a unit of Samsung, promotes a planned launch of an "Artificial Human" at the 2020 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Monday.

actively hate?" he said. According to Samsung and Star Labs, NEON offers avatars with lifelike reality "that is beyond normal perception to distinguish."

The company envisions commercial opportunities to create avatars to be service representatives, financial advisors, healthcare providers or concierges. "We have always dreamed of such virtual beings in science fictions and movies," Mistry said.

"NEONs will integrate with our world and serve as new links to a better future, a world where 'humans are humans' and 'machines are humane.'" The laboratory was launched in 2019 by Mistry, who had previously been a senior Samsung vice president and head of innovation at Samsung Mobile. He was known for developing Sixth Sense, a gesture-based wearable technology system built at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The India-born Mistry also worked on projects with Microsoft and Google and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. —AFP

French unions block refineries in bid to stop pension reform

PARIS: French unions blockaded several oil refineries yesterday, aiming to cause shortages at petrol stations after a month-long public transport strike failed to force the government to withdraw its pension reform plans. Workers at Exxon Mobil France's Port Jerome and Fos refineries began a four-day strike, the hardline CGT union said. An Exxon spokeswoman confirmed that the 140,000 barrels-per-day Fos-sur-Mer plant, which accounts for about 10% of French refinery output, was blocked but added that the 240,000 bpd Port Jerome refinery was operating normally. French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said the country was not at risk of fuel shortages and that police will ensure that oil depots are not blockaded.

"People have the right to strike, but they do not have the right to block (refineries)," he said on RTL radio, referring to action by workers to obstruct factory gates. Philippe said he was open to discussing changes to the average retirement age with unions, one of the main sticking points over pension reform plans that have triggered protests. The environment ministry said all French refineries continued to operate, but five out of seven were temporarily having difficulty distributing their products. It said it expected no problems with petrol stations, whose supplies are guaranteed by a separate network of about 200 depots.

Yesterday, only three of these depots reported difficulties while others were operating normally, the ministry said, adding that France has stocks corresponding to more than three months of fuel consumption. On Monday, a CGT union official told Reuters that all but one French refineries will be on strike for 96 hours from yesterday to tomorrow and they will close completely. Total said yesterday that the strikes were having little impact on its operations and that only 26 of its 3,500 petrol stations had run out of fuel. It said only about 5 percent of its refinery staff were on strike and that its five refineries were storing their production while shipments are blocked. "There is no risk of shortages at our petrol stations," Total said. Unions have vowed to halt the reforms, which are a central part of President Emmanuel Macron's agenda. Nationwide strikes and demonstrations have shut schools and closed transport services, while demonstrations have led to clashes with the police. Unions are planning a fourth day of nationwide demonstrations today. —Reuters

Business

Toyota's 'woven' city, Samsung robot-ball in focus at tech show

Annual Consumer Electronics Show opens in Las Vegas

LAS VEGAS: A smart city from Toyota, a rolling robot from Samsung and a new 5G smartphone from China's TCL were among the announcements Monday at the Consumer Electronics Show preview day.

Here are a few highlights from the events at CES that opened yesterday in Las Vegas.

Toyota's 'Woven City'

The Japanese auto giant said it would create a "woven city" on 70 hectares (175 acres) at the base of Mount Fuji in Japan, powered by hydrogen fuel cells, to test autonomous driving and other technologies. "Building a complete city from the ground up, even on a small scale like this, is a unique opportunity to develop future technologies, including a digital operating system for the city's infrastructure," said company president Akio Toyoda.

He was joined by Danish architect Bjarke Ingels of the Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), which will collaborate on the project. The city will be designed for around 2,000 people, including Toyota employees and visiting researchers, with sustainable construction materials, in-home robotics to assist with daily living and sensor-based AI to check occupants' health.

Ingels told the news conference the city would have different types of thoroughfare for autonomous vehicles, pedestrians and "micro mobility" vehicles such as scooters and bikes.

The smart homes "will take advantage of full productivity, using sense of the AI to do things automatically like restocking your fridge or taking out the trash, or even taking care of how healthy you are," Ingels said.

LG goes shopping

LG said its smart televisions were being enhanced to give viewers real-time answers to questions about what is happening on screens—from sports to news to films, and even help them find and buy what a particular

actor may be wearing. Technology created by startup TheTake aims to provide a comprehensive "shoppable video experience" through new partnerships with smart TV leader LG Electronics and media companies including WarnerMedia, A+E Networks, Crown Media Family Networks, and NBC Universal.

Beginning this year, owners of LG's new webOS Smart TVs will be able to shop on-screen for things they spy on participating networks' shows, according to TheTake. "Shoppable video has been talked about since the days of Rachel's sweater on 'Friends,'" said TheTake co-founder and chief executive Tyler Cooper.

5G under \$500

Chinese consumer electronics giant TCL offered a glimpse at three new smartphones, one tailored for super-fast 5G networks, and promised all would come in at less than \$500 at launch later this year.

TCL revealed it is working on a phone with a screen that folds like a book, and a visor headset that gives an experience like looking at a 110-inch television screen. Both of those were prototypes in development.

Samsung's rolling robot

Samsung scored points with its rolling robot ball, named Ballie, which tracks its owner around the home. The ankle-high robot was designed as a "life companion" and fits into the company's vision of "human centered" artificial intelligence.

Sebastian Seung, chief research scientist at Samsung Electronics, described the tiny robot as a fitness assistant and a mobile interface to help people in various situations. "It's a remote control that helps seniors control all the smart devices in the home, and calls for help if they need it," he told a CES keynote.

The South Korean consumer electronics giant also showed a "Sero" television that can pivot from portrait to landscape modes the way smartphones or tablets do



LAS VEGAS: Samsung Research Chief Scientist, Executive Vice President Sebastian Seung speaks during the Samsung press event for CES 2020 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center yesterday in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

in an appeal to generations raised with mobile internet viewing habits. The Sero, which means "vertical" in Korean, debuted in South Korea last year but will be available in other countries in 2020.

TV watching back

Chinese TV colossus Skyworth is taking its line-up to the US and Europe, with 8K resolution models that

boast artificial intelligence along with cameras that watch the watcher. "We believe adding cameras to TVs will become a new worldwide trend," Skyworth chief executive Tony Wang said while unveiling its latest line-up of displays. Artificial intelligence built into the cameras in TVs can handle video calls, take pictures, and even track body motion for fitness or game applications. —AFP

Argentina food prices soar after VAT is returned to basic basket

CARACAS: The measure that exempted the payment of 21 percent for basic foods expired on December 31. This week there are already increases above what was agreed by the government last week, with the change of the year, the measure that exempted the payment of 21 percent of the Value Added Tax (VAT) for food in the basic basket ceased to be in force in Argentina.

Since then some of these products have already registered increases of up to 16 percent, and even above what had been agreed with the government.

According to the prices that companies publish on their e-commerce platforms, it was found that most of the price variations were around 7 percent, in line with what the companies had agreed with the government. But in some cases those percentages were exceeded, reaching increases of 16 percent, as in the case of some oils. In the case of some flours and rice the increases are around 14.5 percent.

Due to the drag of the previous year and the impact of these increases on food prices in the basic basket, January inflation is hardly below December levels, which was estimated at 4.2 percent. This percentage would be maintained despite the measures taken by the government such as the freezing of transport tariffs and the postponement of fuel increases. In December, according to the consultant Elypsis, food and beverages increased 3.9 percent and 58 percent in the year.

The food and beverage item is the one with the greatest weight in the general inflation indicator (with approximately 30 percent) and January is usually a month of high seasonal inflation, so from the Econviews consultant they anticipate that January's monthly inflation will have a 3.5 percent floor, despite the freezing of several regulated prices. —Reuters

Hyundai to make flying cars for Uber air taxis

LAS VEGAS: Hyundai announced Monday it would mass produce flying cars for Uber's aerial rideshare network set to deploy in 2023. The South Korean manufacturer said it would produce the four-passenger electric "vertical take-off and landing vehicles" at "automotive scale," without offering details. The deal announced at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas could help Uber, which is working with other aircraft manufacturers, to achieve its goal of deploying air taxi service in a handful of cities by 2023.

Jaiwon Shin, head of Hyundai's urban air mobility division, said he expects the large-scale manufacturing to keep costs

affordable for the aerial systems.

"We know how to mass produce high quality vehicles," Shin told a news conference at CES. He said he expected the partnership to allow for the short-range air taxis to be "affordable for everyone." Eric Allison, head of Uber Elevate, appeared at the CES event with Hyundai to discuss the partnership.

"By taking transportation out of the two dimensional grid on the ground and moving it into the sky, we can offer significant time savings to our riders," Allison said. He said that because of its other app-based transport options, "only Uber can seamlessly connect riders from cars, trains and even bikes to aircraft." Uber has announced it had selected Melbourne to join Dallas and Los Angeles in becoming the first cities to offer Uber Air flights, with the goal of beginning demonstrator flights in 2020 and commercial operations in 2023.

Hyundai is using CES to show the S-A1 model aircraft with a cruising speed up to 180 miles (290 km) per hour. The aircraft utilizes "distributed electric



LAS VEGAS: A model of the S-A1 urban air taxi concept is displayed during a Hyundai press event for CES 2020 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center on Monday in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

propulsion," designed with multiple rotors that can keep it in the air if one of them fails. The smaller rotors also help reduce noise, which the companies said

is important to cities. The Hyundai vehicle will be piloted initially but over time will become autonomous, the company said. —AFP

Musk hands over made-in-China Teslas to early buyers in Shanghai

SHANGHAI: Tesla CEO Elon Musk presented the first batch of made-in-China cars to ordinary buyers yesterday in a milestone for the company's new Shanghai "giga-factory", but which comes as sales decelerate in the world's largest electric-vehicle market. The eccentric entrepreneur danced awkwardly, gave out high-fives, and mugged on a stage as sleek Model 3 sedans—the company's mid-price, mass-market offer—

were driven up one by one and presented to buyers who jumped into the back seats before being driven away at the plant.

The factory is the company's first outside the United States and a key step forward in Musk's strategy of going global. Musk said it was just the start of what will be a growing investment in China by the California-based electric-vehicle pioneer.

"We intend to continue making a significant investment and increasing that investment in China, making the Model 3 and the Model Y, and future models also in China," he said.

Musk, 48, said Tesla also planned to establish "a China design and engineering center to actually design an original car in China for worldwide consumption." Tesla has said the multi-billion-dollar plant is producing more than 1,000 vehicles per week. It has already delivered a small batch of Model 3s on December 30 to

employees who had pre-ordered them.

Those being driven away at yesterday's event were the first for regular consumers. The giga-factory is unusual for China, which typically requires foreign automakers to forge manufacturing joint ventures with domestic firms, which means sharing profits and technology with local partners.

Sales slowdown

But amid sustained US pressure on China to open its markets, that requirement was waived for the Shanghai assembly line, which is wholly-owned by Tesla and believed to be the first to enjoy that status. Musk has said that the plant would eventually have an annual production capacity of 500,000 vehicles, and has billed it as the solution to the company's perennial struggles with production delays and failure to keep up with demand. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.801
Indian Rupees	4.240
Pakistani Rupees	1.970
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.671
Nepali Rupees	2.643
Singapore Dollar	226.380
Hongkong Dollar	39.090
Bangladesh Taka	3.550
Philippine Peso	5.991
Thai Baht	10.139
Malaysian Ringgit	77.698

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.067
Qatari Riyal	83.496
UAE Dirham	789.604
Bahraini Dinar	807.230
UAE Dirham	82.768

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	22.000
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	18.959
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.220
Tunisian Dinar	114.640
Jordanian Dinar	428.760
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.203
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.182

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	303.800
Euro	342.230
Sterling Pound	401.780
Canadian dollar	235.320
Turkish Lira	52.020
Swiss Franc	315.470
US Dollar Buying	296.450

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	303.550
Canadian Dollar	234.610
Sterling Pound	398.670
Euro	340.480
Swiss Franc	297.440
Bahrain Dinar	807.250
UAE Dirhams	83.050
Qatari Riyals	84.285
Saudi Riyals	81.840
Jordanian Dinar	429.420
Egyptian Pound	18.955
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.674
Indian Rupees	4.213
Pakistani Rupees	1.957
Bangladesh Taka	3.546
Philippines Peso	5.929
Cyprus pound	18.060
Japanese Yen	3.810
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.655
Malaysian Ringgit	74.760

Chinese Yuan Renminbi	43.995
Thai Bhat	11.055
Turkish Lira	51.280
Singapore dollars	224.556

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.392713	0.406613
Czech Korune	0.005434	0.014734
Danish Krone	0.041391	0.046391
Euro	0.332260	0.345960
Georgian Lari	0.105426	0.105426
Hungarian	0.000938	0.001128
Norwegian Krone	0.030486	0.035686
Romanian Leu	0.054176	0.071026
Russian Ruble	0.004903	0.004903
Slovakia	0.009071	0.019071
Swedish Krona	0.028233	0.032323
Swiss Franc	0.306748	0.317748
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.202048	0.210448
New Zealand Dollar	0.196183	0.205683
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.228774	0.237774
US Dollars	0.299700	0.304250
US Dollars Mint	0.300300	0.304250
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002924	0.003725

Chinese Yuan	0.042237	0.045737
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036999	0.039749
Indian Rupee	0.003575	0.004347
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002714	0.002894
Korean Won	0.000250	0.000265
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070289	0.076289
Nepalese Rupee	0.002619	0.002959
Pakistan Rupee	0.001313	0.002083
Philippine Peso	0.005839	0.006139
Singapore Dollar	0.219793	0.229793
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001315	0.001895
Taiwan	0.009987	0.010167
Thai Baht	0.009739	0.010289
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.000013

Arab

Bahraini Dinar	0.799694	0.807734
Egyptian Pound	0.018899	0.021640
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000199	0.000259
Jordanian Dinar	0.423583	0.432583
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000100	0.000250
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021126	0.045126
Omani Riyal	0.783968	0.791850
Qatar Riyal	0.082791	0.083623
Saudi Riyal	0.079927	0.081227
Syrian Pound	0.001288	0.001508
Tunisian Dinar	0.104819	0.112819
Turkish Lira	0.044548	0.054393
UAE Dirhams	0.082081	0.082907
Yemeni Riyal	0.000987	0.001067

Business

NBK Capital: Boursa Kuwait holds first position in the world in 2019

On the list of top markets, thanks to FTSE upgrade and MSCI announcement

KUWAIT: Although most GCC markets managed to close the year in the green, they have significantly underperformed compared to their developed and emerging markets peers. The only exception was in Kuwait and Bahrain with Kuwait being by far the best performer in the GCC. Status upgrade to emerging market by FTSE and the announcement of an MSCI upgrade in May 2020 provided a significant boost for Kuwait equities. The All Share Index closed the year with a gain of 23.7 percent while the blue-chip Premier Market Index recorded a 32.3 percent gain which puts it high on the list of the 2019 top performers globally. Bahrain was the second-best performer in the GCC with 20.4 percent during the year after posting a gain of 5.45 percent in December.

The Tadawul All Share Index managed to boost its yearly performance to 7.2 percent from a flat line as at the end of November after posting a gain of 6.75 percent in December placing it at the top of the best GCC performers list for December. The performance of Saudi and Kuwait boosted the S&P GCC Composite which recorded 5.6 percent in December, ending the year up 7.6 percent. In the UAE, Dubai outperformed with a monthly gain 3.2 percent against 0.89 percent for Abu Dhabi resulting in yearly gains of 9.3 percent and 3.3 percent for the UAE markets respectively.

December was the best month for emerging markets since January. The MSCI EM and the MSCI Asia ex-Japan added 7.17 percent and 6.42 percent during the month respectively bringing the full 2019 performance of both indices to 15.4 percent. Emerging markets benefited from the de-escalation of the US-China trade tensions, and the positive economic growth outlook in developing countries, and in China in particular.

In Asia, the Shanghai Composite and the Taiwan Stock Exchange added 6.20 percent and 4.42 percent in December, closing the year at 22.30 percent and 23.33 percent respectively. Elsewhere in the EM space, Brazil's Ibovespa Index was among the best performers for the year with a gain of 31.58 percent. It was followed by Russia Stock Exchange Index and Turkey's Borsa Istanbul 100 Index with gains of 28.55 percent and 25.37 percent

respectively. Despite heightened volatility driven mainly by trade tensions between the US and China, concerns of a slowdown of major economies, and the Brexit saga in the UK, the year 2019 turned out to be one of the best years for global markets since the financial crisis a decade ago. Trade tensions were diffused by a "phase one" deal between the US and China which the US President said he will sign on January 15 at the White House, then immediately start negotiations on phase two.

The MSCI AC World Index advanced by around 3.39 percent in December closing the year at 24.0 percent. This is its strongest performance since the financial crisis in 2009 and was mainly driven by US tech giants, and to a lesser extent by a recovery in the eurozone and Asian markets. The MSCI EAFE index, which represents the performance of developed markets outside of the US and Canada, underperformed adding 18.44 percent during the year after a 3.16 percent performance in December.

In the US, the latest reading of the third quarter GDP growth was confirmed at 2.1 percent compared to a Q2 growth of 2.0 percent, while Core Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) remained stable at 2.1 percent over the same period. Unemployment edged marginally lower in November to 3.5 percent from 3.6 percent a month earlier with the US labor participation rate at 63.2 percent virtually unchanged from the 63.1 percent at the beginning of the year. Despite the good economic numbers coming out of the US, the economic outlook is still uncertain with a persistently marked weakness in manufacturing activity.

The ISM manufacturing PMI unexpectedly declined to 47.2 in December down from a previous reading of 48.1 in November and expectations of a partial recovery to 49.0. In terms of market performance, major US indices led their global peers in terms of performance and closed the year at all-time highs. The S&P 500 ended the year up 28.88 percent after adding 2.86 percent in December, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) was up 22.34 percent. The tech heavy Nasdaq, on the other hand, added 3.54 percent during the last month of the year closing 2019 up 35.23 percent. Treasury yields continued their normal-



ization and recovery which started at the beginning of September. The 10-year closed the year at 1.92 percent up from a 1.43 percent at the start of September, while the shorter term 2-year yield was range-bound and closed at 1.57 percent.

In Europe, while the Gross Domestic Product stabilized at 1.2 percent for the third quarter, there was an uptick in inflation during November as the core Consumer Price Index (CPI) edged higher to 1.3 percent from a previous reading of 1.1 percent. Manufacturing activity remained slow as the Markit Manufacturing PMI declined to 46.3 from a revised 46.9 for November. Germany's manufacturing sector weakened further as shown by the German Markit's Manufacturing PMI which declined to 43.7 from 44.1 the previous month. The equity markets, however, seem to have shrugged the economic weakness and pressed on during December to record double-digit gains. The Stoxx Europe 600 added

2.06 percent during the month to close the year with a gain of 23.16 percent, while the German DAX and the French CAC40 added 0.10 percent and 1.23 percent for the month and closed the year with gains of 25.48 percent and 26.37 percent respectively.

The sweeping victory of the UK's conservative party and Prime minister Boris Johnson seemed to have added to the market confidence that the Brexit saga is on its way to closure. The FTSE 100 surged 2.67 percent during December and managed to close the year with a gain of 12.10 percent. On the economic front, however, numbers remain weak. The Markit Manufacturing PMI for December contracted at the fastest pace since July 2012 according to IHS Markit. It fell to 47.5 marking the eighth straight month below the 50.0 level. Inflation stabilized in November as both the headline and core CPI measures were unchanged at 1.5 percent and 1.7 percent respectively.

UK retailers suffer worst Xmas since 2014

LONDON: Morrisons was the big loser as Britain's major food retailers endured their worst Christmas since 2014, hurt by intense competition and sustained consumer uncertainty which deterred shoppers from splashing out. Industry data from market researchers Nielsen and Kantar showed all of Britain's big four supermarket groups - market leader Tesco, Sainsbury's, Walmart owned Asda and Morrisons - suffered sales declines in the 12 weeks to the end of December and continued to lose market share to German-owned discounters Aldi and Lidl.

Both data sets showed Morrisons was the industry laggard and the firm's own trading statement confirmed a weak performance. Nielsen said British supermarkets' total sales over the four weeks to Dec. 28 period rose just 0.5 percent from last year - the lowest sales growth over the Christmas period in five years. It said while shoppers visited supermarkets more often, they purchased fewer items and spent less each time.

"There was no sign of the post-election rush many had hoped for in the final weeks before Christmas, with shoppers carefully watching their budgets," said Fraser McKeivitt, head of retail and consumer insight at Kantar. He said consumers cut back on traditional and indulgent festive classics, with sales of Christmas puddings down 16 percent, sparking wine sales down 8 percent and turkey sales down 1 percent.

Morrisons' own update showed its underlying sales, excluding fuel and sales tax, fell 1.7 percent in the 22 weeks to Jan. 5 - a period that included the group's third quarter and the nine-week Christmas trading period. "Throughout (the period), trading conditions remained challenging and the customer uncertainty of the last year persisted," Chief Executive David Potts told reporters.

"The market was also highly pro-

motional (and) collectively more competitive, especially in areas such as beers, wines and spirits, fuel and in-store coupons," he said. UK pay growth has slowed since the middle of 2019 - a year characterized by political uncertainty in the run-up to several Brexit deadlines and the Dec. 12 national election. Potts said there would be uncertainty in the grocery market until the terms of Britain's exit from the European Union become clearer.

Better than feared

Morrisons' performance was, however, better than feared, with analysts forecasting a decline of 2.2 percent from the year earlier period. The firm said it still expected 2019-20 pretax profit within the range of analysts' forecasts of 400-431 million pounds (\$527-\$568 million), up from 396 million pounds in 2018-19, thanks to the tight management of costs. Shares in Morrisons were up 2.2 percent at 1112 GMT, reversing Monday's losses and paring losses over the last year to 10 percent.

The run up to Christmas marks the most important, and competitive, time of the year for British supermarkets. In recent years all four major groups have had to fight off the challenge from Aldi and Lidl, which are continuing to open new stores at a rapid pace. The discounters are also selling more premium products, making them more competitive over Christmas.

Kantar noted that Aldi and Lidl's combined market share of 13.7 percent is more than treble what they held in December 2009. On Monday Aldi UK reported a 7.9 percent increase in total sales for the four weeks to Dec. 24 and said its like-for-like sales were positive.

The Nielsen and Kantar data showed Sainsbury's as the least worst performer, followed by Tesco and Asda. Online seller Ocado maintained its position as Britain's fastest growing grocer with sales growth of 12.5 percent, Kantar said. Shares in Sainsbury's were up 1.6 percent, while Tesco was up 0.6 percent. Sainsbury's, which is trying to rebuild confidence in its strategy following a botched attempt to take over Asda, updates on trading today, followed by Tesco and Marks & Spencer tomorrow.—AFP

India asks refiners to stop buying Malaysian palm oil

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI: India has informally asked palm oil refiners and traders to avoid buying Malaysian palm oil, government and industry sources said yesterday, following Malaysian criticism of India's actions in the Kashmir region and its new citizenship law. India is the world's biggest buyer of the oil and palm oil inventories could spike in Malaysia, putting prices under pressure if Indian refiners reduce purchases from the country. Malaysian prices are the global benchmark for palm oil prices.

A senior official in India's vegetable oil industry, who did not wish to be named, said the government had asked refiners at a meeting attended by two dozen vegetable oil industry officials in New Delhi on Monday to boycott Malaysia.

"In Monday's meeting we have been verbally told to avoid buying Malaysian palm oil," the official said.

"We've had various rounds of meetings within the government and industry to see how we could reduce imports from Malaysia," one Indian government official said, adding India has yet to firm up a plan of action and is exploring various options. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has angered India over his comments on India's actions in Kashmir and over a new Indian citizenship law, which critics say chips away at India's secular foundations and could be used by to discriminate against Muslims.

In October, Indian traders stopped signing new contracts with Malaysia for a brief period fearing India will raise import tax on Malaysian palm oil after Mahathir told the UN General Assembly that India had "invaded and occupied" Kashmir, a disputed Muslim-majority region also claimed by Pakistan.

Last month, Mahathir, prime minister of a predominantly Muslim nation, also waded into the debate about India's new citizenship law, which has led to violent protests in India and at least 25 deaths in clashes with police. "People are dying because of this law. So why is there a necessity to do this thing when all this while, for 70 years almost, they have lived together as citizens without any problem?" Mahathir said last month.

The Indian government has made it clear it wants to punish Malaysia for these remarks and traders should support it, said another industry official. "The government has been struggling to find ways to restrict imports from Malaysia due to World Trade Organization rules. For the time being it asked for industry co-operation," he said.

India's trade ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Malaysia's Primary Industries Minister Teresa Kok, responsible for the palm oil industry, told Reuters on the sidelines of an industry event that the government has not received any official statement or notice from India about cutting imports from Malaysia.

"There are some discussions going on but until they officially announce, we don't know whether it's true," said Kalyana Sundram, CEO of Malaysian Palm Oil Council, a state agency responsible for promoting palm oil. Palm oil accounts for nearly two-thirds of India's total edible oil imports. India buys more than 9 million tons of palm oil annually, mainly from Indonesia and Malaysia.

Indian refiners and traders have already contracted Malaysian palm oil for shipments in January and small amounts for February, said a Mumbai-based dealer with a global trading firm.

"The impact of Monday's meet would be clearly visible from March onward - Indonesia's exports will rise," the dealer said. Indonesia is the world's biggest producer of palm oil, followed by Malaysia. Palm oil is crucial for the Malaysian economy as it accounts for 2.8 percent of Malaysia's gross domestic product and 4.5 percent of total exports.— Reuters



KUALA LUMPUR: Palm oil is crucial for the Malaysian economy as it accounts for 2.8 percent of Malaysia's gross domestic product and 4.5 percent of total exports.

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Business

Lexus unveils first EV, the UX 300e

First product under the banner of Lexus electrification strategy



KUWAIT: Lexus introduced its first battery electric vehicle (BEV), the UX 300e, at the Guangzhou International Automobile Exhibition, held in Guangzhou recently.

Since introducing the RX 400h in 2005, LEXUS has been a pioneer in vehicle electrification technology, playing a leading role in offering products that possess both performance and environmental friendliness. At the 2019 Tokyo Motor Show, Lexus unveiled its global electrification strategy, called "Lexus Electrified", which targets a fundamental leap in vehicle performance, handling, control and driver enjoyment.

In particular, the technology of Lexus Electrified enables integrated control of powertrain, steering, suspension, and brakes, realizing the ultimate potential of the motor control technology cultivated in HV. With this technology, we can control the driving force to provide ideal vehicle posture according to each driving situa-

tion. Lexus endeavors to continue providing enjoyable and safer driving vehicles.

As the first production model under the Lexus Electrified banner, the all-electric UX 300e was developed for excellent on-road performance. Lexus engineers kept the distinctive design and the utility characteristics of the UX crossover intact and focused on the opportunities to build on the performance advantages unique to EVs. The UX 300e's high-output motor provides a natural-yet-brisk acceleration character, and the high-capacity batteries located directly underneath the floor of the cabin deliver a low center of gravity and 400 km-driving range. Combined with the newest connectivity technology, the UX 300e maximizes the advantages of EVs while realizing driving performance and convenience in a single package.

Lexus has always focused on providing exhilarating performance, and the case is no different with development of a BEV.

UX 300e Motor specifications

Placement	Model	Max output (kW [ps])	Max torque (Nm [Kgf·m])
Front	4KM	150 [204]	300 [30.6]

UX 300e Battery specifications

Type	Capacity	Range	Charging speed	
			Standard (AC) charge	Quick (DC) charge
Lithium Ion	54.3 kWh	400 km*	Max 6.6 kW	Max 50 kW

Starting from the refined Lexus driving signature of the UX, Lexus engineers were able to leverage the new electric drivetrain to even further enhance the vehicle's on-road performance. At the same time, UX 300e has one of the quietest cabins in its class, as befits the sound

management heritage of the Lexus DNA.

Legendary Lexus reliability inherited from hybrid heritage

In developing the UX 300e, Lexus utilized the knowledge acquired developing the brand's industry-leading hybrid sys-



tems and applied the same level of quality and comfortable operation to its first production EV as it always has with other vehicles. The Lexus engineering team delivered outstanding battery reliability and adopt the latest connectivity technology to maximize everyday usability and the functionality with smartphones.

The UX 300e is scheduled to go on sale in the Chinese and European markets in 2020, and in Japan early in 2021.

France, US set 2-week target for resolving digital tax spat

PARIS: France and the United States have given themselves two weeks to try to resolve a row over a French digital tax, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said yesterday, emphasizing that Paris has the European Union's backing on the issue.

Washington has threatened to impose duties of up to 100 percent on imports of champagne, handbags and other French products worth \$2.4 billion after a US government investigation found the French tax would harm American technology companies.

"I had a long talk with US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. We have decided to step up efforts to try and find a compromise, within the OECD, on digital tax," Le Maire told reporters after a meeting in Paris with EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan. "We gave each other precisely 15 days, until our next meeting, which is planned on the sidelines of Davos at the end of January," the minister said, referring to the World Economic Forum that is held in the Swiss ski resort.

France decided in July to apply a 3 percent levy on revenue from digital services earned in France by firms with revenues of more than 25 million euros (\$28 million) in France and 750 million euros worldwide. "This is a more general issue between the United States and Europe," Le Maire said, stressing other EU nations were planning their own national digital taxes. He said any international agreement on digital taxation would immediately supersede the French tax.

"Do we want a deal on the digital tax within the OECD or are we bracing ourselves for a confrontational mode which won't be a conflict between France and the United States but a trade conflict between the European Union, a lot of European states, and the United States?"

Le Maire said he hoped there would be no US sanctions during the two-week window convened with Mnuchin, adding that any decision by Washington to take action would in effect bring an end to the discussions. On his first official visit to Paris as new EU Trade Commissioner, Phil Hogan said the European Commission "will stand by France" in its digital tax dispute with Washington.

He also said he had discussed trade with China and reform of the World Trade Organization (WTO) with Le Maire, and that he plans to meet his US counterpart in Washington to try to find common ground on these topics. "We want to see a reform of the WTO and we share the US analysis on this," Hogan said. Last month, Washington reaffirmed its commitment to the WTO but called for longstanding concerns with the trade body's appellate court to be addressed.

"A WTO reform is one of France's top priorities. Because it's better to solve trade issues within a multilateral body than in a bilateral way," Le Maire said. "France is ready to support all efforts allowing a jump-start of WTO reform negotiations and the solving of the problems affecting its dispute settlement body." —Reuters

US economic slowdown hits energy consumption

LONDON: US manufacturers and freight hauliers were hit last year by the sharpest slowdown since the 2008/09 recession and it filtered through into a noticeable dip in energy consumption. Use of electricity, natural gas and diesel by industrial customers all showed large declines, or at least sharp slowdowns, in the nine months ending in September 2019. In July to September, industrial users' total energy consumption fell 1 percent compared with the same period a year earlier, according to statistics from the US Energy Information Administration.

That was the biggest decline since the mid-cycle manufacturing slowdown in 2015/16 and before that the recession of 2008/09. Within the total, industrial consumers' electricity consumption fell by almost 5 percent in the third quarter from a year earlier, easily the biggest decline since the recession.

Power consumption exhibits a lot of short-term variability based on both the weather (which affects heating and cooling demand) and the state of the economy, so the data must be interpreted with care.

But industrial users' consumption showed a much more pronounced third-quarter slowdown than for residential customers, which suggests

most of the weakness was economic rather than weather-related. In contrast to electricity, industrial users' gas consumption continued to grow, mostly because of the strong increase in demand from petrochemical producers.

Even so, gas consumption rose by just 0.75 percent in July-September compared with a year earlier, down from a growth rate of 7 percent year on year in early 2018.

Diesel slump

The manufacturing and freight slowdown has also hit petroleum demand, especially consumption of the middle distillate fuel oils such as diesel used by manufacturers, railroads and trucking firms. Economy-wide distillate consumption was down almost 3.4 percent in August-October compared with a year earlier.

Like electricity use, distillate consumption closely tracks industrial output and manufacturing surveys, so the slump in fuel use confirms the severe hit to manufacturing activity in the middle of last year.

Slackening distillate demand has been reflected in a slowdown in refining activity and reduced profitability for many refining firms, including some of the oil majors. US oil refineries processed 17.0 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil and other inputs during 2019, down 300,000 bpd (1.8 percent) compared with the previous year. US refinery processing was below year-ago levels for 41 out of 52 weeks in 2019, a sign of tepid consumption.

The manufacturing and freight recession was even worse across Europe and Asia, as rising tariffs and

The situation in Eden is playing out in other towns across Australia where huge bushfires have burnt through more than 10.3 million hectares (25.5 million acres) of land, killed 25 people and left thousands homeless. Weeks into the crisis, the economic costs are mounting, potentially wrecking the central bank's hopes for a "gentle turning point" of renewed growth in gross domestic product this quarter.

"The fires have come at a time when there was already a lot of uncertainty about Australia's economic outlook," AMP's Sydney-based head of investment strategy Shane Oliver said in a telephone interview.

Oliver estimated a minimum 0.4 percent hit on gross domestic product (GDP) in the March quarter, which could mean growth stalled completely in the period and prompt a further interest rate cut as early as February. "The impact on tourism is expected to be more lasting while the impact on consumer spending is the biggest unknown," Oliver said.

Australia's A\$1.95 trillion economy is already limping after 28 years of recession-free expansion as cash-strapped consumers shun everything from clothes to cars while a three-year drought has hurt the farm sector.



intensifying business uncertainty have taken their toll on investment and activity. The result has been a worldwide slump in distillate consumption that has hit refining throughput, margins and profits for refiners across North America, Europe and Asia.

Royal Dutch Shell and Exxon Mobil have both warned investors in recent weeks that fourth-quarter profits will be lower than previously forecast, citing lower demand for refined fuels and petrochemicals.

2020 Outlook

Most traders are anticipating a cyclical acceleration in oil and energy consumption this year as the manufacturing and freight sectors put last year's slowdown behind them. The United States and China have announced a Phase 1 trade deal that should reduce some tariffs and avoid the imposition of others, as well as

create a more stable business environment. The US Federal Reserve and other major central banks have also cut interest rates over the last 6-9 months and provided other forms of credit stimulus to extend the business cycle expansion.

And fiscal policy is likely to become more expansionary, as the United States enters a presidential election year and European governments try to boost disappointing growth. Encouraging optimism, industrial production data from the start of the fourth quarter appeared to indicate the cyclical downturn was bottoming out, creating conditions for an upturn at the start of 2020.

More recently, manufacturing surveys have shown lingering weakness in the United States and China, which could push back an acceleration in energy consumption to later in the year. —Reuters

Eden far from a paradise as bushfires hit economy

EDEN, Australia/SYDNEY: The peak summer holiday period should bring boatloads of cruise-ship passengers and other holiday makers to the Australian coastal town of Eden, with visitors thronging stores like Lynn Baxter's newsagent. This year, Eden is anything but a paradise for Baxter and other business owners on the town's smoke-filled main street. Just days after the entire town, including tourists, was evacuated in the face of fierce wildfires, most shops remained shuttered. Dead birds and burnt leaves littered the beachfront.

"It's a seasonal town," Baxter told Reuters from behind the counter of her shop, adding that income was down 85-90 percent. "This money, through this time of year, gets us through winter and we don't have it now. Don't know what we're going to do."

The downturn prompted three rate cuts by the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) last year to an all-time low of 0.75 percent. Financial futures now imply a 50-50 chance of a fourth easing next month. In signs of the early impact of the fires, data released yesterday showed a gauge of Australian consumer confidence slumped last week to its lowest level in more than four years.

Job advertisements suffered their largest monthly drop in seven months in December, a fall that ANZ senior economist Catherine Birch linked to the bushfire crisis.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said he expected the full economic impact of the fires to be "very significant". "All those businesses in those communities who have been impacted, been hit at exactly the wrong time of the year, when they're the busiest time," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Smoke on the waterfront

In Eden, the reopening of the town following the weekend evacuation and the fact that it escaped any major fire damage has made little difference to businesses. At least two cruise ships have bypassed the port in the past week

as smoke blankets the waterfront. Eric Wolske moved to the town with his partner two years ago, buying an antiques shop as an investment.

"Well compared to last year this time, business obviously is down," Wolske told Reuters, adding he was banking on a cruise ship due to berth later this month.

Tourism accounts for more than 3 percent of Australia's annual GDP and many hotels and resorts have suffered extensive damage, while many national parks are closed. In the cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra the smoke has dented the country's clean and green image and led to the cancellation of some entertainment events.

Agricultural businesses have also been affected, with the sizeable dairy industry struggling to secure milk supplies. Insurers have received 8,985 bushfire-related claims in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland since Nov. 8. The claims are estimated to have a loss value of A\$700 million.

Still, Oliver said there was light at the end of the tunnel. "We can see a revival from June quarter as rebuilding activity kicks in helped by insurance payouts and welfare payments," said Oliver, who still expects two RBA rate cuts this year. —Reuters

What's On

Kuwaitis to participate in World Cup Pastry competitions

Horeca 2020 organizing committee announced the program of the cooking competition that will be held during the Horeca Kuwait 2020 due to be held at Mishref International Fair Grounds in the period of January 20-22, 2020 and organized by Leaders Group in collaboration with Hospitality Services Company.

In this regard, Horeca Kuwait executive manager, Mohammed Anees Najia said that this year's cooking competition jury panel would include the French Academy representative in the Middle East and the GCC states, chef Charles Azar, chairman of the Jordanian Chefs society, Shadi Abo Khadija, senior chef of the American Angus Company, Peter Rosenberg, the head of the French Cooking Academy, Chef Mark Mubash, member of the world's pastry competition organizing committee the French chef, Nasser Mandi, chairman of KSA's chefs society, Yasser Jad, the head of the World Association of Chef Societies (WACS), chef, Thomas Gugler, Anil Grover; chef



Mohammed Najia

accredited by the World Chefs and the Indian Chefs Society, the owner of Al-Makan Restaurant, chef, Faisal Al-Nashmi, the head of the world culinary competition, chef Samaan Hilal, the founder of the world bakers competition-France, chef Francois Pozzoli and the Academic Director of Le Cordon Bleu London, chef Loic Malfait.

Najia added that thanks to the experience accumulated over the previous nine cycles of Horeca Kuwait, the cooking competitions had been achieving annual success and attracting world class A chefs from various cuisines.

"This year's competitions will include 25 categories and participants from Kuwait, both Kuwaiti and expat chefs, will take place in the world Pastry Cup National Selection", Najia concluded.



Judges, Faisal Al-Nashmi and others

NBK, LOYAC arrange cultural trip to Cambodia

National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) and LOYAC concluded their cultural trip to Cambodia. The trip goes with NBK's support to LOYAC's annual activities and events including the trips.

A group of volunteers from different backgrounds ages between 14 and 18 participated in this trip which was designed to build the leadership skills in their personality. This eight days trip included a group of social initiatives, interacting with different cultures, volunteering and donating.

During this trip, participants were introduced to the Cambodians' different cultures and learn their daily life routine.

This support reflects NBK's commitment to its Corporate Social Responsibility as well as the vital role it plays in supporting students, youths and self-building initiatives in Kuwait.

"Cambodia is truly an inspiring cross-cultural learning experience that added profound value to the young people involved", said Asmaa Bin Hussain, NBK Public Relations Officer. "This is the first-time we go with Loyacers to Cambodia. We were happy to join Loyacers in lots of inspiring cultural



Asmaa Bin Hussain

trips around Asia and Africa. In Cambodia, we visited Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham and Siem Reap. We hung out with the youth, contributed to the community and explored the treasures of its cities".

"NBK always strives to empower Kuwaiti youth to realize their potentials, build their personalities and motivates their ambition. This trip with LOYAC comes in line with

our strategy to invest in youth and develop their capabilities," Bin Hussain added.

Throughout the program, Loyacers and Cambodian youth were engaged in stimulating discussions about various aspects of each society to gain a deeper understanding of what makes our cultures unique and beautiful. In addition, the trip included historic tours and urban adventures exploring the bazaars, and landmark. LOYAC is a nonprofit organization that runs several programs for the youth to develop their professional skills, enhance their personal growth and help them find their sense of purpose by extending themselves to others.

Gastronomic journey around the world at Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa



Experience a journey of culinary delight around the world with sensational theme nights inspired by exquisite cultures at Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa.

Italian Night - Tempt your taste buds and explore authentic Italian dishes amidst the winter gardens every Monday from 19:00 to 23:30 at Garden Cafe. Savour homemade Italian specialties, a rich menu of handmade pasta, traditional Italian soups, stone-oven baked pizzas, live cooking stations and delightful desserts from the sumptuous dessert corner.

Winter Desert Camp Barbeque - Gourmet delights straight from the grill, with delicious barbecue nights every Wednesday from 19:00 to 23:00 at poolside Mint Cafe. Enjoy a selection of succulent dishes, hot off the grill and live stations featuring an exciting array of barbecued meats, including freshly cooked meats and seafood. Experienced chefs from the hotel will freshly prepare and serve delicious lamb chops, oriental kebabs, smoked brisket, tuna, salmon, prawn and vegetables sizzling, directly from the griddle. To make the night even better, indulge in delicious shisha

flavours while enjoying live band for entertainment under the starry sky.

Layali Messilah - Start the weekend by experiencing a feast for the senses with the best Mediterranean buffet with live cooking stations every Thursday from 19:00- 23:00 at Garden Cafe. Accompanied by tunes of live music, guests will be able to enjoy a delicious Arabic buffet with explosive flavours from Ouzis, Shish Taouk, Lamb Harees, Iranian Kebab, Chicken Maqloba, Mansaf to Moroccan Sweets, Mixed Baklava, Kunafa and more.

Family Friday Brunch: Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Resort offers a sumptuous international lunch buffet every Friday from 13:30 to 16:00 in Garden Cafe. The buffet has been curated to offer guests a host of alluring choices from every corner of the world, from the Japanese cuisine to the American and more. Guests can also enjoy outdoor sessions overlooking the hotel's lush gardens with live music. Children up to the age of 12 and under can also enjoy a complimentary buffet brunch, with exciting kids' activities to keep them entertained.

ICSK Amman basks in Christmas celebration



Christmas is the festival which inspires the spirit of sharing and caring. Soaking in the spirit of Christmas, ICSK Amman celebrated the festival with enthusiasm over the whole week prior to Christmas.

The school was beautifully decorated and everybody was dressed mostly in red and white (Santa's favourite colours) to bring the spirit of Christmas to life.

Radio Amman organized a special RJ session on Christmas as well. Old carols were played through the Jukebox and Santa welcomed the students to school by giving them chocolates.

Christmas season brings cheer and love and special assemblies were conducted by several classes with the same fervour, spreading the message of love and joy among the children. Carol singing competition was conducted between senior students as well as teachers which was enjoyed by one and all. Everyone got drowned in the happy festive vibes of the season and the Christmas celebrations at Amman was a big hit.



Birthday greetings

Many happy returns of the day to our dear Ibrahim Ismael Al-Rouwaini. May Allah protect you and bless you always. Wishes coming from your parents and loved ones.



'Atrocious' child cancer ward reveals ills of Russian healthcare

MOSCOW: Underfunding, corruption allegations, internal feuding, facilities in disrepair — flaws revealed at a Moscow pediatric cancer ward have shone a harsh spotlight on the afflictions plaguing Russia's public healthcare system. The Blokhin cancer center, housed in a brutalist 1970s-era compound in the south of the capital, is so notorious that some have taken to calling it "Blokhinwald" after the Nazi-era Buchenwald concentration camp.

"Children with cancer are being treated in atrocious conditions, with a lack of ventilation, mold on the walls and overcrowded rooms," Maxim Rykov, the hospital's former deputy director of pediatrics, told AFP. Along with 20 of his colleagues, Rykov quit the hospital, which describes itself as Russia's biggest oncological clinic, in September, accusing its new chief of mismanagement.

A health ministry investigation cleared the hospital, but the accusations were hardly a surprise to the parents of children treated there. "The air vents had to be blocked up because the ventilation ducts hadn't been cleaned for years," said Tamara Tsvetkova, whose five-year-old daughter Veronika spent a year at the center for leukemia treatment and is now in remission.

"In the rooms there were no lockers to put things, we had to buy them ourselves, as well as camp beds so that we could sleep next to our children," Tsvetkova said. An AFP request to visit the Blokhin clinic was refused. The oncologists who resigned accused the new management, which took over in June, of cutting their salaries by 35 percent, as well as changing treatment regimens to save money.

Lack of transplant funding

Following media reports, the health ministry opened an investigation that instead accused doctors of enriching

themselves through opaque schemes to fund bone marrow transplants. Contacted by AFP, hospital management refused to comment, saying the conflict was "closed."

The medics denied any corruption, saying they arranged for private foundations to pay for transplants because of a lack of public financing. "We do 50 or 60 transplants per year and the state pays for around 30. For the rest, either we abandon the patients or we look for a funding source," said surgeon Igor Dolgoplov, who resigned in November after a 20-year career.

Parents of child patients say they see the doctors who quit as victims of the system. "They've saved so many children. I can't condemn them," said Nailiya Tugusheva, whose five-year-old daughter Amira also has leukemia.

Growing dissent

What causes the greatest alarm among parents of young Blokhin patients are changes in some treatment protocols. Foreign-made medicines are being replaced with Russian equivalents, partly because they are cheaper but also due to a government requirement in place since 2015 to support the national pharmaceuticals industry.

About 30 parents have written to President Vladimir Putin asking him to reconsider the policy but "nothing came of our message," Tsvetkova said. The deaths in early December of two girls, aged 14 and 17, at the cancer center after bone marrow transplants have only increased concerns, though no link has been established with the new drugs regime. Russian doctors have generally avoided public disputes, despite very low pay by Western standards, but those at the Blokhin clinic are not the only ones speaking out and posting videos online. In October, neonatologists — treating newborns — threatened to resign from a

hospital in the city of Perm in the Urals mountains over low pay and long hours. In the Kurgan region of Siberia, the closure of a tuberculosis center led to protests. And in Moscow in November, two renowned specialists in children's kidney transplants condemned the veto on foreign medicines, saying no Russian equivalents existed.

'Very little' spent on health

The government stresses the need to overhaul an inefficient health system, inherited from the Soviet era and hit hard by the economic turmoil of the 1990s. Its so-called optimization drive over the last two decades to better allocate resources has led to the closure of smaller rural hospitals and a concentration of doctors in large multifunctional hospitals in major cities.

But in some areas "people have to travel 200 kilometers" (125 miles) for medical help, said Ivan Konovalov, of the Alliance of Doctors trade union. And parts of the countryside often have no more than just first-aid drop-in centers. From 2000 to 2018, the number of hospitals fell from 10,700 to 4,390, according to official figures, while the number of beds per 10,000 Russians dropped from 115 to 71. "Hospitals are short of medicines and patients have to buy them themselves," Konovalov said.

"In our country, a lot of money gets spent on the security forces, army and police and very little on health," he added. Russia's health expenditure was 3.7 percent of GDP last year. That's much less than the 9.5 percent in France or Germany, according to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development data.

Putin has acknowledged certain problems, notably a lack of facilities, equipment and staff, and announced an extra 150 billion rubles (\$2.3 billion/2.1 billion euros) fund-



MOSCOW: General view of the Russian Cancer Research Center in Moscow on November 15, 2019. — AFP

ing in total for a three-year period beginning this year. Yet, medical student Darya Sosodova, who recently protested outside the health ministry, says she is not convinced by Putin's promises. "People being fired, the low pay — when you see all that, you wonder if it's worth continuing your studies and staying in Russia," she said. — AFP

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PAGE

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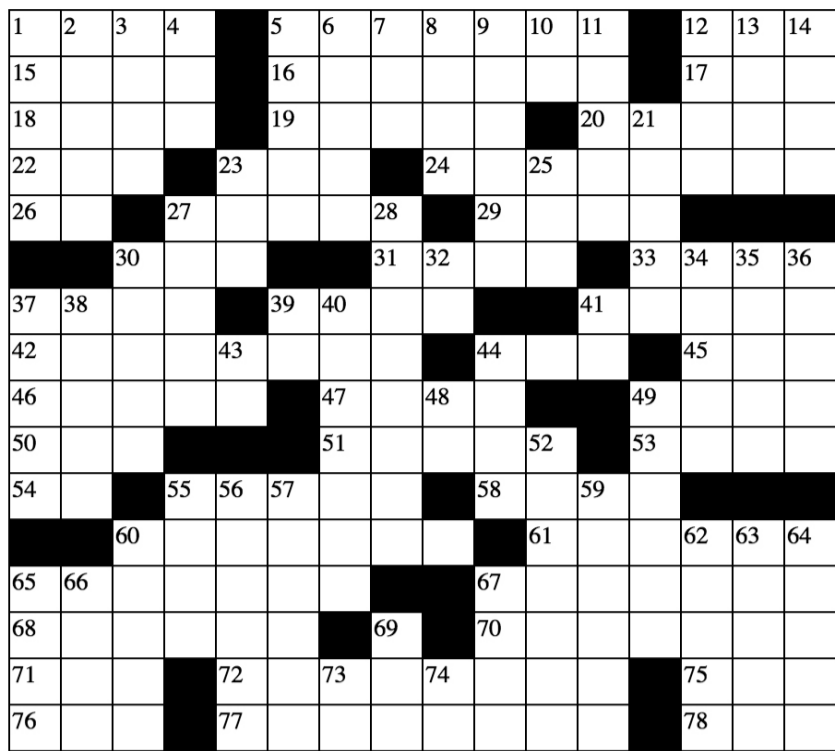
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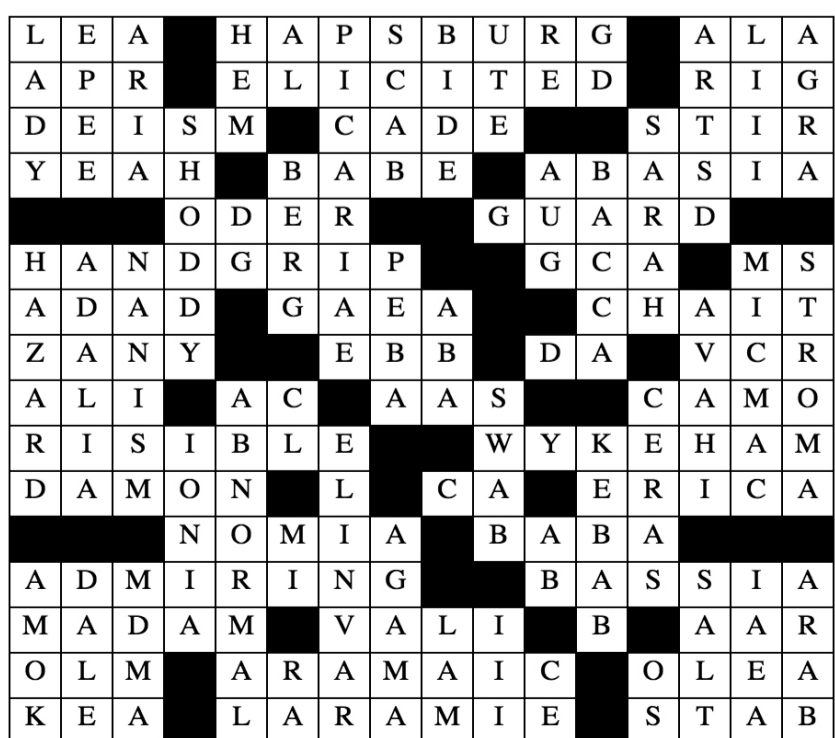
ACROSS

- Informal terms for money.
- A state-chartered savings bank owned by its depositors and managed by a board of trustees.
- A collection of things wrapped or boxed together.
- South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
- Serving as or forming a base.
- (Babylonian) Consort of Anu.
- A gland in which gametes (sex cells) are produced.
- The basic unit of electric current adopted under the System International d'Unites.
- Give up, such as power, as of monarchs and emperors, or duties and obligations.
- A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- (used of count nouns) Every one considered individually.
- Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
- An officer who acts as military assistant to a more senior officer.
- A fragment of brick used as a weapon.
- Any of various coarse shrubby plants of the genus Iva with small greenish flowers.
- A long flexible steel coil for dislodging stoppages in curved pipes.
- North American yellow-breasted songbirds.
- An inflammatory disease of connective tissue with variable features including fever and weakness and fatigability and joint pains and skin lesions on the face or neck or arms.
- (of complexion) Blemished by imperfections of the skin.
- Displeasing to the senses and morally revolting.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
- A blind god.
- Any of several families of mostly small beetles that feed on plants and plant products.
- Small genus of perennial herbs or sub-shrubs.
- Rig used in drilling for oil or gas.
- New World lizards.
- Brief episode in which the brain gets insufficient blood supply.
- (Christianity) Saved from the bondage of sin.
- Ratio of the adjacent side to the hypotenuse.
- Relating to or characteristic of or occurring in the air.
- Large Chinese deer surviving only in domesticated herds.
- Used of a single unit or thing.

DOWN

- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
- A speech defect that involves pronouncing s like voiceless th and z like voiced th.
- The compass point midway between east and southeast.
- With rapid movements.
- A blanket that is used as a cloak or shawl.
- A legal document codifying the result of deliberations of a committee or society or legislative body.
- Gull-like jaeger of northern seas.
- An alloy of copper and zinc (and sometimes arsenic) used to imitate gold in cheap jewelry and for gilding.
- A class of proteins produced in lymph tissue in vertebrates and that function as antibodies in the immune response.
- A high wave (often dangerous) caused by tidal flow (as by colliding tidal currents or in a narrow estuary).
- An island northwest of Wales.
- Singing jazz.
- A Chad language spoken in northern Nigeria.
- A large body of water constituting a principal part of the hydrosphere.
- Late time of life.
- The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
- A separate part of a whole.
- Testacean rhizopods.
- A river in northern Italy that flows southeast into the Adriatic Sea.
- A state in northwestern North America.
- In full operation.
- A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicine (trade names Advil and Motrin and Nuprin) used to relieve the pain of arthritis and as an analgesic and antipyretic.
- Completely prepared or in condition for immediate action or use or progress.
- A Dravidian language closely related to Tamil that is spoken in a hilly section of southwestern India.
- A Russian river.
- Stem of the rattan palm used for making canes and umbrella handles.
- The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- A colorless element that is one of the six inert gases.
- An endorsement.
- A radioactive gaseous element formed by the disintegration of radium.
- A copper-nickel alloy with high electrical resistance and a low temperature coefficient.
- A widow holding property received from her deceased husband.
- Dearly loved.
- Feel admiration for.
- (Akkadian) A goddess.
- Lay bare.
- Of or relating to a hair.
- The craniometric point that is the most prominent point at the back of the head (at the occipital protuberance).
- Property that is leased or rented out or let.
- Being three more than fifty.
- Tall New Zealand timber tree.
- Apparent power to perceive things that are not present to the senses.
- A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
- A midwestern state in north central United States in the Great Lakes region.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Too much food and drink could have you feeling a little out of sorts today, Aries. Some friends might have taken you out and exposed you to the most tempting of food and drink. This is always fun, but today you have to face the consequences! A workout fueled with water could help burn off any toxins or extra calories, and a nap just might complete the process so you're feeling like your old self again. Get going!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Right now you might be in the process of moving from one job to another, Taurus. This might even be a total change in career. Your hard work is paying off, though it may not show up in your bank account for a while yet. There might be contracts to be executed first. Your social life may be put on hold until all facets of this transition are worked out. Don't be intimidated, however. You've made the right choice.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, right now you could be overwhelmed by conflicts among your own needs, the needs of your family, and your responsibilities toward your job. As a result, you may be feeling tense and stressed out, and wondering if the situation will ever be resolved. Don't panic. It will, and you'll be none the worse for it. The keyword is balance, and the solution lies in finding it. Get to it! You'll want to put this behind you.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

A close relative may be ill or otherwise troubled, Cancer, and you might worry a bit too much today because of a lack of communication from this person. Attempts to phone might result in no answer or repeated voicemail messages. However, take care to stay focused and objective. Your relative is probably recovering from whatever has been bothering him or her. Remember, no news is good news. Hang in there.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is not the day to make financial investments of any kind, Leo, although someone may present you with some possible opportunities. They may sound good, but caution is called for. If the information appeals to you, look into it and try to learn the facts, but make no commitment today. If it's truly a good opportunity, it won't disappear within a few days. If it isn't, you'll want to know. Wait!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You should be looking especially attractive today, Virgo, but you may feel that it's wasted because your beloved isn't around to appreciate it. Cheer up! It will only be for a few days, and you'll still look pretty good by then. Try to keep yourself busy, preferably doing something you love to do, so your enthusiasm will enhance your good looks. Your friend won't be away forever. It only seems that way.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Right now you might be in the process of moving from one job to another, Libra. This might even be a total change in career. Your hard work is paying off, though it may not show up in your bank account for a while yet. There might be contracts to be executed first. Your social life may be put on hold until all facets of this transition are worked out. Don't be intimidated, however. You've made the right choice.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Money matters might require your attention today, Scorpio. Unusual expenses may have depleted your reserves, so you might have to cut a few corners. Your income, however, is probably the same if not slightly higher. This is, therefore, only a temporary situation, and your accounts should be back to normal in time, although some caution with regard to spending may need to be observed for a while. Work creatively on your budget and try to relax.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A lack of contact with a romantic partner could have you feeling a little down right now, Sagittarius. You may be wondering if you've said or done anything that offended your beloved one in some way. Your friend, however, is apt to be totally oblivious to the idea that you're upset. Your partner is probably taking care of some family obligations and may have lost track of time. Hang in there! Your honey should get in touch with you soon.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Excesses in food and drink yesterday may force you to cancel a social engagement today, Capricorn. You probably aren't feeling up to it. This might be a bit irritating, and somewhat embarrassing as well. However, you just might have needed the rest even if you hadn't eaten too much. Make the most of your evening alone. Soak in a tub and go to bed early. In the morning, you'll be glad you did.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Tension between a married couple who are both your friends could have you situated in the most uncomfortable place of all, Aquarius: right smack in the middle. Both may want to recruit you to their side, but you'll want to avoid allying yourself with either party. The best you can do is mediate by trying to get each of them to see the other's point of view. Whether you succeed or not, you'll have tried your best.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Gloom over the absence of a family member or romantic partner could come upon you today, Pisces, and your usually exuberant nature could be far more subdued than is normal for you. You might even spend the entire evening watching whatever happens to be on TV. It would be far more productive if you treated yourself to a trip to the bookstore and picked up some new reading material. At least you'll learn something while your partner is away!

Wordsearch Puzzle

The Beach

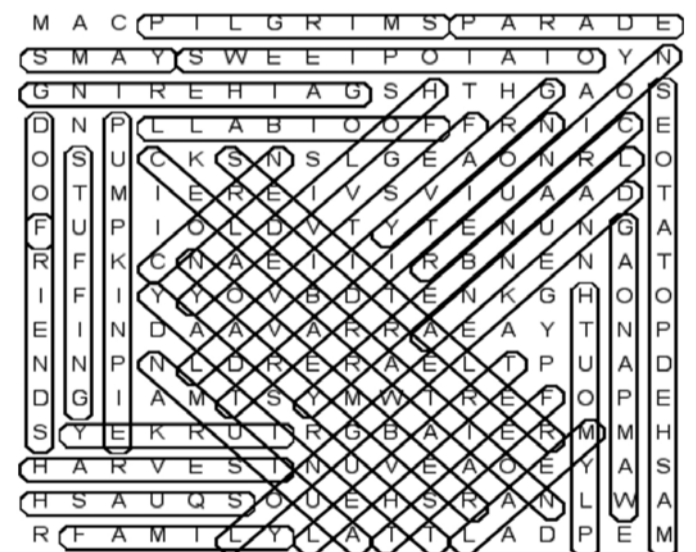
Find and circle all of the beach words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an additional beach word.



- | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|
| BARE FEET | SAILING | SURFBOARD |
| BEACH BALL | SAND | SUNFING |
| BOAT | SEAGULL | SWIMMING |
| CLOUDS | SEASHELL | SWIMSUIT |
| DRIFTWOOD | SEASHORE | T SHIRT |
| HAT | SKY | TOWEL |
| KITE | STARFISH | VOLLEYBALL |
| LIFEGUARD | SUNGLASSES | WADING |
| OCEAN | SUNSCREEN | WATER |
| PAIL | SUNSHINE | WAVES |
| PIER | | |

Yesterday's Solution

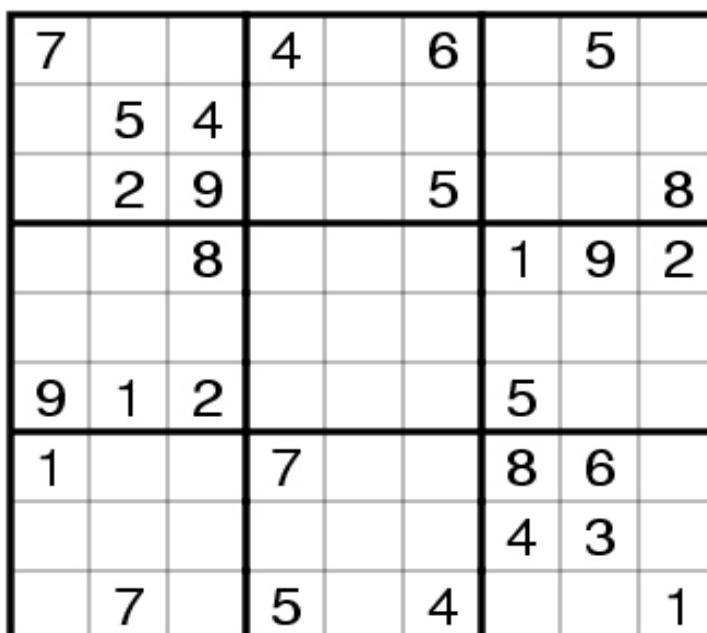
Thanksgiving (U.S.)



- | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------|
| ANNUAL | GRAVY | RELATIVES |
| AUTUMN | HARVEST | REUNION |
| CELEBRATION | HOLIDAY | SQUASH |
| CORN | LONG WEEKEND | STUFFING |
| CRANBERRY | MASHED POTATOES | SWEET POTATO |
| FAMILY | MEAL | THURSDAY |
| FEAST | NOVEMBER | TRADITION |
| FESTIVAL | PARADE | TRAVEL |
| FOOD | PILGRIMS | TURKEY |
| FOOTBALL | PLYMOUTH | WAMPANOAG |
| FRIENDS | PUMPKIN PIE | YAMS |
| GATHERING | | |

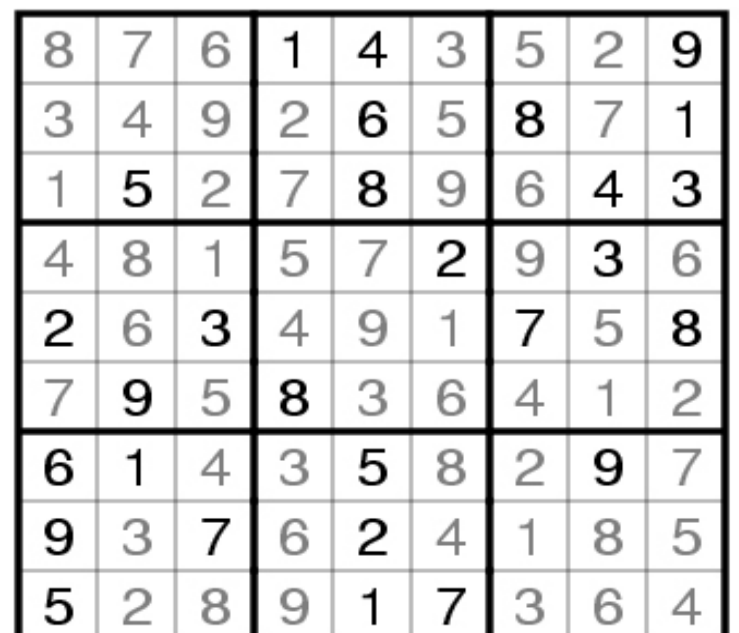
The hidden message is: MACY'S THANKSGIVING DAY PARADE

Daily SuDoku



hard

Yesterday's Solution



very hard

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2020



Tourists watch a fireworks display during the China Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival in Harbin in China's northeast Heilongjiang province on Jan 5, 2020. — AFP photos

Mass snow wedding, crystal towers at China's ice fest



An ice sculptor gives finishing touches to an ice sculpture on Jan 3, 2020.

China's annual ice festival in Harbin has kicked off with couples lining up for a snow-themed mass wedding, swimmers braving frigid waters and frozen palaces rising from the ground. Fireworks marked the festival's opening on Sunday night as tourists wandered between colorfully illuminated ice towers and monuments in the northeastern city. Earlier in the day, 43 brides in lace wedding gowns and down jackets waited in line with grooms to take part in a "mass ice and snow wedding".

A few brave swimmers plunged into a pool carved from the frozen Songhua River on a day when temperatures stayed below minus seven degrees Celsius even in the afternoon. This year's Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival in the province of Heilongjiang required 170,000 cu m of ice harvested from the Songhua River by more than 100 workers. The workers toiled for hours on the ice each day in the weeks before the festival, cutting out thousands of pieces of ice every 12-hour shift.

The Harbin festival, featuring glittering palaces and fantastical scenes sculpted out of ice, has drawn millions of people over the years to one of China's coldest cities. This year's festivities will coincide with the city's first skiing marathon this week, according to the official Xinhua news agency. China has ramped up its promotion of snow and ice tourism ahead of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

An expressway is under construction linking Beijing and Zhangjiakou, a city in northern Hebei province that will co-host the Olympics, while a high-speed railway line connecting the two cities opened on December 30. China expects 340 million people to visit snow and ice attractions in the 2021-2022 winter season, up from 224 million in the 2018-2019 season, Xinhua reported Monday. — AFP



Couples arrive for a "mass ice and snow wedding" ahead of the opening of the Harbin International Snow and Sculpture Festival.



Tourists slide on an ice sculpture.



"Snow bicycles" are parked at the Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival.



Designer Grace Wales Bonner poses for a photograph before the catwalk show for fashion brand Wales Bonner on the second day of the Autumn/Winter 2020 London Fashion Week Men's, in London on Jan 5, 2020. — AFP photos



London designer Wales Bonner making waves

At just 29, Grace Wales Bonner is one of London's most promising designers, exploring black male identity through her eponymous menswear brand with looks that have caught the eye of celebrities such as Meghan Markle. Wales Bonner, the daughter of a Jamaican father and English mother, unveiled her 2020 autumn/winter collection on Sunday at "London Fashion Week Men's", with a clear nod to her Caribbean roots.

"My grandfather came to London in the fifties so it is about the second generation who grew up in London" in the 1970s, she told AFP. "I was really interested in the youth community and how people embrace British traditions but also how they perform their identities or connections to the Caribbean. It is also looking to the multiculturalism in Britain at that time."

Dubbed Lovers Rock, from the name of a style of romantic reggae born in the British capital and popular in the 1970s and 1980s, her collection was partly inspired by the photographer John Goto. Goto captured the British African-Caribbean community of Lewisham, in southeast London, in 1977. Wales Bonner also dug into her own personal history. "It feels like an inevitable collection for me to do, it is like coming home in a way," said the designer, who grew up in south London.

Her cuts recall Savile Row, the prestigious road of bespoke tailors synonymous with English style since the 1960s. Caribbean symbols such as gold buttons on a



serge reefer jacket are displayed with pride. The cross-cultural look can also be seen in hats made from Scottish wool from the Shetland islands but in Jamaican colors. "It is a mix of very traditional, recognizable British fabrics but also trying to disrupt them a little bit," said Wales Bonner.

She also reinterprets the works of Frank Bowling, the British abstract painter who was born in Guyana. A retrospective of his work was displayed at the Tate Modern art gallery last year. His colorful Swan I and II paintings are printed on silk shirts, the bird symbolising the irreplaceable desire for freedom. Sunday's catwalk show, backed by an impressive sound system, resembled a family or street party with the public, including young and older members of the African-Caribbean community, sitting at round tables sipping hibiscus tea.

Early success

Wales Bonner had only just left the Central Saint Martins fashion design college in 2014 when her graduate collection "Afrique" won the L'Oréal Professionnel Talent Awards. Her first autumn/winter collection in 2015, "Ebonics", was critically acclaimed. The same year, she received the best young talent for menswear at the British Fashion Awards, following up 12 months later with the LVMH young designer prize, for a collection evoking the 1930 coronation of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. The endorsement by some of the biggest names in the industry, including Karl Lagerfeld, Marc Jacobs and Nicolas Ghesquière, was the spur she needed to develop her own brand.

'More visibility'

Another welcome piece of publicity came last May when the wife of Prince Harry, Meghan Markle, chose one of Wales Bonner's creations in photographs introducing the couple's new son, Archie. "There's definitely been more visibility, more awareness around the brand, it's been very positive. It was a gracious thing for her to do," Wales Bonner said. "I think it is quite amazing how she uses her platform to support other people, other women as well. She has been very clever and seems to be very generous and sincere in her intentions."

Wales Bonner, who cites Coco Chanel and British designer Phoebe Philo as role models, is passionate about the issues of identity and representation, delving into art, literature, music and black history for ideas. "It (fashion) feels like the most direct and easiest way for me to communicate and to express myself," she said. "I am always looking at this very refined, beautiful, vision of masculinity." — AFP



How to make it in Bollywood, or die trying

It took a minute for Malhaar Rathod, then an aspiring teenage actress, to realize what the 65-year-old Indian film producer was asking her to do - and to make the decision to walk away. "He claimed he had a part for me and then asked me to lift my top. I got so scared, I didn't know what to do at first," Rathod, now an up-and-coming television star, told AFP in Mumbai. Her experience with what is euphemistically known as Bollywood's "casting couch" culture underlines the challenges facing anyone seeking to break into India's massive, insiders-only film industry, where the #MeToo movement has secured few wins.

After #MeToo triggered the downfall of top Hollywood powerbrokers like Harvey Weinstein and Kevin Spacey, many women in Bollywood spoke up about their experience of sexual harassment, breaking a long-established culture of silence. The Indian industry has largely looked the other way however and many of the alleged perpetrators have been able to revive their careers after lying low for a few months.

Movie-mad India is the world's largest producer of films, with around 1,800 releases a year in multiple languages, easily dwarfing Hollywood's output - but forging a career in the nepotistic industry can be a challenge. Unlike the children of celebrities who are groomed for stardom and tailor-made debuts, outsiders have to fend off lecherous men and contend with a gruelling routine of auditions and rejections.

'Dream come true'

"It's very difficult to crack Bollywood if

you don't have connections. No-one is going to offer you a launch, you have to do small parts and work your way up," actor Paras Tthukral told AFP. "I have done all kinds of jobs to survive. Worked in a call center, in corporate gifting, marketing, you name it," Tthukral, who moved to Mumbai in 2008 and has since appeared in two TV shows and a couple of films, added. "An alternative career would have been easier for sure... but being an actor is a dream come true."

Rathod is one of the lucky ones. After her early brush with the casting couch, she is now a familiar face to Indian viewers, appearing in advertisements for global skincare brands including Garnier and Dove. The sole breadwinner for a family of five including two younger sisters, she has managed to make inroads into television with a part in the hit show "Hostages" on India's Disney-owned streaming platform Hotstar.

The 25-year-old is hoping to see that success translate to the silver screen, following in the footsteps of film stars such as Preity Zinta and Deepika Padukone who began their Bollywood career with advertisements. But she is keenly aware that it could all disappear in a flash. "Waiting to hear back about roles has given me sleepless nights," she said, adding that she has recently turned to prayer and meditation in a bid to calm her mind. "You can't have too many expectations, otherwise you will be perpetually disappointed."

For every success story, there are tens of thousands of aspiring actors who fail to make it into the big leagues. Even so, more

and more people are joining their ranks, lining up for auditions in Mumbai's northern suburbs where Bollywood's major studios are based.

Thrill of acting

Casting director Girish Hule told AFP the number of actors vying for roles in the adverts he handles has more than doubled since 2014. "I have even come across doctors and engineers who quit stable jobs because they wanted to act," he said. "Years go by waiting for the big break. People go back home or take up other jobs in the industry, working as stylists or assistant directors or in casting. In some cases, people spend five years, appearing at around 500 auditions and never get an acting job."

The glitz and glamour notwithstanding, finding success in Bollywood comes with plenty of challenges - from battling sexual harassment to spending months out of work. "In the beginning, I was too scared to even tell my mom when someone misbehaved, because I thought my family would stop me from pursuing acting," Rathod said. "I am so glad #MeToo happened here - before that, it was just going on and no-one was talking about it," she said, referring to sexual harassment in the industry.

For Tthukral, who is well-versed in the ups and downs of the business, the risks are secondary to the thrill of acting, which he compares to a drug. "My parents don't understand how I live - they just want me to settle down and run their business. Part of me wants that too, it would be an easier life," said the 34-year-old, who moved back to his hometown of New Delhi this summer. But then he added, "I will return when I have made some money. I will be somebody. I don't know when the break will come but it will come." — AFP



In this photo taken on Dec 10, 2019, aspiring actress Malhaar Rathod trains during a kickboxing session at a gym in Mumbai. — AFP photos



Rathod is seen at a studio in Mumbai.



Denise Vicentin, who lost her right eye and part of her jaw to cancer, looks in the mirror for the first time after getting a digitally-engineered prosthesis, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Dec 3, 2019.



Vicentin embraces Salazar-Gamarra after receiving the digitally-engineered prosthesis. — AFP



Vicentin poses after receiving the digitally-engineered prosthesis.

Low-cost prosthesis gives Brazil cancer survivor a new face

Denise Vicentin looks in the mirror and bursts into tears. After losing her right eye and part of her jaw to cancer, the Brazilian woman is getting a new face thanks to a digitally-engineered prosthesis. "Today I can say how much better I will feel being out in the streets. I have no words," Vicentin, 53, tells AFP at a clinic in Sao Paulo after being fitted with a prosthesis for a missing chunk of her face. Researchers at Paulista University are employing smartphones and 3D printing to create digital facial impressions used to make silicone prostheses.

The pioneering method has slashed costs and halved production times. "In the past, it took much longer work, hours of sculpting by hand, and the process was very invasive, with material on the patient's face to get an imprint of their appearance," says Rodrigo Salazar, the lead researcher. "Today with cell phone pictures, we cre-

ate a three-dimensional model."

Vicentin is one of more than 50 patients treated by Salazar and his colleagues since 2015. The team specializes in maxillofacial prosthetics, a branch of dentistry focused on treating people disfigured by birth defects, disease or trauma. Their technique was published in 2016 in the peer-reviewed Journal of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery.

Enduring the stares

AFP has followed Vicentin's journey for more than a year and a half, documenting the various stages of her physical and psychological recovery. Her ordeal began 30 years ago when she developed a facial tumor. It was removed twice, but it returned in a malignant form two decades later. Gradually, she lost parts of the right side of her face - along with her marriage and her dignity.

"When I was on the metro or train, I tried not to pay attention to the stares," Vicentin recalls. "At places like the bowling alley, I felt them looking, and the person would even leave when they saw me."

Vicentin has difficulty eating and her speech slurs because of the loss of her jaw. Her daughter, Jessica, acts as her interpreter. As 3D printing developed in recent years, Luciano Dib - one of Salazar's supervisors and a co-researcher - got the idea to use the technique for prosthesis models. "I saw people at the mall do 3D printing, so I thought, 'Why can't we use that for prostheses?'" he says.

Budget tech

Vicentin's transformation began in 2018. Dib implanted titanium rods in her eye socket to hold the prosthesis. Over the next year, she underwent multiple surgeries to build up her facial tissue. Using a smartphone, Salazar took 15 pictures of her face from different angles, which were used to make a three-dimensional digital model. Using that model, a graphic designer created a mirror image of the healthy half of Vicentin's face.

Technicians then 3D-printed a prototype prosthesis which they used to make the final one from silicone, resin and synthetic fibers. To make the prosthesis as real-looking as possible, Salazar and his colleagues carefully matched its coloring to Vicentin's skin and blue-green eye. The process for making the final prosthesis took 12 hours - half the time of conventional methods.

But it was spread out over a year because of Vicentin's surgeries. She received the completed prosthesis in early December. The small egg-sized piece fit perfectly, with magnets clipping it to the titanium implants. Conventional techniques for making prosthesis models involve equipment costing up to \$500,000, he says. Their method requires a computer and a smartphone. "The method demonstrates that you don't need big investments to use advanced technology," Salazar says.



A doctor tests an eye implant on Vicentin on Nov 1, 2019.

'So happy'

Next year, Dib and Salazar plan to open a treatment center for facial prosthetic rehabilitation built by Paulista University and a non-profit organization which they founded, called Plus Identity. They have a waiting list of potential patients. Eventually, Dib hopes 3D printing can be used to make the actual silicone prostheses. "In a very short time, we will be able to assist the patient on the spot with a printed prosthesis," Dib says. For Vicentin, the journey is not yet over. She needs further treatment to restore her jaw and top lip. But for now, she is overjoyed. "It was a long time looking at a face which was missing a piece, so I am so happy," she tells AFP after spending her first night at home with the prosthesis. "I only took it off to clean it - I even slept with it." — AFP



A doctor works on the construction of the eye implant.



Doctor Rodrigo Salazar-Gamarra works on a digitally-engineered prosthesis for Vicentin.

China farmers reap rich harvest through video-sharing apps

Do you want a piece?" beekeeper Ma Gongzuo says, looking into the camera of a friend's smartphone before biting into the dripping comb of amber-colored honey. The clip goes out to his 737,000 followers on Douyin, the Chinese version of popular video sharing app TikTok that has 400 million users in the country and has turned Ma into something of a celebrity. Creating videos has become a popular sales tactic for Chinese farmers: The clips show increasingly discerning consumers the origins of the product and provide a window into rural life that captures audience imagination.

For some it has helped them find a way out of poverty, which the ruling Communist party hopes to eradicate by 2020. "Everyone said I was good for nothing when they saw I'd come back," the 31 year-old says of his return to his village after a failed attempt at running an online clothing business. "They tell us that we can only get out of poverty if we study and get a job in a city," he adds. Today, Ma drives an expensive car and has already earned enough to buy property and help his parents and fellow villagers with their homes and businesses.

'I show my life'

In 2015, Ma took on the family honey producing business in the verdant hills of Zhejiang province, and thanks to e-commerce apps, managed to turn a yearly revenue of 1 million yuan (\$142,000). But the sales began to stagnate. So in Nov 2018, with help from



This picture taken on Nov 13, 2019 shows Chinese farmer Ma Gongzuo collecting honey at his apiary in Songyang county in China's Zhejiang province. — AFP photos

his friends in the village, he began posting videos about his life on the farm. They showed him opening up a hive surrounded by a swarm of bees, swimming bare-chested in a river, and chopping wood.

"I never advertise my products. I show my daily life, the landscapes of the countryside. That's what interests people," Ma says. "Of course people suspect that I'm selling honey. But they decide to get in touch with me to say they want to buy some." Like most transactions in China, where hard cash is less and less popular, the orders are paid through apps like WeChat or AliPay. Ma says he now sells between 2 and 3 million yuan (\$285,000-\$428,000) worth of honey each year, as well as dried sweet potato and brown sugar.

"When I was young we were poor," he recalls, adding: "At school I used to admire other kids who had pocket money, because I never had any." Now he drives a 4x4 BMW that cost around 760,000 yuan (\$108,000) and has also invested in building a B&B. "Using Douyin, that was the turning point," he says. "Today I can buy my family what they need. I help the other villagers to sell their products too. All of the local economy benefits," he explains.

'It's progress'

In China, some 847 million access the

Internet via their smartphone, so online apps have played a vital role in Ma's success. "It's progress," his father Ma Jianchun says happily. "We old people are overwhelmed. With the money, we've been able to renovate our house." China is home to the world's largest market for live video broadcasting, according to US audit firm Deloitte. Getting in on the trend, Douyin's parent company ByteDance says it has organized training for 26,000 farmers on how to master the art of making videos.



Ma at his house in Songyang county.



Ma's assistant uses a mobile phone to take a video as Ma tastes honey at his apiary.

There are other similar platforms including Kuaishou and Yizhibo. Taobao, the most popular e-commerce app in the country and owned by tech giant Alibaba, launched a project in 2019 showing farmers how to become livestreaming hosts in a bid to help them earn more. The number of people living under the poverty line in rural China has reduced dramatically - from 700 million in 1978 to 16.6 million in 2018, according to government figures.

But the depopulation of the countryside

continues, as many Chinese head to cities in search of better-paid jobs. "We want to be an example, to show young people that it is entirely possible to set up a business and earn money in rural areas," explains university-educated Ma Gongzuo. "We hope that more will return, so that life and the economy can resume in the villages." With his newfound fame, Ma says he has already received many proposals. And not just from those interested in his honey. — AFP



Ma checks his tea garden.

Lifestyle | Cocktail

'1917' advances on Oscars contention after big Globes wins

Sam Mendes' "1917," an innovative and deeply personal portrayal of World War I, has exploded into Oscar contention following its dramatic wins at the Golden Globes. The movie - inspired by tales Mendes' military veteran grandfather told him as a child - follows two British soldiers on a perilous mission across no man's land. They must risk near-certain death to deliver a vital message ordering a calamitous planned attack on German lines be aborted.

The film won best drama, the Globes' most prestigious prize, on Sunday as well as best director for Mendes - fending off frontrunners such as Martin Scorsese ("The Irishman") and Quentin Tarantino ("Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood"). "It's the biggest team effort ever," co-lead actor George MacKay told AFP moments after the top prize was announced, adding that he was "thrilled, proper thrilled".

In a radical filmmaking experiment, Mendes and cinematographer Roger Deakins shot footage that glides from trenches to crater-filled battlefields and through a devastated French town, in what appears to be almost one continuous shot stretching for two hours. "They've never made a film in one continuous take. None of us have," Dean-Charles Chapman, the film's other leading actor, told AFP at a Beverly Hills event hosted by BAFTA, Britain's version of the motion picture Academy.

Chapman and MacKay described how they rehearsed the scenes for six months, "reading the scenes in an open field" as they paced out their movements and dialogue until they became muscle memory. Meanwhile, an intricately detailed set of exactly the right scale was constructed around them. "We're walking along stabbing

stakes along the floor to mark out - there's the wall, there's the start, there's the finish," recalled Chapman. "Slowly the set would become a trench, and then we'd adjust the size of the set around the scene. And we'd do that with every single scene - it took six months to do."

Keep viewers guessing

The bold approach clearly paid off as victory at the Globes, which open Hollywood's award season, has seen odds for "1917" at next month's all-important Oscars slashed. It is expected to compete for best picture, best director and multiple technical categories - although its relatively unknown stars are not in the awards conversation. Mendes said he deliberately cast actors who were not "big movie stars" to help audiences empathize with them - and keep viewers guessing about whether they would survive.

"Maybe both of them will be killed - I don't know. Whereas if it's Leonardo DiCaprio, then perhaps you know he's going to survive," Mendes told AFP in Paris last month. Chapman is best known for playing child king Tommen Baratheon in "Game of Thrones," while MacKay had a supporting role in 2016 comedy "Captain Fantastic." While "1917" does feature British stars including Colin Firth, Benedict Cumberbatch and Andrew Scott, they are confined to smaller roles.

'Most personal movie'

The basis for the plot was a particular story Mendes' grandfather Alfred told him about serving as a messenger on the Western Front. This was supplemented with other real accounts of the war taken from letters, diaries and



Director Sam Mendes (second left) poses with cast and crew in the press room with the awards for Best Motion Picture - Drama and Best Director - Motion Picture during the 77th annual Golden Globe Awards on Jan 5, 2020 at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

other research. "I suppose it is my most personal because it comes directly from me, although I feel that I never made a movie that wasn't personal at some level," said Mendes. The film turned out to have personal connections for its actors too.

Chapman told AFP how his research for the role of Lance Corporal Blake led him to uncovering his own great-great-grandfather's journal entry in a book called "The Western Front Diaries". The actors also visited France and Belgium to see the actual war sites. The film was shot in England. The collaborative nature of shooting

"1917" mirrored the subject matter, as the actors learnt about the appalling experiences their ancestors had endured together in the trenches, they explained.

"There was lots of themes emotionally and literally, about the story and what the characters go through, that were entwined in the making of the film," said MacKay. "It's a wonderful thing where the specialness of that experience aligns with it being received so positively," he added. — AFP

'Joker' leads BAFTA nominations with 11 nods

"Joker", a dark origins story about the comic book villain, led nominations for the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards yesterday, but Britain's top movie honors drew criticism over the lack of diversity in the acting categories. Netflix film "The Irishman", a star-studded gangster drama directed by Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino's "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood", which won the best comedy/musical Golden Globe on Sunday, got 10 nominations each.

Also fresh from its triumph at the Golden Globes - where it picked up best drama and best director for Sam Mendes - immersive World War One drama "1917" received nine nominations. The four movies will compete against South Korean director Bong Joon-ho's darkly comic "Parasite" for best film at the Feb. 2 awards in London as well as for best director.

"Joker", directed by Todd Phillips, won the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival and a Golden Globe acting prize for Joaquin Phoenix, who has received critical acclaim for his transformation from vulnerable loner into confident villain in the movie. Phoenix got a BAFTA leading actor nod. He will compete against Leonardo DiCaprio in "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood", Adam Driver for Netflix divorce drama "Marriage Story", Golden Globe winner Taron Egerton in Elton John musical biopic "Rocketman" and Jonathan Pryce in papal drama "The Two Popes".

Criticism

However, soon after BAFTA announced the acting contenders, online critics lamented the lack of diversity, using the hashtag #BaftasSoWhite on social media. The leading actress list featured Scarlett Johansson for "Marriage Story", Saoirse Ronan for the latest adaptation of "Little Women", Charlize Theron for "Bombshell", a drama about sexual harassment allegations at Fox News, Jessie Buckley for musical drama "Wild Rose" and



(From left) BAFTA Film committee chair Marc Samuelson, BAFTA Chief Executive Amanda Berry, English actors Ella Balinska and Asa Butterfield and BAFTA deputy chair Krishnendu Majumdar pose before the BAFTA nominations announcement in central London yesterday. — AFP

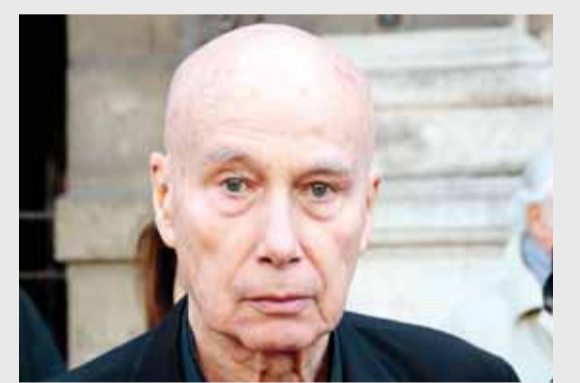
Renee Zellweger for "Judy".

Johansson was also nominated as supporting actress for "Jojo Rabbit", a comic satire set during World War Two which in total got six nominations. She faces competition from "Marriage Story" co-star Laura Dern, Florence Pugh for "Little Women" and twice-nominated Robbie for "Bombshell" and "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood".

Nominees for supporting actor were Al Pacino and Joe Pesci for "The Irishman", Tom Hanks for "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood", Anthony Hopkins for "The Two Popes" and Brad Pitt for "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood". Asked

about the acting categories "seem(ing) very white", BAFTA Chief Executive Amanda Berry told BBC Radio 4's "Today" program: "I'm going to totally agree with you. That's how I felt when I first saw the list."

"This isn't being disrespectful to anybody who has been nominated because it's an incredibly strong list...If you look at the director category, where I hoped we would see at least one female director...that is an incredibly strong list," Berry said, adding women directors were nominated in other categories. She told Reuters BAFTA was also working on a new scheme for women directors. — Reuters



French publisher pulls books by writer accused of underage rape

French publisher Gallimard said yesterday it was halting sales of books by a writer accused of raping children. France's most prestigious publishing house told AFP it was the first time in its 140-year history that it had taken such a radical step. Award-winning essayist Gabriel Matzneff is under investigation after a leading French editor detailed in print how he seduced her when she was 14. Gallimard said they were recalling all the journals the 83-year-old had written under its imprint since 1990. The last, "The Lover at the Arsenal", came out in November.

Amazon has also reportedly withdrawn the Kindle version of one Matzneff's most notorious works, "Les Moins de Seize Ans" (The Under 16s), after sales exploded online after the scandal broke. The dramatic moves come a day after French culture minister Franck Riester said the writer should lose a special state pension. Riester told reporters Matzneff could also be stripped of his two major state honors as officer of Arts and Letters and knight of the Order of National Merit. The weekly magazine Le Point had also dropped him as a columnist.

Open secret

Matzneff has never made any secret of his sexual preference for adolescent girls and boys, and it did not stop him winning the prestigious Renaudot prize in 2013. In "Les Moins de Seize Ans", which was published in 1974 and reissued in 2005, he was frank about indulging his obsessional "taste" for underage partners and sex tourism. He was even more explicit in his 1990 book, "Mes amours décomposées" (My Loves Deconstructed), which describes sexual relationships with teenagers aged between 14 and 16. It is illegal in France for an adult to have sex with anyone under 15.

He told French television at the time that he preferred "to have people in my life who are not hardened and who are still kind". "A very young girl is rather sweeter, even if she becomes very quickly hysterical and just as crazy as she will be when she is older," he added. Despite raising eyebrows, Matzneff continued to publish and there was little controversy when he picked up the Renaudot prize six years ago. The case has again shone a light on what many see as an overly permissive attitude towards sexual harassment and pedophilia in France.

'Exceptional love'

The French film establishment has been rocked by rape accusations against directors Roman Polanski and Luc Besson, while star Adele Haenel said she was sexually harassed by the director of her first film when she was 12. All three men deny the claims. Police opened a formal investigation into Matzneff last week after publisher Vanessa Springora described her tortured relationship with the writer in a book titled "Consent".

In it she described how Matzneff, then in his fifties, would wait for her outside school and then take her to his home for sex. Matzneff denies any wrongdoing, insisting there was an "exceptional love" between him and Springora. He claimed she tried to portray him as "a pervert, a manipulator and a predator". Gallimard said it felt impelled to act after Springora's book was published. "The exceptional measure which we have taken is justified to make sure the suffering that Vanessa Springora recounts" in her book is heard, it added in a statement. — AFP

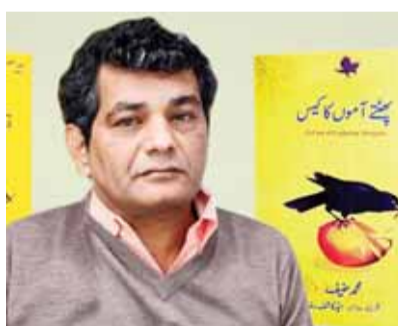
Top Pakistani novelist says military seized Urdu versions of his book

Acclaimed Pakistani novelist Mohammed Hanif has accused the country's powerful intelligence agency of confiscating Urdu translations of his first novel, which satirizes the armed forces. The alleged swoop on his publisher by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency comes months after the long-awaited translation of his 2008 novel "A Case of Exploding Mangoes" went on sale in Pakistan - more than a decade after its English-language debut.

The book chronicles the final days of hardline dictator General Zia-ul-Haq and the myriad conspiracy theories behind the plane crash that killed him in 1988, while also harshly criticising Pakistan's military establishment. In the book, the military relies on torture and extrajudicial murder, and covertly supports a jihadist insurgency to pursue its goals - accusations made by rights activists in real life, but which the military denies.

"This afternoon some people claiming to be from the ISI barged into my Urdu publisher Maktaba Daniyal offices," Hanif tweeted late Monday, adding they "confiscated all copies of Urdu translation of A Case of Exploding Mangoes". He said they had "threatened the manager" and "wanted information about our whereabouts". Hanif's novel earned glowing reviews and was longlisted for the Booker Prize, with critics comparing him to satire writers such as Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut.

Despite the widespread praise - and its availability in English in Pakistan - more than a decade passed before the book was translated into Urdu. "A Case of Exploding Mangoes has been in publication for 11 years now. Nobody has ever bothered me. Why now?" tweeted



Mohammed Hanif

the author. "I am sitting here, wondering when will they come for us," Hanif, who is also a regular columnist for The New York Times, has been critical of the military in the past.

A spokesman for the military denied the allegations, adding the military had no interest in confiscating books and pointing out that Pakistan did not have a large readership for novels. Bookshops in Lahore and Islamabad said yesterday they still had Urdu versions on sale. Yesterday, a representative of a popular bookshop in Lahore, Fiction House, said a man who said he was associated with the military visited the shop and asked questions about the book, including how many copies had been sold. The military's spokesman denied having sent anyone to the shop. Works written in English have a narrower, elite audience in Pakistan and often have greater leeway, but Urdu content tends to be more carefully censored. Hanif, who graduated from the Pakistan Air Force Academy as a pilot officer, later became a journalist before also turning to writing novels. In the novel, Hanif caricatured Zia as a superstitious and insecure leader whom several people wanted to assassinate. — Agencies

Judge threatens to jail Harvey Weinstein for texting in court



Harvey Weinstein arrives at New York City criminal court for his sex crimes trial yesterday in New York City. — AFP

Harvey Weinstein's rape trial took a dramatic turn yesterday as the judge threatened to revoke his bail and jail the former film producer after catching him using his cellphone just as jury selection got underway. "Is this really the way you want to end up in jail for the rest of your life, by texting and violating a court order?" state Judge James Burke asked the 67-year-old defendant, visibly angry. He told Weinstein not to answer.

Assistant District Attorney Joan Illuzzi, the lead prosecutor, urged Burke to jail Weinstein. "There is a grave risk that this defendant at some point will realize that the evidence against him is imposing and overwhelming" and he will try to flee, she said. The judge ultimately decided not to jail Weinstein but warned he would not get another chance. "I'm not looking for apologies: I'm looking for compliance," Burke said.

Weinstein has been released on bail, but is required to wear an electronic-tracking device that was visible on his ankle as he got out of a sports utility vehicle when he arrived at court yesterday. Weinstein has pleaded not guilty to charges of assaulting two women in New

York. He faces life in prison if convicted on the most serious charge, predatory sexual assault.

On Monday, hours after Weinstein's trial in New York started, Los Angeles District Attorney Jackie Lacey charged Weinstein with the sexual assault of two unidentified women in 2013. More than 80 women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct dating back decades. Weinstein has denied the allegations, saying any sexual encounters he had were consensual.

One of his lawyers, Arthur Aidala, asked the judge to delay the trial or at least allow more time for jury selection because Monday's charges would make it impossible to choose a fair and impartial jury this week. "I cannot think of one time, one case where the day of jury selection this type of prejudice is being cast against a criminal defendant," said Aidala, who held up copies of the New York Times, Daily News and New York Post with articles about the Los Angeles indictment. "I don't see how anyone could answer honestly that they're fair and impartial after this stuff is drilled into their brains," he said. — Reuters

Classifieds

Wednesday, January 8, 2020



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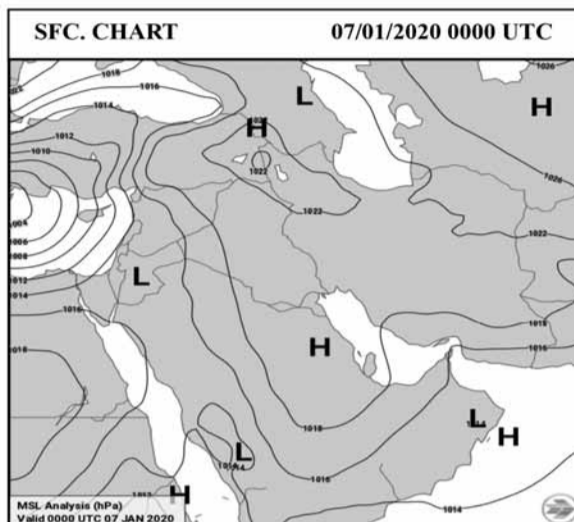
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 06 - 24 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h with a chance for mist forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings
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STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	14 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	06 °C
ABDALY	21 °C	07 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	21 °C	09 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	20 °C	15 °C
AHMADI	20 °C	13 °C
NUWAISIB	22 °C	09 °C
WAFRA	21 °C	08 °C
SALMY	19 °C	08 °C



4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	01/08	Rather hot and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	22 °C	09 °C	SE-S	15 - 38 km/h
Thursday	01/09	Rather cold and some scattered clouds will appear	18 °C	05 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Friday	01/10	Cool and Partly cloudy	19 °C	04 °C	NW-N	12 - 32 km/h
Saturday	01/11	Cool and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on	19 °C	05 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:19
Sunrise	06:44
Zuhr	11:54
Asr	14:46
Sunset	17:05
Isha	18:27

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	21 °C
MIN. Temp.	06 °C
MAX. RH	93 %
MIN. RH	31 %
MAX. Wind	NW 28 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, Mustafakhan Hamzakhan Jumal holder of Indian Passport No. Z2402486, issued at Kuwait on 25-09-2012, permanent address of India A-1148, Jumal Mohalla, Goregaon Raigad, 402103, M.S. and presently residing at Kuwait do here by change my name as: Given Name: Mustafa Hamzakhan, Surname: Jumal. (C 5486)

I, Sultan Ahmed Husain, holder of Indian Passport number Z2816107, issued at Kuwait on 31/08/2014, presently residing at Kuwait do hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Given name: Sultan Ahmed, Surname: Husain. Objections if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015. (C 5487) 8-1-2020

I, Sunil Kuttiyil George (Kuttiyil Geo Vila, Chandanappally P.O, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, Pin: 689648) holder of Indian Passport No. T5332157 issued at Kuwait on 07-07-2019, presently residing at Kuwait do hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Given Name: Sunil Kuttiyil Surname: George. Objection if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015. (C 5485) 7-1-2020

hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Given Name: Shibi Surname: Joseph. Objection if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015.

I, Sunil Kuttiyil George, father of Ansa Leya Sunil holder of Indian Passport No. S2391456 issued at Kuwait on 15-01-2018, Permanent address of Kuttiyil Geo Vila, Chandanappally P.O, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India and presently residing at Kuwait do hereby change my daughter's Given Name as: Ansa Leya Surname: Sunil. Objection if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015.

I, Sunil Kuttiyil George, father of Kripa Anna Sunil holder of Indian Passport No. T821186 issued at Kuwait on 07-11-2019, Permanent address of Kuttiyil Geo Vila, Chandanappally P.O, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India and presently residing at Kuwait do hereby change my daughter's Given Name as: Kripa Anna Surname: Sunil. Objection if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015. (C 5485) 7-1-2020

Sharing accommodation for Filipino ONLY Farwaniya block 4, near Big Jamiya, available on December 25, Contact 55571873. 7-1-2020

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Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw) DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Wednesday 8/1/2020				Departure Flights on Wednesday 8/1/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
FEG	441	Asyut	00:05	AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	JZR	713	Sohag	00:10
THY	772	Istanbul	00:20	MSC	412	Asyut	00:15
JZR	254	Amman	00:20	MSR	615	Cairo	00:30
DLH	625	Dammam	00:50	FDB	072	Dubai	00:30
KAC	102	London	00:50	BBC	044	Dhaka	00:40
JZR	734	Cairo	01:00	FEG	342	Sohag	01:05
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:00	JZR	723	Alexandria	01:05
MSR	618	Alexandria	01:35	MSR	611	Cairo	01:10
UAE	853	Dubai	01:40	THY	767	Istanbul	01:10
KLM	446	Bahrain	01:45	UAE	872	Dubai	01:10
THY	1464	Istanbul	01:50	CLX	7912	Hanoi	01:10
KKK	1268	Istanbul	01:55	RBG	218	Asyut	01:50
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KNE	382	Taif	01:50
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	GFA	222	Bahrain	02:00
KAC	414	Bangkok	02:40	KAC	673	Dubai	02:00
THY	1404	AYT	02:45	JZR	103	Bahrain	02:00
PGT	860	Istanbul	02:50	FDB	060	Dubai	02:10
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:50	UAE	878	Doha	02:10
JZR	402	Lahore	02:55	QTR	1079	Jeddah	02:35
KAC	156	Istanbul	02:55	SVA	501	Dubai	02:50
RJA	648	Amman	03:05	JZR	125	Dubai	03:05
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	KNE	530	Jeddah	03:05
OMA	643	Muscat	03:05	KAC	105	London	03:30
NIA	1604	Luxor	03:10	KAC	563	Amman	03:30
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	JZR	405	Kochi	04:00
KAC	418	Manila	03:20	KAC	743	Dammam	04:05
QTR	1076	Doha	03:30	KAC	775	Riyadh	04:05
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:00	ABY	128	Sharjah	04:15
KAC	382	Delhi	04:05	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	04:20
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	OMA	646	Muscat	04:20
RBG	1153	Asyut	04:10	KAC	785	Jeddah	04:20
ETH	3424	Bahrain	04:15	KAC	619	Doha	05:00
KAC	796	Madinah	04:25	FEG	242	Alexandria	05:00
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:25	MSR	576	Sharm el-Sheikh	05:00
JZR	1738	Cairo	04:45	SVA	505	Madinah	05:10
JZR	404	Hyderabad	04:50	FDB	052	Dubai	05:10
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:05	QTR	1073	Doha	05:15
FDB	069	Dubai	05:05	KAC	361	Colombo	05:20
IGO	1759	Delhi	05:10	KAC	155	Istanbul	05:45
THY	770	Istanbul	05:20	KAC	503	Beirut	06:00
JZR	402	Mumbai	05:25	UAE	858	Dubai	06:00
KAC	344	Chennai	05:30	KAC	283	Dhaka	06:10
RBG	215	Sohag	05:35	OMS	226	Muscat	06:10
UAE	873	Dubai	05:40	KAC	343	Chennai	06:15
KAC	552	Cairo	05:45	KAC	381	Delhi	06:15
JZR	112	Doha	05:50	SAW	706	Dammam	06:15
BAW	157	London	06:10	KAC	511	Riyadh	06:15
JZR	708	Luxor	06:15	KAC	615	Bahrain	06:15
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:15	JZR	721	Alexandria	06:15
KAC	714	Sohag	06:20	GFA	216	Bahrain	06:15
KAC	678	Dubai	06:40	JZR	127	Dubai	06:15
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:50	JZR	403	Hyderabad	06:15
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:05	JZR	733	Cairo	06:15
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	JZR	253	Amman	06:15
KAC	358	Kochi	07:25	QTR	1081	Doha	06:15
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	MSR	621	Cairo	06:15
JZR	724	Alexandria	07:50	FDB	064	Dubai	06:15
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:00	GFA	218	Bahrain	06:15
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	KAC	331	Trivandrum	06:15
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:05	ABY	124	Sharjah	06:15
KAC	384	Delhi	08:10	RJA	641	Amman	06:15
UAE	855	Dubai	08:25	FDB	058	Dubai	06:15
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:50	KAC	351	Kochi	06:15
OMA	641	Muscat	09:00	JZR	401	Mumbai	06:15
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00	UAE	876	Dubai	06:15
IRA	665	Shiraz	09:15	KNE	232	Riyadh	06:15
QTR	1070	Doha	09:20	KAC	353	Bengaluru	06:15
GOW	061	CNN	09:30	OMA	648	Muscat	06:15
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	NIA	1406	Sohag	06:15
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	MEA	403	Beirut	06:15
JZR	410	Delhi	09:50	KAC	301	Mumbai	06:15
SYR	341	Dammam	10:00	RBG	214	Sohag	06:15
AKB	889	Mangalore/Bahrain	10:20	QTR	1089	Doha	06:15
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	DHX	171	Bahrain	06:15
MEA	404	Beirut	10:55	KAC	205	Islamabad	06:15
QTR	1074	Doha	11:00	KLM	445	Bahrain	06:15
KIS	6032	Mashhad	11:00	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	06:15
JZR	1736	Cairo	11:05	ALK	230	Colombo	06:15
JZR	114	Doha	11:10	THY	1413	Trabzon	06:15
IGO	1755	CNN	11:30	UAE	860	Dubai	06:15
NIA	1405	Sohag	11:30	KAC	383	Delhi	06:15
JZR	122	Dubai	11:45	JZR	407	Ahmedabad	06:15
KIS	6032	Mashhad	11:45	GFA	220	Bahrain	06:15
TBZ	6605	Mashhad	11:55	KAC	783	Jeddah	06:15
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:00	KAC	351	Cairo	06:15
SAW	701	Dammam	12:30	KAC	411	Bangkok	06:15
RBG	553	Alexandria	12:30	JAV	622	Amman	06:15
THY	766	Istanbul	12:30	QTR	1083	Doha	06:15
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:30	SVA	515	Riyadh	06:15
				SVA	503	Jeddah	06:15
				JZR	701	Asyut	06:15

US exposes Saudi Arabia to peril after Iranian killing

RIYADH: The US has put its ally Saudi Arabia in Iran's crosshairs with the assassination of a top general, leaving it bracing for retaliation just as it was working to ease tensions after a torrid 2019. American officials say the kingdom faces a "heightened risk" of drone and missile attacks after the killing in Baghdad last week of powerful Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani in a US drone strike. The assassination has sparked fears of a regional conflagration as Tehran vows to take "severe revenge", with Saudi Arabia calling it a "very dangerous moment".

Riyadh has tried to distance itself from the US strike, with a Saudi official telling AFP the kingdom was "not consulted" by Washington before the killing. Saudi newspapers close to the regime have sought to deflect blame onto rival Doha, saying the drone that downed Soleimani took off from a US base in Qatar, glossing over the deployment of American troops in the kingdom.

A Saudi delegation led by Prince Khalid bin Salman, the deputy defense minister, arrived in Washington on Monday for de-escalation talks, while King Salman has urged Iraq to take urgent measures to defuse tensions.

"It's pretty clear that the Saudis don't welcome this crisis even though they have to be quietly delighted with the killing of Soleimani," said Hussein Ibish, a scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "They know they would be in the crossfire if war breaks out, so they are doing everything they can to bring down the temperature."

In recent months, Saudi Arabia and its arch-nemesis Iran have taken steps towards Iraq-brokered talks in a bid to defuse tensions that have brought the Middle East to the brink of war. Iraq's prime minister, Adel Abdel Mahdi, said Sunday that he was expecting to meet Soleimani on the day he was killed, saying the general had travelled to deliver a response from Tehran to an earlier Saudi message. The outreach marks a shift from Saudi ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's earlier aggressive stance towards Iran, which sent regional tensions soaring.

Analysts had fretted that Saudi leaders, frustrated with former US president Barack Obama's outreach to Iran and who welcomed Donald Trump's hostile stance,

would drag Washington into another intractable conflict. But Riyadh appears chastened by coordinated attacks on key oil installations last year, which were blamed on Iran, despite its denials.

Washington's seemingly tepid response after the Sept 14 attacks affirmed the view that the kingdom could not rely on its closest Western ally to come to its aid if a conflict erupted, analysts say. "The September 14 assault in Saudi Arabia demonstrated its inability to protect their critical infrastructure against asymmetrical attacks," said Kristian Ulrichsen, a fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute in the United States. "With both the Saudis and its ally the UAE gearing up for global events this year - the G20 summit in Riyadh and the Dubai Expo 2020 - both will be desperate to avoid any escalation that could put them in doubt."

'Reward for outreach'

Riyadh has quietly tried to disentangle itself from other regional crises. It appears to have stepped up direct talks with Yemen's pro-Iran Houthi rebels it has

been fighting for almost five years, leading to a noticeable decline in attacks by both sides. Riyadh is also in talks with Qatar over ways to ease a two-year Saudi-led boycott on its neighbor. "The killing of Soleimani... threatens to upend this progress," said Stephen Seche, vice president of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

"It greatly increases the likelihood that elements within the Huthi movement close to Tehran will be tempted to... strike deep into Saudi Arabia, a move that would almost certainly scuttle the ongoing peace initiative." The Yemeni rebels, who have proved surprisingly impervious to Saudi Arabia's expensive military arsenal, have pledged "swift reprisals", voicing solidarity with Tehran. But Iran and its proxies are likely to target American installations. "Because the Iranians need to go after something American, they can find a way to do so without necessarily destroying their outreach to Saudi Arabia," said Ryan Bohl, of US geopolitical think-tank Stratfor. "That could be a reward for Riyadh for its outreach." — AFP



This handout image released on Jan 6, 2020 shows an artist's illustration of the planet TOI 700 d, the first Earth-size habitable-zone planet discovered by NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS). — AFP

Assembly delays grilling of Aseri...

Continued from Page 1

Adasani vowed that if the government does not apply the law by referring those suspected of stealing public funds to the public prosecution, he will file to grill the prime minister. MP Yousef Al-Fadhlah said that the issue of lawmakers receiving money from government officials is highly disturbing and a big blow to the constitution and values.

Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem told the Assembly that he has coordinated with the government to hold a special session tomorrow to discuss a number of issues including the recently signed agreement between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia over the neutral zone, adding

that voting on the agreement will be made only after the foreign relations panel submits its report. Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said he was prepared to provide the details of the historic agreement to the National Assembly.

The Assembly then continued to debate the Amiri speech delivered on the opening day of the current term late October. MP Safa Al-Hashem complained that some government departments are "penetrated" by foreign advisors, saying that an 80-year-old expat advisor to the finance ministry undersecretary has just got a renewal, "although he sleeps during meetings".

MP Mohammad Al-Hadiya complained of flagrant violations in the citizenship issue and criticized the government for refusing to launch an investigation into the allegations. MP Thamer Al-Suwait however said there are unfounded allegations into this sensitive issue, saying that a lawmaker had claimed that 6,000 people were granted nationality in a deliberate attempt to raise baseless and racist concerns.

At least 56 mourners killed in stampede...

Continued from Page 1

The assassination of Soleimani set off an escalating war of words between Iran and the United States. In Tehran, President Hassan Rouhani on Monday warned Trump to "never threaten" Iran, after the US leader issued a US strike list of 52 targets in the Islamic republic. Yesterday, Iranian lawmakers voted to designate all US forces around the world "terrorists" over Soleimani's killing. Parliament also agreed to bolster the coffers of the Quds Force by \$244 million.

In Kerman, people converged from afar on Azadi Square where two flag-draped coffins were on display, with the second one reportedly containing the remains of Soleimani's closest aide, Brigadier General Hossein Pourjafari. "We're here today to pay respects to the great commander of the holy defense," said one of the mourners who came from the southern city of Shiraz. "Haj Qasem was not only loved in Kerman, or Iran, but also the whole world," Hemmat Dehghan told AFP. "The security of the whole world, Muslims, Shiites, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and especially Iran, all owe it to him," said the 56-year-old war veteran. Another mourner said Soleimani's assassination "boils the blood of the Iranian people".

Iraq's parliament has demanded the government expel the 5,200 American troops stationed in the country in response to the drone attack which also killed top Iraqi military figure Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis. Baghdad requested in a letter to the UN - seen by AFP - that the Security Council condemn the US strike so that "the law of the jungle" is not allowed to prevail. The operation represented "a dangerous escalation that could lead to a devastating war in Iraq, the region and the world," wrote Iraq's UN ambassador Mohammed Hussein Bahr-Aluloom.

On Sunday night, the US mistakenly notified Baghdad of an imminent troop pullout in a letter that sparked confusion in Washington. "We respect your sovereign decision to order our departure," said the letter, whose authenticity was confirmed to AFP by both Iraqi and US defense officials. In the letter, US Brigadier General William Seely said the US-led coalition would "be repositioning forces".

"In order to conduct this task, Coalition Forces are required to take certain measures to ensure that the movement out of Iraq is conducted in a safe and efficient manner," said the letter. It said helicopters would be travelling in and around Baghdad's Green Zone where the US embassy is located as part of the preparations. AFP could hear helicopters flying low over Baghdad throughout the night on Monday.

But Pentagon Joint Chiefs Chairman Mark Milley said the letter was a draft that was sent by mistake. "It was a mistake, an honest mistake, a draft unsigned letter, because we are moving forces around," Milley told reporters in Washington. US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the letter was "inconsistent" with Washington's position and denied there had

been a decision to leave Iraq.

Some of Canada's 500 military personnel based in Iraq will be temporarily moved to Kuwait for safety reasons, the country's top military official said yesterday, due to fears of possible retaliation there. General Jonathan Vance, chief of the defense staff, said in a letter to military families that "the news coming out of the Middle East is alarming for many of you". "Some of our people will be moved temporarily from Iraq to Kuwait," he added. Simply put, we are doing this to ensure their safety and security.

Germany said it was withdrawing some of its troops deployed to the anti-IS coalition in the country. NATO also said it would temporarily reduce its presence in Iraq because of the increased risk to troop safety. France, however, has "no intention" of pulling its troops from Iraq, a French government source told AFP. Saudi Arabia - an oil-rich US ally seen as vulnerable to Iranian counter strikes - also appealed for calm after a "very dangerous" escalation.

Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he was informed by UN chief Antonio Guterres that Washington had denied him a visa for a planned trip to UN headquarters in New York. "What we know is that the US State Secretary (Mike Pompeo), in a call to the Secretary General of the United Nations, said: 'We did not have time to issue a visa for Mohammad Javad Zarif and we will not issue a visa'," Zarif said. "The Secretary General responded by saying that it is Iran's right to take part in this session," Tehran's top diplomat said, quoted by semi-official news agency ISNA.

Zarif was speaking to reporters in Tehran at a gathering to promote an Iranian peace plan for the Gulf. Zarif later took to Twitter, saying the rejection violated the terms of a 1947 agreement on the travel of representatives of UN members to and from the headquarters. But he said "denying me a visa... pales in comparison to" US sanctions and threats, as well as the "cowardly assassination" of Soleimani last week. "What are they really afraid of? Truth?" he tweeted.

Zarif said the US visa decision was "a sign of the bankruptcy of the US government and Trump's regime", according to ISNA. The Iranian foreign minister said he had been planning to go to UN headquarters on Thursday for an open debate on "Upholding the Charter of the United Nations". But he added that he had also intended to "raise America's crimes" during his visit to New York.

Trump's US political rivals have challenged his decision to order the killing of Soleimani and questioned its timing in a US election year. His administration said Soleimani was planning new attacks on US interests, without giving evidence. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo again defended the decision at a Washington news conference yesterday, saying attacks allegedly planned by Soleimani "were going to lead, potentially, to the death of many more Americans".

Pompeo also held Soleimani responsible for a Dec 27 rocket attack in Iraq in which a US civilian contractor was killed. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received a phone call on Monday from Pompeo, KUNA said. They discussed the latest developments in the region, and affirmed the importance of de-escalation and dealing with these developments in a spirit of wisdom and self-restraint in order to achieve its security and stability, KUNA reported. — Agencies

Planet hunter finds Earth-sized world in 'Goldilocks zone'

WASHINGTON: NASA's planet hunter satellite TESS has discovered an Earth-sized world within the habitable range of its star, which could allow the presence of liquid water. Another first for the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite is its discovery of a world orbiting two stars, evoking the planet Tatooine from Star Wars but unlikely to be hospitable to life as we know it.

The potentially habitable planet, named "TOI 700 d", is relatively close to Earth - only 100 light years away, NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory announced during the winter American Astronomical Society meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii on Monday. Proxima Centauri, the closest star to Earth, is just over four light years away. "TESS was designed and launched specifically to find Earth-sized planets orbiting nearby stars," said Paul Hertz, NASA astrophysics division director.

TESS initially misclassified the star, which meant the planets appeared larger and hotter than they actually are. But several amateur astronomers, including high school student Alton Spencer - who works with members of the TESS team - identified the error. "When we corrected the star's parameters, the sizes of its planets dropped, and we realized the outermost one was about the size of Earth and in the habitable zone," said Emily Gilbert, a graduate student at the University of Chicago.

The discovery was later confirmed by the Spitzer Space Telescope. A few other similar planets have been discovered before, notably by the Kepler Space Telescope, but this is the first discovered by TESS, which was launched in 2018. TESS stabilizes on one area of the sky to detect whether objects - planets - pass in front of stars, which causes a temporary drop in the stars' luminosity. This allows TESS to infer the presence of a planet, its size and orbit. Star TOI 700 is small, about 40 percent of our Sun's size and only about half as hot.

TESS discovered three planets in orbit, named TOI

700 b, c and d. Only "d" is in the so-called "Goldilocks zone," not too far from and not too close to the star, where the temperature could allow the presence of liquid water. The name is an allusion to the fairytale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears", in which a young girl samples three bowls of porridge and finds that one is "just right - not too hot and not too cold".

TOI 700 d is about 20 percent larger than Earth and orbits its star in 37 days. It receives 86 percent of the energy that Earth receives from the Sun. It remains to be seen what d is made of. Researchers have generated models based on the size and type of star in order to predict d's atmospheric composition and surface temperature. In one simulation, NASA explained, the planet is covered in oceans with a "dense, carbon-dioxide-dominated atmosphere similar to what scientists suspect surrounded Mars when it was young."

The planet is tidally locked to TOI 700, meaning that one side always faces the star, in the same way that Earthlings never see the "dark side" of the Moon. This synchronous rotation meant that, in another model, one side of the planet was constantly covered in clouds. A third simulation predicted an all-land world, where winds flow from the planet's dark side to its light one. Multiple astronomers will observe the planet with other instruments, in order to obtain new data that may match one of NASA's models. Another discovery announced at the meeting was TESS's first finding of an exoplanet orbiting two stars instead of one, also known as a circumbinary planet. The announcement prompted comparisons with Luke Skywalker's home world of Tatooine in the "Star Wars" movie series, with its bewitching double sunsets. But the newly found planet's size alone - it is 6.9 times larger than Earth, almost the size of Saturn - makes it unlikely to be livable.

Named TOI 1338 b, it is the only planet in the TOI 1338 system, which lies 1,300 light-years away in the constellation Pictor, and orbits its stars every 95 days. The two stars orbit each other every 15 days. One is about 10 percent bigger than our Sun, while the other is cooler, dimmer and only one-third the Sun's mass. TOI 1338 b was identified by Wolf Cukier, a high school student who had an internship with NASA last summer. — AFP

India suffers hottest decade on...

Continued from Page 1

globally, but is still taking hold in India, where heatwaves in 2015 and 2016 have so far been tied to climate shifts. According to the IMD, 2019 was the seventh warmest year on record in India. Overall about 1,630 people died in extreme weather events over the year, it said.

The South Asian giant - home to 1.3 billion people - last year experienced a longer summer as well as monsoon rains that were delayed but ultimately the biggest in 25 years. It also saw a record number of cyclones, and later record cold, with Delhi seeing its coldest day in over a century last month. A dry spell also triggered crippling droughts and dire water shortages, including in the southern city of Chennai, which was plunged into crisis when its four main water reservoirs ran dry.

More unpredictable weather - including more frequent droughts and heatwaves - can threaten harvests

and food security, especially in developing nations such as India, climate scientists say. Weather extremes also can lead to more water shortages and outbreaks of water and mosquito-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria. In early December, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said that 2019 was on course to be the second or third warmest year on record globally. It said the global mean temperature during the first 10 months of 2019 was 1.1C above pre-industrial levels.

The 2015 Paris Agreement, a global pact to fight climate change agreed to by nearly 200 countries, aims to keep the Earth's temperature rise well below 2C, striving for 1.5C. But current national plans to curb emissions and limit climate change, even if achieved, would produce warming of more than 3 degrees - one reason countries are due to update them this year, as global emissions continue to rise rather than fall.

WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas warned that if urgent climate action was not taken "then we are heading for a temperature increase of more than 3 degrees C by the end of the century, with ever more harmful impacts on human wellbeing". "We are nowhere near on track to meet the Paris Agreement target," he said. — Reuters

Putin in surprise visit to Assad...

Continued from Page 1

the war. Russia has thousands of forces deployed across Syria in support of the army, while an unknown contingent of Russian private security personnel also operates on the ground.

Putin had already been to Hmeimim, the Mediterranean base where the largest number of Russian forces is deployed, in December 2017 but had not visited Damascus since the start of the conflict in 2011. The Russian strongman is next expected in Turkey, the other key broker in a conflict that has left more than 380,000 people dead and displaced half of the country's population. His visit to the region comes as the United States, whose military dominance in the region has waned while Russia's has grown, touched off what many fear could be a high-stakes cycle of region-wide tit-for-tat violence.

The head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm, Qassem Soleimani, was killed on Friday in a US strike on Baghdad international airport. The head of the Quds Force was widely seen as one of the most powerful men in the region and the architect of Iran's support for the Syrian army. Tehran has reacted by vowing bloody revenge, as have the militias it controls in Iraq, while parliament in Baghdad has voted to request a

full US troop withdrawal.

US President Donald Trump, who boasted in a tweet that Soleimani should have been killed earlier, in turn threatened Iran with more strikes and Iraq with sanctions if US forces were targeted or forced to leave. Putin's reaction to the escalation between Iran and Washington had been laconic, warning only that Soleimani's killing could "seriously aggravate the situation in the region".

The United States still has forces deployed in Syria as part of the coalition against the Islamic State jihadist group, some in Kurdish-controlled areas in the northeast and others at a base further south near the Iraqi and Jordanian borders. Peskov told Interfax, RIA Novosti and TASS that Putin had met Assad at a command post for Russian forces in Syria, driving through Damascus on the way. "Putin also noted that on the streets of Damascus the signs of how peace has been restored can be seen with the naked eye," according to Peskov.

He said the two men had heard military reports on the situation in various parts of Syria. "The Syrian president expressed appreciation for the help of Russia and the Russian military in the fight against terrorism and the restoration of peaceful life in Syria," Peskov said. Accompanied by Assad, Putin later visited the Old City of Damascus including the 8th century Umayyad mosque and an ancient church. "I think Putin is there to reinforce the Russian position in Syria and with the person of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, especially as Iran's position has been indelibly weakened, since Soleimani was essentially Iran in Syria," said David Lesch, an expert on Syria. — Agencies

Sports

Two-time champion Sainz seizes lead on day three of Dakar Rally

Alonso is fifth fastest in the stage but still two hours and 40 minutes behind Sainz

NEOM: Two-time champion Carlos Sainz took over at the top of the Dakar Rally car standings yesterday after winning the third stage around the Saudi Arabian desert city of Neom.

The Spaniard, driving a Mini buggy, led Toyota's defending champion Nasser al Attiyah of Qatar by four minutes and 55 seconds after the 427km loop that extended close to the Jordanian border.

Overnight leader Orlando Terranova dropped to third, eight minutes off the pace, after the Argentine completed the stage nearly 13 minutes slower than Sainz. Three different drivers have now won the opening stages of the first Dakar to be held in the Middle East after more than a decade in South America.

The stage win was a career 33rd for Sainz, a double world rally champion who is also father of the McLaren Formula One driver with the same name, Fernando Alonso, the first Formula One world champion to compete in the Dakar, came back strongly from a difficult Monday when he smashed a wheel and suspension and lost more than two and a half hours.

The Spaniard was fifth fastest in the stage but still two hours and 40 minutes behind Sainz in the overall classification. Khalid al Qassimi of the United Arab Emirates, seventh overall on Monday night, ended his involvement in the rally after crashing and rolling his privately-entered Peugeot.

In the motorcycle category, American Ricky Brabec won the stage on his Honda and took over the lead from Britain's Sam Sunderland.

Monday's stage winner Ross Branch injured his shoulder in a crash at the 88km mark that cost the Botswana-born rider more than an hour. "I took a bend a little too wide and there was a rock which I hit with my back wheel. It threw me off the bike and I'm feeling a little battered, but that's just the race, I suppose," he said. Yamaha's Adrien van Beveren fractured his collarbone in another crash and was taken to hospital by helicopter. Australia's defending champion Toby Price lost his way and finished the stage fifth. The rally, held entirely inside Saudi Arabia, ends in Qiddiya on Jan. 17. —Reuters



NEOM: Mini's Spanish drivers Carlos Sainz and co-driver Lucas Cruz compete during the Stage 2 of the Dakar 2020 between Al Wajh and Neom, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. — AFP

Patriots' Kraft praying Brady won't play elsewhere

NEW YORK: A rare first-round loss in the playoffs has the New England Patriots entering the offseason surrounded by unprecedented levels of drama and uncertainty. At the forefront of discussions about the future in New England for the next three months is whether quarterback Tom Brady will be back with the Patriots for a 21st season. Brady said Saturday night in the aftermath of a pick-six that helped the Tennessee Titans close out the Patriots that he considered retirement unlikely. Head coach Bill Belichick on Sunday said the Patriots weren't ready to talk about the future 12 hours after the painful postseason loss.

But owner Robert Kraft opened up to Peter King in an interview regarding where Brady could play next season. "Before the season started," Kraft said, "it was very important to Tom that he be free to do whatever he wanted at the end of the year. You know what I said to myself? That any person who plays 20 years for this team and helps us get to six Super Bowls, and been really selfless, has earned that right."

I love the young man like he's part of my family. Blood

family. Anyone who's done that has earned the right to control his future after 20 years. And you know, my hope and prayer is No. 1, he play for the Patriots. Or No. 2, he retires. He has the freedom to decide what he wants to do and what's in his own best personal interest." Brady said before the season he planned to explore all opportunities granted by a restructured contract. The Patriots have paid Brady below market value for the position while stockpiling Lombardi trophies. He was 19th among quarterbacks based in annual average value of his contract in 2019.

"If it's the Patriots, great. If that doesn't work, I don't know," Brady told King. "I just don't know. I love playing football. I still want to play football. I think I still can play at a championship level. I've just got to go do it. I'm motivated to get back to work and training."

PlaySugarHouse.com and BetRivers.com are not offering futures on where Brady's next snap will be taken due to regulatory approvals for this class of bets. If approved, they would open with Brady at +140 to play next season for another team and +700 to retire. Brady playing 2020 for the Patriots would be -180.

When Kraft was reminded of the many Hall of Fame quarterbacks to wear multiple jerseys, from Brett Favre to Joe Montana to Dan Marino and Joe Namath, the Patriots' owner said he's not ready to see Brady play for another team.

"I'm thinking of all that, of all the quarterbacks who went elsewhere, and I just hope and believe that Tom ... he is so special that he's earned the right to do



Tom Brady

what's best for him. But I just hope and pray we fit into his plans," Kraft said. "He is unique in the kind of leader he is, his work ethic, his selfless nature, everything. Think about it: He's been with us 20 percent of the life of the NFL." — Reuters

CGF to consider India's 'innovative' 2022 Birmingham proposals

NEW DELHI: India's offer to host separate Commonwealth championships for shooting and archery, both absent in the 2022 Birmingham Games, will be considered by the Commonwealth Games Federation in the coming weeks, CGF chief executive David Grevenberg said.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has offered to host, at New Delhi or Chandigarh, separate Commonwealth championships for these two disciplines months before the actual Games begins in Birmingham.

The groundbreaking proposal could pave the way for facility-sharing among member countries, said the IOA which had earlier threatened to boycott the Birmingham Games over the absence of shooting, which is an optional sport for host cities.

"The CGF can confirm that it has now officially received a proposal from Commonwealth Games India (CGI) to host a Commonwealth shooting event and potentially an archery event in India during 2022..." Grevenberg said in a CGF statement mailed to Reuters.

"The proposal will be reviewed and considered in January and February by the CGF and discussed with Birmingham 2022 Delivery Partners."

India has promised to bear the cost of these two events and wants the results to count towards the overall medal tally in Birmingham. The proposal has been supported by the Indian government as well as the International Shooting Sport Federation and World Archery.

"Key aspects of this assessment will be to ensure that the proposal conforms with our rules and regulations, is operationally deliverable, sets manageable precedents for the Commonwealth Games and ultimately adds value to athletes and the Commonwealth Sports Movement," added Grevenberg.

Shooting supplied 16 of India's 66 medals, including seven golds, at the 2018 Gold Coast Games where the country finished third in the medals table.

In shooting's absence, India could slip to anywhere between fifth and eighth in Birmingham, according to IOA estimates. — Reuters

Kubacki clinches Four Hills title with closing win

BISCHOFSHOFEN: Poland's Dawid Kubacki secured the prestigious Four Hills World Cup ski-jumping title in style on Monday with success in the closing leg at Bischofshofen.

The 29-year-old capitalised on his consistency, finishing third in the two opening jumps at Oberstdorf and Garmisch and then a close runner-up at Innsbruck on Saturday. "I'm happy that I could remain calm and do my job," said the 2019 world champion.

With only one win on the World Cup circuit in the past decade, Kubacki posted efforts of 143 metres and 140.5m for a tally of 300.9 points in the closing event to beat Germany's Karl Geiger (291 pts), in front of a 15,000-strong crowd. "It was the best 4-Hills-Tournament for me so far, I've never been that good before," said Geiger. In third came Marius Lindvik, the Norwegian outsider who had conjured up

a course record-equalling 143.5m jump to win at Garmisch and lift him into second overall. "It's been an amazing tournament for me," said the 21-year-old. "I didn't expect to be second in the overall ranking. There are so many fans at all the events that it was always nice to go back to the hotel and relax a bit." Kubacki's path to the Four Hills summit was aided by the lack of form of the big favourite, Japan's Ryoyu Kobayashi.

He stormed to Four Hills success last year with a clean sweep of wins in all four jumps. He kicked off his title defence on the right note when winning in Oberstdorf before failing to fire in the remaining three, finishing respectively fourth, 14th and seventh.

Four Hills results

Monday's 4th leg at Bischofshofen
1. Dawid Kubacki (POL) 300.9 points (143m + 140.5m), 2. Karl Geiger (GER) 291 (140m + 136m), 3. Marius Lindvik (NOR) 289.4 (139m + 137m)

Overall

1. Dawid Kubacki (POL) 1,131.6 points, 2. Marius Lindvik (NOR) 1,111, 3. Karl Geiger (GER) 1,108.4, 4. Ryoyu Kobayashi (JPN) 1,096. — AFP



BISCHOFSHOFEN: Dawid Kubacki from Poland celebrates with the trophy of the Four-Hills Ski Jumping tournament (Vierschanzentournee), in Bischofshofen, Austria, yesterday. — AFP

Red Bull secure Verstappen for next four years

LONDON: Max Verstappen has signed to stay at Red Bull until the end of 2023 in a clear vote of confidence in the former world champions' Formula One title potential and their Honda partnership.

The announcement yesterday leaves two of the top three teams with young driver talent secure for the long-term, with Ferrari announcing in December that Charles Leclerc was staying to 2024.

"I am really happy to have extended my partnership with the team. Red Bull believed in me and gave me the opportunity to start in Formula One which I have always been very grateful for," Verstappen, 22, said in a statement.

"Over the years I have grown closer and closer with the team and besides the passion from everyone and the on-track performance it is also really enjoyable to work with such a great group of people."

"Honda coming onboard and the progress we have made over the last 12 months gives me even more

motivation and the belief that we can win together...I want to win with Red Bull and our goal is of course to fight for a World Championship together."

Red Bull finished third last year in the first season of a new partnership with Honda, which proved an immediate success after the Japanese manufacturer's failed relationship with McLaren.

Verstappen was best of the rest behind Mercedes drivers Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas.

The rumour mill will now focus more on six-times world champion Hamilton, who is out of contract at the end of this year, and the future of Leclerc's four-times champion team mate Sebastian Vettel.

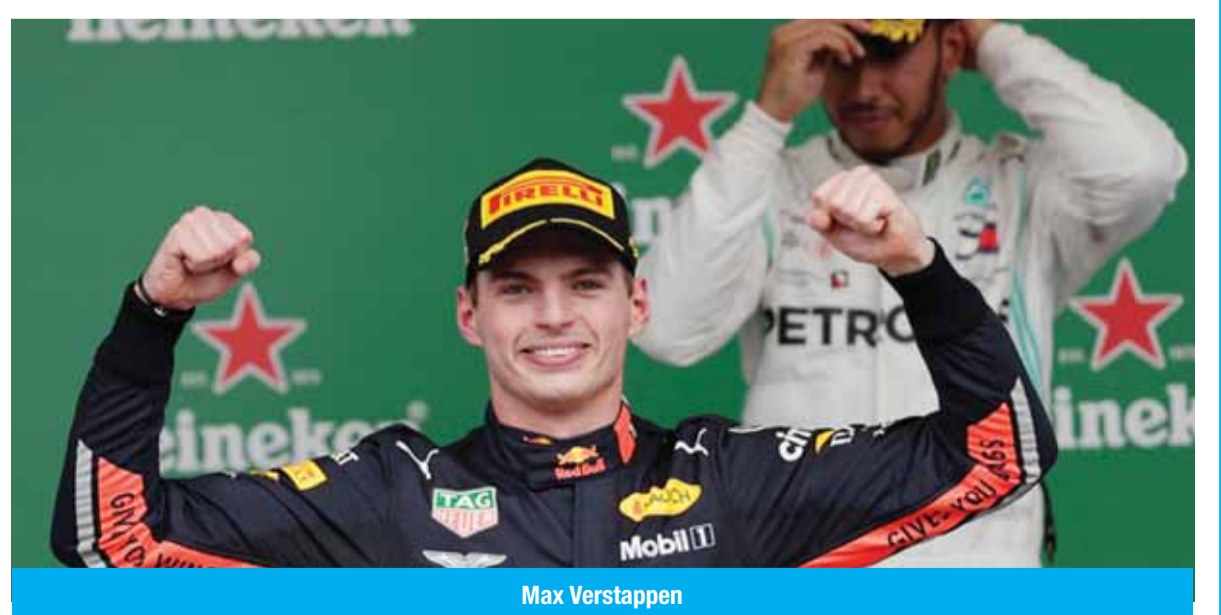
Verstappen won three races in 2019, and now has a career total of eight F1 victories, and is seen as a champion-in-waiting.

The Dutchman, who in 2016 became the youngest ever race winner in the sport's history, had been linked to both Ferrari and Mercedes in paddock speculation.

He may have damaged his Ferrari chances, however, by accusing the Italian team of cheating with their engine last season — comments that went down badly at Maranello.

Mercedes, who also have Bottas out of contract at the end of 2020, are waiting on Hamilton — who turned 35 yesterday and has had talks with Ferrari chairman John Elkann — to decide his next step.

Formula One is about to enter a new era in 2021



Max Verstappen

with sweeping rule changes and what owners Liberty Media hope will be a more level playing field.

"With the challenge of the 2021 regulation changes on the horizon continuity in as many areas as possible is key," commented team principal

Christian Horner. "Max has proven what an asset he is to the team, he truly believes in the partnership we have forged with our engine supplier Honda, and we are delighted to have extended our relationship with him." — Reuters

Sports

Inspired Ben Stokes seals dramatic England victory

England's first victory at Newlands since 1957

SCOREBOARD

Final scoreboard after the fifth day of the second Test between South Africa and England at Newlands yesterday:

England, first innings: 269	
South Africa, first innings: 223	
England, second innings: 391-8 declared	
South Africa, second innings (overnight 126-2)	
P. Malan c Stokes b Curran	84
D. Elgar c Buttler b Denly	34
Z. Hamza c Buttler b Anderson	18
K. Maharaj lbw b Anderson	2
F. du Plessis c Denly b Bess	19
H. van der Dussen c Anderson b Broad	17
Q. de Kock c Crawley b Denly	50
V. Philander c Pope b Stokes	8
D. Pretorius c Root b Stokes	0
A. Nortje c Crawley b Stokes	0
K. Rabada not out	3
Extras (b4, lb2, nb5, w2)	13
Total (2 wkts, 56 overs)	248
Fall of wicket: 1-71 (Elgar), 2-123 (Hamza), 3-129 (Maharaj), 4-164 (Du Plessis), 5-171 (Malan), 6-237 (De Kock), 7-237 (Van der Dussen), 8-241 (Pretorius), 9-241 (Nortje)	
Bowling: Anderson 18-9-23-2, Broad 23-8-37-1, Bess 33-14-57-1, Curran 16-4-37-1 (lb, lw), Denly 18-4-42-2, Root 6-0-11-0, Stokes 23.4-8-35-3 (4nb, lw)	
Result: England won by 189 runs	
Series: The four-match series is level at 1-1.	

CAPE TOWN: Ben Stokes took the last three wickets as England subdued a stubborn South Africa to win a thrilling second Test by 189 runs late on day five yesterday, their first victory at Newlands since 1957.

Quinton de Kock and Rassie van der Dussen had frustrated England for 44 overs before Stokes provided late drama to finish the match with 8.2 overs to spare and level the four-match series.

The win will be especially pleasing for England for the way they stuck to their task on a flat fifth-day wicket, with Stokes's superb burst earning the all-rounder figures of 3-35.

"A great day's play and a great test match," England seamer Stuart Broad told Sky Sports. "We had to work incredibly hard, we knew we were going to have to do that. "It was incredible discipline from South Africa throughout the day but we kept saying one bit of magic. "We set some funky fields. One breakthrough and we could apply some pressure. You need a lot of character and skill to chase 10 wickets. We are proud of taking our chances." Chasing a test record 438 to win, South Africa looked relatively comfortable as they reached 237 for five with 26 overs remaining in the match. For the second time in the innings, however, a key man gave his wicket away. De Kock (50) attempted to pull a dragged down delivery from part-time leg spinner Joe Denly and succeeded only in picking out Zak Crawley at mid-wicket.

It was an unnecessary stroke that opened the door for England and when Broad removed the obdurate Van der Dussen (17 from 140 balls), it was well and truly ajar. Stokes accounted for Dwaine Pretorius and Anrich Nortje in successive balls, both caught at slip, and sealed the victory in front of an ecstatic Barmy Army when Vernon Philander was caught fending a lifting delivery to Ollie Pope.



CAPE TOWN: South Africa's Pieter Malan (R) plays a shot as England's Dom Sibley (L) and England's Jos Buttler (C) look on during the fifth day of the second Test cricket match between South Africa and England at the Newlands stadium in Cape Town yesterday. — AFP

South Africa had given themselves a chance with some stern resistance, not least from debutant opener Pieter Malan who lasted 288 balls for his 84. But England looked on course for victory at lunch after grabbing the key wicket of South Africa captain Faf du Plessis (19), who will be disappointed with his shot selection as he tried to take on spinner Dom Bess with a powerful sweep and picked out Denly at square leg.

"The boys fought very hard. They bowled really well and congrats to them," De Kock said. "Obviously we tried to push them as far as we can. Unfortunately we fell just short. I was disappointed because we had a good partnership going and I smoked one straight to a fielder." South Africa won the first test in Pretoria by 107 runs. The third match in the four-test series starts in Port Elizabeth on Jan. 16. — Reuters

Confusion over S African position on four-day Tests

CAPE TOWN: Cricket South Africa issued a one-paragraph statement yesterday stating it was official policy to support four-day Test match cricket. But the statement appeared to surprise both the acting chief executive of Cricket South Africa and the chief executive of the South African Cricketers' Association.

The full statement by CSA read: "In view of an unsourced and misleading report in the media this morning please be advised that it is Cricket South Africa's official policy to support four-day Test match cricket. "We, in fact, hosted the first official four-day Test match between ourselves and Zimbabwe a couple of years ago." Asked to elaborate, a spokesman for CSA said he was not aware whether CSA had taken a formal decision to support a suggestion that the World Test championship should consist of four-day matches from 2023.

The proposal appears to have the support of England and Australia. The statement was made in response to an article in the London Daily Mail which claimed South Africa was opposed to four-day Tests.

Jacques Faul, the acting chief executive of CSA, said he believed all stake-holders needed to be consulted before an official position was taken. "I was not privy to any discussions which might have taken place on this issue before my appointment," he said.

Andrew Breetzke, chief executive of the S.A Cricketers' Association, said SACA aligned itself with the position of the Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA).

"We believe this is an issue which needs extensive research and discussion," he said. CSA has been hit by controversy in recent months, with SACA, at least two sponsors and two former chief executives all calling for the board to resign.—AFP

England opener Burns out of S Lanka tour

LONDON: England opening batsman Rory Burns will miss the tour of Sri Lanka in March after undergoing successful surgery on ruptured ligaments in his left ankle, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced yesterday.

The 29-year-old suffered the injury playing football — part of the squad's warm-up routine — last Thursday on the eve of the second Test against South Africa in Cape Town. There was a lot of criticism of England's practice of playing football following the injury to Burns and it has now been banned by head coach Chris Silverwood with the support of Ashley Giles, England's director of men's cricket.

Burns' injury was the second relatively serious injury to an England cricketer playing football prior to a game in just over a year. Jonny Bairstow was injured and missed several matches during a tour of Sri Lanka in October 2018. "England opening batsman Rory Burns has undergone successful surgery on ruptured ligaments in his left ankle," read the ECB statement. "Surgery took place in London on Monday afternoon.

"The Surrey captain is expected to be out of action for up to four months. "He will miss England's Test tour of Sri Lanka in March and is aiming to return to play with Surrey in the County Championship at the beginning of the 2020 season in April."—AFP

Starry rise of cricket's Labuschagne

SYDNEY: Australia's Marnus Labuschagne has joined the stars of world cricket in just five months, soaring to fourth in the batting rankings from a nondescript 110th after seizing a freak opportunity with both hands.

Labuschagne emerged from nowhere to become Test cricket's leading scorer last year with 1,104 runs, including 896 since November — bettering the great Neil Harvey (834) for most runs scored by an Australian in a five-Test summer.

The South African-born 25-year-old now shares rarefied air with cricket's elite, lagging only Virat Kohli, Steve Smith and Kane Williamson in the international rankings. "I haven't really had a chance to stop and reflect on the summer that I have had," Labuschagne said after his double century against New Zealand last week in Sydney.

"Looking at it, it has been a very special summer but the real privilege is playing in this team." None of this may have happened if Labuschagne had not grabbed his chance as a concussion substitute during Australia's Ashes campaign in England last August.

It was during the second Test at Lord's when master Australian batsman Smith was felled by a vicious bouncer off England paceman Jofra Archer in the second innings. Smith's departure opened the way for Labuschagne to become the first concussion substitute in a Test match after a change in the International Cricket Council's regulations.

He made the most of his opportunity, reeling off four consecutive half-centuries and finishing the Ashes series with 353 runs at 50.42 — even earning comparisons with the stellar Smith.

If Labuschagne's career took off during the Ashes, it has rocketed into the stratosphere this Australian summer. He peeled off two centuries against Pakistan, finishing the two-Test series with 347 runs at 173.50, and he was at another level against the Black Caps.

'Purist' Tendulkar against 4-day Tests

MUMBAI: Indian batting great Sachin Tendulkar told Reuters he is firmly opposed to shortening test matches to four days from five and has warned against straying too far from the game's roots in the quest to attract a younger audience.

The International Cricket Council (ICC), the sport's world governing body, is set to discuss the idea of reducing all Test matches by a day to free up a crowded international calendar. The future of the longest format has been the subject of debate since the rise of Twenty20 leagues over the last decade coincided with dwindling crowds at Test matches outside cricket hotbeds Australia and England.

However, Tendulkar told Reuters there were other ways of making Test matches more attractive and halting the drift toward the shorter formats. "I feel a purist will always enjoy a five-day match, because that is where you find the challenges," he said.

"We should not be looking at Test cricket as a longer format of a limited-overs match." Tendulkar retired from international cricket in 2013 and remains the leading scorer in the format with 15,921 runs and a record 51 hundreds.

He said that while the game continues to evolve it would be a mistake to focus on the latest trends at the expense of Tests. "From Test cricket, one-day cricket started, which people enjoyed, and from there T20 came and next the 100-ball will come," he added.

"A number of new things are being produced for the



SYDNEY: Australia's Marnus Labuschagne signs autographs after winning the third cricket Test match between Australia and New Zealand at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney on January 6, 2020. — AFP

The gum-chewing number three scored 143 in Perth before reaching his highest Test score of 215 in the third Test in Sydney.

"People like Marnus, you see someone with incredible work ethic, incredible hunger to get better, very coachable and incredible energy," said Australia coach Justin Langer, who plucked Labuschagne from relative obscurity to play for the national team.

"He brings so much to the team, not just batting and bowling." Such has been Labuschagne's growing profile that Australia batting great Ricky Ponting has tagged him as a potential future Test captain.

"Labuschagne is one that will come into the conversation in 12-18 months' time once he's properly established himself in the team," Ponting said. "He seems like the right sort of guy to maybe be a captain down the track at some point."

Another former Australia captain Greg Chappell says Labuschagne has the temperament and technique to become one of Australia's best number three bats-

men alongside Ponting, Don Bradman and himself.

"He has always had a solid technique and shots on both sides of the wicket," Chappell said. "He is looking to score runs. He is not looking to survive. "He is always looking to get a single, looking to get off strike, looking for the bad ball... they are the traits that I have seen in nearly 70 years of watching cricket that the good players have." Labuschagne has been an avid watcher of team-mate Steve Smith's quirky batting technique and has adopted his extravagant 'light sabre leave', mimicking Smith's flourish after leaving the ball outside off-stump. Labuschagne understands the rich history of batting greats Australia has had coming in at one wicket down, declaring the role had been a "pinnacle one for Australia and there is a lot that comes with that".

"The standard is so high. For me, it's about upholding that standard," he said. "That is making sure I am sticking to the process and trusting my game and not trying to be anyone else — making that position mine in my own way." — AFP

newer generation. But while you are learning new things you cannot forget your roots. "As a purist, it is important test cricket stays the way it is." Four-day matches were given the green light by the ICC in 2017 when South Africa hosted Zimbabwe, and England have since played one against Ireland.

With an increasing number of tests finishing before the fifth day, administrators are keen to free up space in the schedule for more lucrative shorter-form matches.

Tendulkar said they should instead focus on producing better playing surfaces to make tests more appealing. "What is the heart of test cricket? I think the heart of test cricket is to provide a good pitch where there is enough for the bowlers throughout the match," he said.

"The ICC should look to provide exciting wickets for spectators to come and watch. You need to provide surfaces where the bowlers are testing batters also. "There are two formats — ODIs and T20s — where the bowlers are being tested, so you've got to have one format where the batters are being tested.

"That's why it's called test cricket — it has to test everyone. "If you provide good pitches which have something for the bowlers, test cricket will find more eyeballs."

Tendulkar, the only cricketer to score 100 centuries across all formats, fears cutting Tests by a day would produce more draws and would be detrimental to spin-bowlers, who tend to thrive on deteriorating wickets towards the backend of Tests.

"I feel spinners look forward to day four and five when there is wear and tear on a scuffed-up surface," he said. "It's like taking day one out of a Test match for fast bowlers. On day five there are a number of things which happen in test cricket. You are completely taking them away. "Teams which have got spinners, for sure, will suffer. Subcontinental teams rely on spinners. "Like how you play



Sachin Tendulkar

on a green top on day one against seamers, you should be able to play spin bowling also on scuffed-up tracks," he said. "That is also part of cricket." Improving the competitiveness of teams outside the top five nations of India, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and England would also make Test cricket a more attractive product.

"Everyone is focusing on quantity, five days to four days ... we need to focus more on quality," he said. "With all due respect there are certain teams which are not challenging the leading five teams. The ICC should be concerned about more teams playing test cricket and being competitive.

"But that competitiveness is missing completely. So, one needs to focus on how could we lift that standard and how we could get them back in Test cricket at a level where they are competitive." — Reuters

Sports

Spurs hand Bucks worst loss of season, Bogdanovic, Jazz outlast Pelicans late

Doncic delivers another triple-double as Mavs beat Bulls

SAN ANTONIO: DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points, and Patty Mills had 21 off the bench as the San Antonio Spurs routed the visiting Milwaukee Bucks 126-104 on Monday night to snap a two-game losing streak. The Spurs led by 10 points after three quarters and ran their advantage to 16 points early in the final period. Milwaukee closed to within 100-89 with 8:12 to play but never made a serious run down the stretch. LaMarcus Aldridge and Rudy Gay scored 17 points each for the Spurs, with Dejounte Murray scoring 13 points and Trey Lyles pulling down 12 rebounds. San Antonio set its season high with 19 3-pointers (on 35 attempts) in the win. The loss snapped a five-game winning streak for Milwaukee, which had not lost by more than 12 points all season. Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 24 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists but missed all five of his 3-point attempts.

DALLAS MAVERICKS 118 - CHICAGO BULLS 110
Luka Doncic registered a triple-double for the second straight game, contributing 38 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists to boost Dallas to a victory against visiting Chicago. Doncic scored a career-high 21 points in the third quarter, capping the flurry with a deep 3-pointer. Dwight Powell (16 points), Tim Hardaway Jr. (15) and Dorian Finney-Smith (11) also finished in double figures for the Mavericks. Lauri Markkanen scored 26 points to lead six Bulls in double figures. Tomas Satoransky (11 points, 14 assists) notched a double-double for Chicago, which has lost four straight and five of six to fall a season-worst 11 games below .500.

SACRAMENTO KINGS 111 - GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS 98
Trevor Ariza contributed 3-pointers to second- and third-quarter runs that allowed host Sacramento to pull away from Golden State for a blowout, in a game that saw the ejection of Warriors coach Steve Kerr. Buddy Hield and De'Aaron Fox led five players, including two reserves, in double figures with 21 points apiece as the Kings made quick work of their opponent on the opening night of a back-to-back. Sacramento visit Phoenix yesterday. The Warriors, who rested Draymond Green and had D'Angelo Russell out for the fourth straight game, trailed by as many as 31 before dropping their fifth straight.

DENVER NUGGETS 123 - ATLANTA HAWKS 115
Nikola Jokic scored a career-high 47 points, and

Will Barton added a season-high 28 to help visiting Denver outlast Atlanta. Jokic was 16-for-25 from the field, with four of the made baskets 3-pointers, and surpassed his career previous high of 41 set against the Brooklyn Nets in 2017. His best previous output this season was 31 points against Memphis on Dec. 28. Jokic also had eight rebounds and five assists. Barton went 12-for-20 from the field, including three 3-pointers, to eclipse his season-best 26 against Philadelphia on Dec. 10. He also added nine rebounds and five assists. Jokic and Barton combined to go 7 of 14 from 3-point range.

PHILADELPHIA 76ERS 120 - OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER 113
Josh Richardson scored 23 points, and Ben Simmons added 17 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists as host Philadelphia held off Oklahoma City. Tobias Harris scored 18 points, and Joel Embiid had 18 points, nine rebounds and a season-high eight assists for the Sixers, who improved to 17-2 at home and also snapped a four-game losing streak. Al Horford scored 13 points. Steven Adams led the Thunder with a season-best 24 points to go along with 15 rebounds, while Dennis Schroder added 21 points. Chris Paul and Danilo Gallinari had 18 points each for the Thunder, who had their five-game winning streak broken.

UTAH JAZZ 128 - NEW ORLEANS PELICANS 126
Bojan Bogdanovic scored 35 points, and visiting Utah knocked off New Orleans to win its sixth straight game. The Jazz held the Pelicans scoreless for the final 1:27. Rudy Gobert, who finished with 19 rebounds, disrupted Brandon Ingram's attempted tying layup with one second left. Joe Ingles finished with 22 points, and Donovan Mitchell scored 19 for the Jazz, including the winning bucket with 1:12 to play. Ingram had 35 to lead the Pelicans, who played without second-leading scorer Jue Holiday, who has a left elbow contusion. JJ Redick added 23, Lonzo Ball had 21 and E'Twaun Moore came off the bench to score 13.

INDIANA PACERS 115 - CHARLOTTE HORNETS 104
T.J. Warren helped ignite a big third quarter and finished with 36 points as Indiana won at Charlotte for only its second victory in the last six games. Warren, a forward playing in his home state, posted 13 points in Indiana's 37-point third quarter, the most points in a



SACRAMENTO: Willie Cauley-Stein #2 of the Golden State Warriors shoots the ball against the Sacramento Kings at Golden 1 Center in Sacramento, California. — AFP

quarter this season for the Pacers. Warren finished 15-for-24 from the field and 6-for-6 on free throws. Domantas Sabonis racked up 18 points and 12 rebounds, Myles Turner had 15 points and Jeremy Lamb added 11 points for the Pacers.

WASHINGTON WIZARDS 99 - BOSTON CELTICS 94
Ish Smith scored 14 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, and Washington beat visiting Boston. Jordan McRae added 19 points for the Wizards, and Isaiah Thomas scored 17 against his former team. The undermanned Wizards won their second straight game and have posted home wins against the Miami Heat, Denver Nuggets and Celtics in an eight-day span. Jaylen Brown had 23 points and 12 rebounds for the Celtics, who never led. Jayson Tatum had 17 points, and Gordon

Hayward finished with 10 points and 10 rebounds.

ORLANDO MAGIC 101 - BROOKLYN NETS 89
Markelle Fultz scored 12 of his career-high 25 points in the fourth quarter, and Orlando made all the plays down the stretch to beat visiting Brooklyn. Reserve D.J. Augustin added 16 points for the Magic, who outscored the Nets by a 26-18 margin in the fourth quarter. Wes Iwundu contributed 12, while Nikola Vucevic went scoreless until midway through the third quarter but finished with 11 points and 24 rebounds. Spencer Dinwiddie and Joe Harris scored 16 points apiece to lead the Nets, who continued to struggle in fourth quarters. After getting outscored 38-22 in the final 12 minutes of Saturday's loss to Toronto, the Nets shot 7 of 23 in the fourth. — Reuters

Controversy lingers as S Arabia gets set to welcome Spanish Super Cup

MADRID: Real Madrid and Barcelona will be among those tussling for the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia this week, amid controversy over a tournament held faraway from home in a country long-condemned for its record on human rights.

Spain's two most decorated clubs could face off in a Clasic final in Jeddah on Sunday if Real Madrid beat in-form Valencia and Barca can overcome Atletico Madrid in the semis. Yet the prospect of another showdown between La Liga's leading pair has been overshadowed by criticism, with lingering concerns about a Spanish competition being played on a different continent, more than 4,000 miles (6,400 km) away.

The financial incentives on offer, both to the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), who run the competition, and the four clubs taking part are bound to have been persuasive. For agreeing to participate alone, Barcelona and Real Madrid will receive six million euros (\$6.72 million) while Atletico and Valencia will pocket around three million euros each. If Barca and Real Madrid reach the final, it is expected they will earn around 10 million euros for the week.

The RFEF, meanwhile, has an agreement for the tournament to be held in Saudi Arabia for three years, for which it will earn a total of 120 million euros, an amount it claims will be put back into the women's game and lower leagues.

President Luis Rubiales has also said the old format, involving a final in August between the league champions and cup winners, was no longer capturing the imagination of fans. "The Super Cup was doomed to death," said Rubiales in November.

"The money we will get is not for building a villa. It will go to women's football and the clubs in Segunda B and Tercera. Of course money is important, who can deny that? Money is very important but the money will go where it is needed."

Saudi Arabia has followed the lead of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates by accelerating its investment in sports events to exert soft power and cast a more positive image of the country across the world.

"There is a very offensive policy to host major sporting events... to spread a different image of Saudi Arabia," Carole Gomez, a researcher at the Institute of International and Strategic Relations, told AFP.

But Rubiales believes the Spanish Super Cup can be used as a force for good. "In the world there are food, economic, social inequalities," he said. "We can avoid it or we can try to contribute to change."

Amid criticism of Saudi Arabia's treatment of women, agreements have been reached between the RFEF and the Spanish authorities to ensure women will have free access to the King Abdullah Stadium, where all three fixtures will be played.

In January 2018, women were allowed to enter a stadium to watch football in Saudi Arabia for the first time. "Women can enter all these events," the Saudi ambassador to Spain, Mansour Bin Khalid Al Farhan Al-Saud, told Marca last month. — AFP

Kahn promises to keep cool on Bayern board

BERLIN: Former goalkeeper Oliver Kahn promised yesterday that he will tone down his notorious temper in his new boardroom role at Bayern Munich.

Kahn was known as a hothead in his 14 years as Bayern number one, but at a press conference yesterday he said there would be "no slide tackles in the meeting room". "Emotionality was important for me as a player, but in business it is not necessarily so helpful," grinned Kahn.

The 50-year-old joined the board at the German champions officially last week, and will succeed Karl-Heinz Rummenigge as Bayern CEO in January 2022.

In the meantime, he will work closely alongside both Rummenigge and sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic in a two-year "acclimatisation period". At his official presentation yesterday, Kahn promised to be "100 percent Bayern Munich from this day forth".

The club legend will be charged with building a new era at Bayern, following the departure of Rummenigge and long-term club patriarch Uli Hoeness, who stepped down as president last year. Kahn said he was aware of the high expectations at Bayern, adding that the challenge "suits my character".

"A great Bayern coach once said that if you sign a contract here, you have to know what you are letting yourself in for," he said. "At Bayern, it is about being the number one in every area. We want to give the fans excellent football, and for that we need to create the economic condi-

Reiss goal sees Arsenal edge past Leeds

LONDON: Arsenal's Reiss Nelson scored early in the second half to secure a 1-0 win over battling Championship leaders Leeds United in the FA Cup third round at The Emirates on Monday. Nelson put a near full-strength home side ahead in the 55th minute, scrappily side-footing the ball into the net after the Leeds defence was caught out by an Alexandre Lacazette cross. Arsenal, who have won the world's oldest cup competition a record 13 times — but lost to Leeds in the 1972 final — visit fellow Premier League side Bournemouth in the fourth round.

Leeds had taken the game to Arsenal straight from the whistle, pushing forward and blasting 11 shots on goal to the hosts' one in the first 25 minutes alone.

They dominated possession and striker Patrick Bamford was unlucky not to score after 15 minutes when he collected the ball from Jack Harrison but curled his close-range shot onto the bar. Arsenal by contrast looked a shadow of the side who beat Manchester United 2-0 in the Premier League on New Year's Day.

But Mikel Arteta's side looked a different team in the second half, with Lacazette whipping an early free-kick off the bar and David Luiz going close before Nelson struck.

"Leeds are a great team and they pressed us, we didn't expect it. We got the goal in the end and that is the most important thing," said Nelson.

"This will give us confidence to go forward," Lacazette



MUNICH: New board member of German first division Bundesliga football club FC Bayern Munich, Oliver Kahn (R) and Bayern's new president Herbert Hainer give a press conference for Kahn's official presentation yesterday. — AFP

tions," Kahn added that reinvigorating Bayern's youth system would be "one of the most important topics" of his tenure. New president Herbert Hainer said that Kahn had been hired for his "football expertise, business expertise and Bayern DNA".

The legendary goalkeeper won the Champions League, the UEFA Cup and eight Bundesliga titles with Bayern before his retirement in 2008. He was Bayern's hero in the 2001 Champions League triumph, saving three penalties in the final shootout with Valencia. Aside from his goalkeeping prowess, Kahn was also known for his on-field aggression, which earned him the nickname "volcano". Since retirement, he has worked as a pundit for German broadcaster ZDF and earned a master's degree in business management. — AFP



LONDON: Arsenal's French midfielder Matteo Guendouzi (L) vies with Leeds United's Northern Irish midfielder Stuart Dallas (R) during the English FA Cup third round football match between Arsenal and Leeds United at The Emirates Stadium in London. Arsenal won the game 1-0. — AFP

said Arteta gave the players a firm talking to at halftime, although the manager made it sound less daunting.

"Now I'm really pleased but we saw two different teams from the first to second half. I tried to tell them exactly what they were going to face and after 32 minutes we'd won one duel," he said.

"We changed our attitude, desire and organisation at halftime and then we were completely different. It was good for my players to learn and to suffer on the pitch."

Both sides fielded second-string keepers — with Emiliano Martinez coming in for Arsenal and Illan Meslier for Leeds — and the home side were missing striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang due to illness, but otherwise they fielded strong lineups. — Reuters

Empty stands and absent stars a sign of FA Cup's slow demise

LONDON: The FA Cup third round used to have pride of place among the showpiece dates of the English football calendar, but a weekend of empty stands and much-changed teams showed there appears to be little romance left for the cup.

After a gruelling festive fixture schedule saw four rounds of Premier League games crammed into 13 days either side of Christmas and new year, managers from the 20 top flight teams made a combined 136 changes.

Crystal Palace, Brighton and Aston Villa were the only Premier League sides to pay the penalty for resting first-team regulars against Championship opposition with even many of the sides further down the pyramid taking the chance to rotate.

The 24 Championship sides made 171 alterations to their starting line-ups. Many fans also took the opportunity for a weekend break from football with attendances for Premier League and Championship clubs down over 150,000 on their previous home matches.

Cardiff narrowly avoided their lowest ever attendance since moving to the 33,000 capacity Cardiff City Stadium over a decade ago. Just 5,828 saw Saturday's 2-2 draw with Carlisle with only one of the four stands even opened.

"I think the amount of fixtures in the schedule over this period makes it very difficult for supporters to support every single game," said Cardiff manager Neil Harris. He was not alone in calling for a change to the schedule if the cup is to be revived.

After a gruelling December in which his side played nine games across four different competitions, Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp made nine changes as the youthful Reds still inflicted more Merseyside derby pain on Everton with a 1-0 win at Anfield.

"Two players started the last game, one of them got injured," said Klopp after James Milner limped off inside 10 minutes. "That's the situation we are in, that's why a lot of managers make a lot of changes. It's nothing to do with the cup, it's the timing."

However, others believe more radical changes are needed to the format to halt the FA Cup's decline.

Replays have already been abolished from the fifth round, but Wolves manager Nuno Espirito Santo said he would have preferred a penalty shootout than another go at Manchester United after a 0-0 draw at Molineux.

From this season the fifth round has also been moved to a midweek to allow a Premier League winter break for the first time over two weekends in February. The Premier League taking priority and people's attention has been a recurring theme of the FA Cup's dwindling attraction. — AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

SPANISH SUPER CUP	
Valencia C.F v Real Madrid CF	22:00
beIN Sports	
ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP	
Leicester City v Aston Villa	23:00
beIN Sports	

25 Two-time champion Sainz seizes lead on day three of Dakar Rally



26 Inspired Ben Stokes seals dramatic England victory



27 Kahn promises to keep cool on Bayern board



Kuwait Sports Club lift Crown Prince Cup



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and the victorious Kuwait Sports Club players after they beat Arabi Sports Club on penalties yesterday to win the Crown Prince Cup. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Sports Club clinched the 27th Crown Prince Cup for the eighth time in its history after beating Al-Arabi Sports Club in a penalty shootout (3-2) yesterday at Jaber International Stadium.

The match was held under the patronage and presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The first half witnessed a defensive approach by both sides. Play was limited with the passage of time, and the players of two teams kept calm with counterattacks to open the score, but the net was impenetrable for them.

With the start of the second half, Kuwait Sports Club imposed its rhythm on the course of the game, tightened its control, launched several

attacks and threatened Al-Arabi's goal on more than one occasion, but all attempts of the two teams were unsuccessful, and the match ended in a goalless draw.

The match moved into extra time, which witnessed several offensive attempts by both teams, but the score remained the same. In the penalty shootout, Kuwait Sports Club goalkeeper saved

three penalties, which decided the winner.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah handed the trophy to the captain of Kuwait SC Hussein Hakeem, and also handed the medals to the winners and runners-up. Al-Arabi had qualified for the final by defeating Al-Nasr with a clean goal, while Kuwait Sports Club had beaten Khaitan Sports Club 2-0. — KUNA

Kyrgios topples Tsitsipas

SYDNEY: A battling Nick Kyrgios earned a morale-boosting victory over world number six Stefano Tsitsipas yesterday, while Russia and Britain booked their spots in the ATP Cup quarter-finals.

Tsitsipas was on a roll after thrashing Alexander Zverev on Monday, but met his match in the temperamental Australian, who was on his best behaviour during the high-quality 7-6 (9/7), 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/5) win.

"It was exhausting but a lot of fun. I knew it was going to be very tough... he's an amazing player and so young and is going to do some special things in this sport," said Kyrgios, who missed his last match with a sore back.

"I'm just glad we got the win. There was a lot of respect out there. He's a good player, a good kid." Australia took the tie, with John Millman winning the other singles against Greece's Michail Pervolarakis 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/1).

In contrast, Zverev cut a miserable figure after he meekly succumbed to another defeat, with the world number seven having some serious problems to iron out ahead of the Australian Open this month.

"Generally I'm not playing good, so there's a lot of things that I still need to improve, but it's the start of the season,"

said the German after crashing to Canada's Denis Shapovalov 6-2, 6-2.

"The first match (against Alex de Minaur) I actually thought I played okay — the serving was horrible — but then I played two very bad matches, but what can I do." His poor form contributed to the Boris Becker-led Germany losing two of their three ties.

VERY SPECIAL

Australia, along with Novak Djokovic's Serbia, had already qualified for the last eight in the 24-nation tournament as winners of their respective groups and they were joined by Russia, with Britain also sneaking in.

The British were on tenterhooks, with their fate in the hands of Belgium and Bulgaria after they beat Moldova 3-0. Belgium ended up crushing the dreams of Grigor Dimitrov's Bulgaria in a deciding doubles clash and in doing so allowed Britain to win the group.

It was a cruel end for Dimitrov and his young team. They looked on track after Dimitar Kuzmanov thrashed Steve Darcis in the opening singles and Dimitrov took the first set in his showdown with David Goffin.

But Goffin bounced back to win with

Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen clinching the doubles. "Tough finding words right now. A very special feeling after pulling out the win today," said Vliegen after beating Dimitrov and Kuzmanov 3-6, 6-4, 10-7.

Britain put themselves in contention by thrashing Moldova, with Dan Evans crushing Radu Albot and Cameron Norrie easing past Alexander Cozbinov before Jamie Murray and Joe Salisbury won the doubles.

Rafael Nadal's Spain will also make the last eight if they beat Japan in Perth on Wednesday, as will the Marin Cilic-led Croatia by beating Argentina in Sydney. The two best runners-up also go through and will be determined on the last day of round robin play today.

World number five Daniil Medvedev steered Russia to victory, ending Norwegian Casper Ruud's giant-killing run with a 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) win as the US Open finalist continued his ominous form.

"Against Casper I knew I had to finish some points at the net," he said. "I knew I had to be aggressive and I think it helped me a lot." World number 17 Karen Khachanov easily beat Viktor Durasovic 6-2, 6-1 in the other singles before Russia made it 3-0 in the doubles. — AFP

India cruise to T20 win over S Lanka

INDORE: Fast bowler Navdeep Saini led a disciplined Indian bowling performance to set up a seven-wicket win over Sri Lanka in the second Twenty20 international in Indore yesterday.

Saini returned impressive figures of 2-18 while fellow paceman Shardul Thakur claimed three wickets to help restrict Sri Lanka to 142 for nine, a total the hosts surpassed in 17.3 overs to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. The opening match was rained off.

"This was a clinical performance, and that's how we want to build on each series. We have ticked a few more boxes this time," said skipper Virat Kohli. "Brilliant from Navdeep. He has done well in ODI cricket, and he's bowling well in T20s, with experienced guys like Jasprit (Bumrah), Bhuvni (Bhuvneshwar Kumar) and Shardul. It's a really good sign for the team."

The 27-year-old Saini, who made his one-day international debut against West Indies on December 22, was adjudged man of the match in his seventh T20 for India. KL Rahul, who top-scored with 45, and Shikhar Dhawan, who made 32, on his return from injury, put on 71

runs for the opening wicket to lay the platform for India's comfortable chase on a good batting pitch. Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga sent back the two openers as he bowled Rahul with a googly and then dismissed Dhawan lbw after a successful Sri Lanka review. Shreyas Iyer, who scored 34 before falling to paceman Lahiru Kumara, and Kohli, who made an unbeaten 30 and hit the winning six, put on a key 51-run stand for the third wicket.

But it was the Indian bowlers who built the platform for victory after Kohli won the toss and elected to field first. Sri Lanka kept losing wickets at regular intervals despite a brisk start but it was wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav's two strikes including Kusal Perera, for 28, that put a lid on the islanders' scoring. Saini, who bowled opener Danushka Gunathilaka for 20, claimed Bhanuka Rajapaksa caught behind for nine, as Sri Lanka slipped to 104 for five. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah also took a wicket on his return from a four-month injury lay-off by bowling Dasun Shanaka with a slower ball. Thakur returned in his final over and the team's 19th to rattle the lower-order with three strikes including two in successive deliveries. Hasaranga signed off the innings with three successive fours off Bumrah but his effort was not enough.

"I thought we were lacking by about 25 runs. We were looking at 160 or so," said Sri Lanka captain Lasith Malinga. "The bowlers did a good job of sticking to their job." The third and final match is on Friday in Pune. — AFP