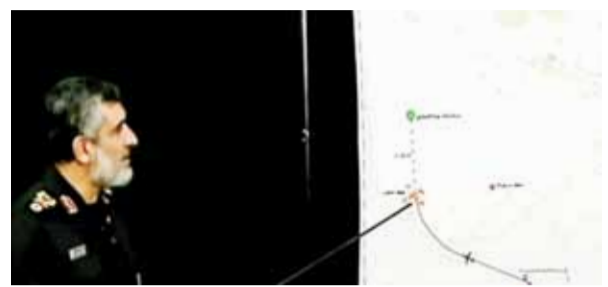




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Sultan Qaboos passes away: World loses wise leader

Successor vows to pursue peace • Amir sends condolences, orders three days of mourning

MUSCAT/KUWAIT: Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said, one of the Middle East's longest serving rulers who maintained the country's neutrality in regional struggles, died on Friday and his cousin Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said was named as his successor in a smooth transition. With his death, the region loses a trusted and seasoned leader, seen as the father of modern Oman, who balanced ties between two neighbors locked in a regional struggle, Saudi Arabia to the west and Iran to the north, as well as the United States.

In a televised speech, Sultan Haitham promised to uphold Muscat's policy of peaceful coexistence and friendly relations with all nations while further developing Oman. "We will continue to assist in resolving disputes peacefully," he said. Oman and fellow Gulf states declared three days of official mourning with flags to be flown at half-mast for Sultan Qaboos. His funeral procession passed along Muscat's main road amid tight security as Omanis thronged the palm tree-lined route, some reaching out their hands and others taking pictures.

The casket, draped in the Omani flag, was carried into Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque where hundreds joined prayers inside. Sultan Qaboos was later buried in a family cemetery. A family council convened yesterday and chose Haitham after opening a sealed envelope in which Qaboos had secretly written his recommendation in case the family could not agree, opting to follow his "wise" guidance, state media said.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber

Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of condolences to Sultan Haitham, lamenting the death of Sultan Qaboos. He expressed great grief over the passing of Sultan Qaboos, expressing his deep condolences to the Omani leadership and people. HH Sheikh Sabah said that the late Sultan Qaboos was a brother and a personal friend with whom he shared admiration and respect, affirming that the world as well as the Gulf, Arab and Islamic nations had lost a very important figure and leader who dedicated his life to the causes of the Arab and Islamic countries. HH the Amir commended the achievements of Oman during the reign of Sultan Qaboos and also remembered the strong stance of Oman in support of Kuwait during the 1990 Iraqi invasion and subsequent participation of Omani forces in the liberation of Kuwait. Sheikh Sabah also recalled Sultan Qaboos' aid of Kuwaiti citizens and his efforts to host them in Oman during the occupation of Kuwait. HH the Amir affirmed his feelings of sorrow towards Sultan Haitham, the leadership of Oman and people. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

HH the Amir also ordered official mourning for three days from yesterday. All government institutions will shut down and the Kuwait flag will fly at half-mast for three days, according to a government statement read by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. The education ministry also announced all schools in Kuwait will remain closed till Monday. — Agencies

SEE PAGES 2 & 3



Sultan Qaboos bin Said



Sultan Haitham bin Tariq

CONDOLENCES

On behalf of the

**Zain Group Board of Directors,
Management and employees,**

we would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to the people of the Sultanate of Oman on the passing of

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said

We hold members of the **Royal Family in Oman** in our closest thoughts and prayers at this difficult time, and stand with the people of this great Gulf nation in their sense of loss and grief.

The Sultan shall remain a great inspiration within the Arab world and beyond for his leadership, vision, compassion and ability to unify people.

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

Qaboos, the sultan who shielded Oman from region's turmoil



RIYADH: A file photo taken on December 19, 2011, shows a handout picture released by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders during their annual summit in Riyadh. The monarchs of the six nations are (from left) Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Kuwait's Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Qatar's Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the United Arab Emirates' Prime Minister and ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa. —AFP



MUSCAT: In this February 20, 2017 file photo, Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said welcomes Kuwait's Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Al-Alam Palace in Muscat, Oman during the Amir's visit to the Sultanate. — KUNA

MUSCAT: Oman's Sultan Qaboos, who died on Friday aged 79, transformed the former Arabian Peninsula backwater into a modern state and sought-after mediator while shielding the sultanate from a region in turmoil. The intensely private sultan — the longest-reigning ruler in the modern Arab world — left no apparent heir and the royal family was charged with selecting a successor.

Instead however they opted for the sultan's own choice, his cousin Haitham bin Tariq, who was named in a sealed letter that Qaboos had prepared in case of a deadlock.

Qaboos was born on November 18, 1940, into the centuries-old Al-Said dynasty in the southern provincial capital of Salalah, in an isolated country on the margins of the modern world. Older Omanis recall the capital Muscat had no electricity or running water and the gates of the medieval city were locked at dusk.

The young Qaboos was sent abroad for his education to Britain, attending the elite Sandhurst Royal Military Academy from where he graduated in 1962. He went on to join a British infantry battalion in Germany, returning home to bide his time under the close watch of his father, Sultan Said bin Taymur. On July 23, 1970, Qaboos became the new sultan, pledging "a new era" for the nation.

Guardian of the Strait

Oman is strategically located on the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow seaway through which much of the world's oil

supply passes — and between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia. Qaboos maintained good ties with both nations, a balancing act that made his capital a must-stop for Western and Arab diplomats as well as military chiefs alike.

The sultan's first foreign trip was to Iran, whose shah — along with the British — helped him quell the Marxist insurgency he inherited from his father in the restive Dhofar region. Those ties endured through Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution that ushered in a Shiite theocracy. Muscat would serve as the back channel for talks between the United States and Iran in the lead-up to a landmark 2015 nuclear deal.

Qaboos also worked to preserve ties with Saudi Arabia and the rest of the wealthy six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council to which Oman belongs, but stuck to his principle of non-interference. In 2015, Oman was the only GCC country not to join a Saudi-led military coalition against Iran-backed Huthi rebels in Yemen. It leveraged this neutrality to mediate the release of multiple foreign hostages captured by Yemen's warring factions. Muscat also maintained close military and economic ties with Britain and the US.

Unlike other Arab states, Qaboos did not contest Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel, opening a trade office in Tel Aviv in the mid-1990s — shuttered in 2000 during a Palestinian uprising. In October 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held surprise talks

with Qaboos in Muscat — a move that raised Palestinian fears of a normalization of ties. Qaboos faced rare protests at the height of the Arab Spring in 2011 and responded by sacking ministers accused of corruption.

All the top posts

Qaboos assumed power as an unknown and spent his first years cultivating the respect of his countrymen, from the mountainous interior to the coast. "In the early years, he went village to village and he had a weekly radio address — that was the only way to reach the entire population at the time," said Muscat-based public policy analyst Ahmed al-Mukhaini.

Qaboos channeled revenues from fledgling oil exports into infrastructure, taking the country from having just a handful of primary schools and some eight kilometers (six miles) of paved roads to a modern state with well over 1,000 schools and a massive highway network. The sultan also commissioned an opera house for Muscat, its packed calendar a testament to his support for the arts.

But Qaboos was no ceremonial monarch. He held every top post, from commander of the armed forces to finance minister. In 1991, he offered a modicum of democracy, creating a Consultative Council — with elected members — to complement the State Council — whose members he appointed. — AFP



In this file photo taken on November 18, 2016 Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said attends a military parade in the capital Muscat, marking the Sultanate's 46th National Day.



A file handout photo taken released on December 19, 2011, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz welcomes Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said at the start of the (GCC) summit meeting in Riyadh.



In this file photo taken on August 04, 2009, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad welcomes Oman's leader, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, at the presidential offices in Tehran.



This file photo taken on January 14, 2011, shows a handout picture released by the Palestinian president's office (PPO), of Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said welcoming Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas at the royal palace in Muscat.



In this file handout photo obtained from the Omani Royal Palace on October 26, 2018 shows Oman's Sultan Qaboos meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the capital Muscat during the latter's unannounced visit to the Gulf country.



This file handout photo from the Palestinian Authority, dated January 6, 2001, shows Oman's Sultan Qaboos welcoming Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat during a visit to the Gulf Sultanate in Muscat.



In this file photo taken on December 26, 1994 from the Israeli Government Press office (GPO) shows Sultan Qaboos of Oman shaking hands with then Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in Muscat, Oman.



An undated file photo taken in the mid-1900s shows Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said in Salalah, Oman.



In this file photo taken on April 06, 1999, Oman's Sultan Qaboos greets South Africa's then President Nelson Mandela upon his arrival in Muscat at the start of a short Gulf tour to promote investments in South Africa.

Oman ruler backs policy that made kingdom vital mediator

MUSCAT: Oman's new royal ruler pledged yesterday to follow the non-interference policy that made the kingdom a vital regional mediator under his late cousin Sultan Qaboos who reigned for half a century. Haitham bin Tariq, the culture minister, was sworn in shortly after modern Oman's founding father was laid to rest after his death on Friday at the age of 79.

"We will follow the path of the late sultan," Haitham, 65, said in his first public speech which was aired live on state television. He expressed support for "our country's foreign policy of peaceful living among nations and peoples... and not interfering in the internal affairs of others, respecting nations' sovereignty and international cooperation."

Qaboos transformed the Arabian Peninsula nation from a backwater into a modern state with a thriving tourism industry, thanks to the country's crystal waters and scenic mountain ranges. But it was the sultan's policy of neutrality and non-interference that elevated Oman's standing as a "Switzerland of the Middle East" and made him an important go-between. Qaboos, the longest-serving leader of the modern Arab world, came to power in 1970. His death came after a long illness and he was believed to be suffering from colon cancer.

The late sultan, who was unmarried and had no children, left no apparent heir. Under the constitution, his successor was to be selected in a meeting of the royal family. If they could not agree, the person chosen by the sultan and named in a sealed letter was to succeed him. State TV said that the letter had been opened, without elaborating as to why. "Haitham bin Tariq was sworn in as the new sultan of the country... after a meeting of the family which decided to appoint the one who was chosen by the sultan," the government said in a tweet.

Smooth succession

Many experts had expected the throne to go to Asad bin Tariq, another cousin, who was appointed deputy prime minister for international relations and cooperation affairs in 2017 in what was seen as a clear message of support.

However, analysts said the swift handover boded well for a smooth succession, at a time of heightened regional tensions with the United States facing off against Iran. "This portrays externally a show of unity that is very important in a volatile region and vis-a-vis concerns that neighbors would have liked to interfere in the process. Instead they closed ranks," Cinzia Bianco, a research fellow at the European Council for International Relations.

Haitham, a sports enthusiast, was appointed to lead the heritage and culture ministry in the mid-



MUSCAT: Omanis gather in front of the Sultan Qaboos Mosque to perform the funeral prayer for the country's ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said, in the Omani capital Muscat yesterday. — AFP



Oman's newly sworn-in Sultan Haitham bin Tariq (right) and General Sultan bin Mohammed al Nomani carry the coffin of the late leader Sultan Qaboos to the royal family cemetery in the capital Muscat yesterday. — AFP

1990s and also serves as head of the committee for Oman's "Vision 2040", a roadmap for social and economic reform.

"This is crucial because socioeconomic reforms and reforms of political economy are the most important challenges for Oman, struggling with high deficits, international debt, youth unemployment," Bianco said.

'Profound legacy'

Sultan Qaboos was laid to rest at the royal cemetery yesterday after his coffin, draped in the Omani flag, was driven through the streets of the capital Muscat. Thousands of people, including members of the royal family and state officials, were present for prayers at the main mosque which is named after the sultan. The royal court announced a mourning period that will see businesses and government offices close for three days.

Many Western and Arab diplomats see the sultanate, with its moderate but active foreign policy that includes healthy relations with the US as well as with regional powers Iran and Saudi Arabia, as a model of balance. As the Gulf's discreet go-between, Oman played a role in Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers while preserving its membership in the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

"He was a stable force in the Middle East and a strong US ally. His Majesty had a vision for a modern, prosperous, and peaceful Oman, and he willed that vision into reality," former US president George W. Bush said in a message of condolence.

The sultan's death comes amid increased tensions between Tehran and Washington, which on Friday piled new sanctions on the Islamic republic following the killing of a top Iranian commander in Iraq that raised fears the region was sliding into war.

The late sultan's standing was recognized with warm tributes from across the world. "I had the pleasure of meeting His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and was struck by his commitment to peace and understanding between nations and between faiths," said British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. "He leaves a profound legacy, not only in Oman but across the region too."

Omanis took to social media to mourn the death of a ruler who had made regular tours of the nation to speak to citizens, often driving his own four-wheel drive in the convoys. "The first words I heard from my weeping mother after news of the great Sultan Qaboos' death was: The father of orphans, of the poor, of the downtrodden, of all of us, has died," Twitter user Abdullah bin Hamad al-Harhi wrote. "Our minds cannot comprehend his absence," another Twitter user who gave her name as Sheikha said. —AFP

CONDOLENCES

**Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief,
management and staff**

convey their deepest condolences to
the royal family, government and people of
the Sultanate of Oman on the passing of

**His Majesty
Sultan Qaboos bin Said**

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A falcon performs during a hunting competition at the Sabah Al-Ahmad heritage village, about 140kms northwest of Kuwait City on Friday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

UN charter first line of defense for small countries: Kuwait

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NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during the session. — KUNA

NEW YORK: Kuwait affirmed that the United Nations charter constituted "the first line of defense for small countries," noting that the 1991 liberation of Kuwait was an example how efforts could be coordinated for such an achievement. The Kuwaiti stance was demonstrated at a United Nations Security Council session-addressed by the State of Kuwait Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi. On basis of UNSC resolutions designed to support law sovereignty, justice and equality, the liberation of Kuwait was accomplished, thus it was a successful and historic example regarding the UNSC capability to end the aggression, Ambassador Otaibi stated.

On current conditions in the Gulf, he indicated that all stakeholders were deeply concerned about security and stability of the region "and we share the United Nations Secretary General in his recurring calls for de-escalation in the area and urge for maximum restraint and wisdom for sake of political tackling that may spare the region more escalation and hazards."

"Seventy-five years after formation of the UN, its charter remains a constitution for multi-lateral international action and a clear international law that regulates relations among states and places action measures to deal with threats against international peace and security in a collective and effective fashion," Ambassador Otaibi said. "The UN charter concerning us during our membership in the Security Council was the compass according to which we dealt with issues enlisted in its agenda and we were convinced that the Security Council could be more effective in tackling challenges raging in our world today."

Otaibi called for activating "the tools enshrined in the charter" to settle strife peacefully, through negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Preventive measures should be of great concern for the Security Council for sake of averting break-out of strife by dealing with crises in the early stages, he said, also expressing confidence that regional organizations, and others, could also contribute to safeguarding international, regional peace and security, according to the UN Chapter eight. He called for greater cooperation between the UNSC and regional organizations.

"We have through our UNSC membership presented a presidential statement for cooperation between the United Nations and the Arab League and we hope to follow up on implementing content of the statement in the future," he said. Otaibi noted that divergent stances among the council member states have often obstructed tackling crises, underscoring necessity of unity among them so that the council could be able to shoulder responsibilities as stipulated in the charter. — KUNA

local spotlight

Gulf security



By Muna Al-Fuzai

Muna@kuwaittimes.net

I really am surprised by those who are anxiously waiting or hoping to hear news of a world war, imagining war is a football match or a fiction movie, so that everyone can enjoy the maximum thrill and suspense and then go back home happily and safely! But they do not know that they will be part of the killing, displacement and destruction, and that they may no longer have a roof over their heads.

Unfortunately, there are those who are promoting the idea of a new war as a feasible notion without considering the expected losses. Sadly, some such voices have arisen from this region, where security should be the one and only goal for all of us expats and citizens.

We in the Middle East are a heated area full of complexity, because even without a war, we are a region plagued by conflicts, let alone a war with death and fighting machines. I think the closest example of this is the assassination of Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani that sparked a sectarian rift in region. It looks now that this issue has calmed down a little, but the tension will drive more disputes.

I am opposed to any idea that promotes war in the world and the region here. We are living in an unstable situation globally, but at least we are safe in the Gulf region, despite the threats surrounding us, especially in neighboring countries that have unstable security situations. So why should we immerse ourselves in a war that we will not get out of safely?!

I believe that maintaining the security of the Gulf region and specifically Kuwait and our internal security should not be a negotiable matter. War in the region may seem like a quagmire that serves someone's interest. But, it would put our core security at stake, because it would make us less secure, not more secure.

We always need measures that show the importance of keeping calm and non-escalation in order to preserve the security and safety of the Gulf, because it is not a regional matter but an international one due to the oil and marine corridors that control global trade movement. The Gulf region is one of the most important maritime regions in the world, as it is a center for the export of oil to most countries of the world, which makes maritime security very important for all countries.

Another example is the final agreement mutually approved between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait recently regarding the resumption of oil production in shared oil-fields, which enhances oil production of the two countries by about 500,000 barrels per day. It is a great move to confirm that we are in a strong stage of bilateral relations, because the return of production will directly impact oil revenues and will benefit the economies of both countries. This agreement had a positive impact - not only economic, but also social and political, which is important in these times. There is no doubt that we need to maintain regional and internal security and reject any sectarian statements to safeguard our society and country.

Local

High school exams postponed due to mourning over Sultan's death

Center to provide chemotherapy for patients with appointments during break

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education (MOE) announced yesterday deferring Sunday and Monday midterm exams to Tuesday and Wednesday, following His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's orders to declare a three-day mourning period in Kuwait, flying flags at half-mast and giving three days off to various government bodies over the sad demise of Sultan Qaboos bin Said. MOE's acting assistant undersecretary for private education Mansour Al-Mansour said the three-day mourning includes all schools - both local and foreign. Meanwhile, official sources at the Civil Service Commission (CSC) said the mourning period is for three days - from Saturday to Monday - and that all government bodies, including schools, will be off during these days.

In the meantime, Kuwait Cancer Control Center (KCCC) Director Dr Ali Al-Mosawi announced that the center will continue providing chemotherapy for patients who had appointments on Sunday and Monday, adding that the process had been coordinated with labs, nursing staff and the registry department. Meanwhile, Kuwait University announced postponing a major registration period to start on Tuesday and end on Monday, Jan 20.

Exceptional budget

In collaboration with the finance ministry, the Cabinet's economic committee is due this week to discuss giving the Ministry of Health (MoH) an exceptional budget to settle the unpaid costs of treating citizens abroad. In this regard, official sources said that this extra funding will be taken from the state's general reserves to pay KD 236.2 million to the Kuwait health office in Washington, KD 78.9 million to the Kuwait

health office in London, KD 16.5 to the Kuwait health office in Paris, KD 9.9 million to the Kuwait health office in Bangkok, KD 7 million to the Dubai office and KD 2 million to offices in other cities around the world.

The sources added that the aforementioned sums are for previous and current claims, some of which had resulted in legal disputes between the concerned offices and the hospitals in those countries, which rejected receiving any more Kuwaiti patients until the previous bills were paid.

In addition, the sources explained that the parliament's budgets and final statement committee will



Govt flies flags at half-mast



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti flags are flown at half-mast outside the State Audit Bureau building yesterday. — KUNA

investigate the bills and how patients are dispatched for treatment abroad, as some lawmakers suspect there is some sort of manipulation in these health offices that needs to be referred to the public prosecution, like the case of the health office in Germany where manipulation and embezzlement were discovered.

"Some lawmakers might grill Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah unless he clearly opens the issue and explains the details about the actual expenses, especially since he had laid off officials from those offices without referring them to court," the sources further stated.

Real estate biddings

Annual real estate biddings made a remarkable rise in 2019 to reach 7,079 properties with a total value of KD 3.6 billion compared to 6,361 with a total value of KD 3.7 billion in 2018. Statistics also showed that real estate properties increased by 718 in 2019 (11.3 percent) compared to 2018, while the total value dropped by KD 73.5 million (2 percent).

Further, statistics showed that residential properties came first with 4,728 in 2019, with a total value of KD 1.5 billion compared to 4,318 with a total value of KD 1.3 billion in 2018. Investment properties came second with 1,770 and a total value of KD 1.2 billion compared

with 1,791 with a total value of KD 1.6 billion in 2018. Commercial properties came third with 472 and a total value of KD 618.9 million compared to 132 in 2018 with a total value of KD 584.4 million.

Occupational properties came fourth with 69 with a total value of KD 91.1 million compared to 98 in 2018 with a total value of KD 94.9 million. Coastal properties came fifth with 23 and a total value of KD 135.5 million compared to none in 2018. Storage properties came sixth with nine and a total value of KD 12.8 million compared to 12 with a total value of KD 31 million. Exhibition properties came seventh with eight and a total value of KD 40.7 million compared to none in 2018.

Kuwait's FM sends letter to French counterpart

PARIS: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Friday sent a letter to French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian handed by Kuwaiti Ambassador Sami Al-Suleiman. This came during a meeting between

Suleiman and Deputy Director of the North Africa and Middle East Department at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Baptiste Faivre. Suleiman said in a statement that he conveyed the Kuwaiti foreign minister's appreciation to his French counterpart for France's support to Kuwait during its non-permanent membership in the Security Council the past two years. Suleiman pointed to the continuous coordination between the two countries on many international issues, which strengthened the role of the UN Security Council in addressing a number of crises and finding solutions to them. During the meeting, both sides discussed a number of topics of common interests and future cooperation projects. — KUNA



PARIS: Kuwait's Ambassador to France Sami Al-Suleiman hands a letter from Kuwait's foreign minister to French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian. — KUNA

Passenger traffic at Kuwait airport up 4% in 2019

KUWAIT: Passenger traffic at Kuwait International Airport increased by four percent last year from a year prior, the Directorate

General of Civil Aviation said. Some 15.448 million passengers used the airport in 2019 compared to 14.813 million in 2018, it explained in a statement. This includes 7.715 million arrivals compared to 7.425 million, with departures recording 7.733 million compared to 7.387 million. Planes traveling through the airport reached 122,358 compared with 118,133, including 115,420 passenger flights compared with 112,971 flights. As for cargo, around 243.4 million kilograms exchanged hands compared with 249.5 million kilograms. — KUNA

Penumbral lunar eclipse visible in Kuwait

KUWAIT: A penumbral lunar was visible in Kuwait Friday evening, said a Kuwaiti astronomer. The eclipse took place at 8:05 pm local time and ran until 12:15 am yesterday morning, Adel Al-Saadoun said. The penumbral lunar eclipse could only be seen with a

microscope, he said, adding that no part of the moon entered the Earth's much darker umbra and the lower portion of the moon tracks deep into the Earth's outer shadow. Six lunar and solar eclipses are predicted to occur in 2020 worldwide, the Kuwaiti astronomer noted. Kuwait recently witnessed a partial solar eclipse with 80 percent of the sun's disk covered by the moon, a phenomenon that may occur from two to five times a year whether the eclipse is partial, total or annular. Kuwait witnessed several partial solar eclipses in 1914, 1922, 1976 and 1999. — KUNA

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India blows up luxury high-rises over environmental violations

Washington turns down Iraqi request to pull out US troops

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TEHRAN: Iranians check newspapers, many bearing a picture of the debris of the Ukrainian plane that crashed in Tehran earlier this week on their front page, outside a news stand in the Islamic republic's capital yesterday. —AFP

Iran says it 'unintentionally' shot down plane

Ukraine, Canada call for accountability after Tehran's admission

TEHRAN: Iran said yesterday it "unintentionally" shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet, killing all 176 people aboard, in an abrupt about-turn after initially denying Western claims it was struck by a missile. President Hassan Rouhani said a military probe into the tragedy had found "missiles fired due to human error" brought down the Boeing 737, calling it an "unforgivable mistake".

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei offered his condolences and ordered the armed forces to address "shortcomings" so that such a disaster does not happen again. The acknowledgement came after officials in Iran had for days categorically denied Western claims that the Ukraine International Airlines airliner had been struck by a missile in a catastrophic error.

The jet, which had been bound for Kiev, slammed into a field shortly after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport before dawn on Wednesday.

It came only hours after Iran launched a wave of missiles at bases hosting American forces in Iraq in response to the killing of Qasem Soleimani, one of Iran's top generals, in a US drone strike. The aerospace commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards accepted full responsibility. But Brigadier General Amirali Hajizadeh said the missile

operator acted independently when he shot down the Boeing 737 after mistaking it for a "cruise missile". "He had 10 seconds to decide. He could have decided to strike or not to strike and under such circumstances he took the wrong decision."

"It was a short-range missile that exploded next to the plane," he added. Iran had come under mounting international pressure to allow a "credible" investigation after video footage emerged appearing to show the plane being hit by a fast-moving object before a flash appears.

'Hostile target'

Ukraine and Canada called for accountability after Iran's admission. The military was first to acknowledge the error, saying the aircraft had been mistaken for a "hostile target".

It said Iran had been at the highest level of alert after American "threats" and that the plane had turned and come close to a "sensitive" military site before it was hit due to "human error". Rouhani said Iran had been on alert for possible US attacks after Soleimani's "martyrdom".

"Iran is very much saddened by this catastrophic mistake and I, on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran, express my deep condolences to the families of victims of this

painful catastrophe," the president said. Rouhani added he had ordered "all relevant bodies to take all necessary actions (to ensure) compensation" to the families of those killed.

"The perpetrators of this unforgivable mistake will be prosecuted." The majority of passengers on the flight PS752 were dual national Iranian-Canadians but also included Ukrainians, Afghans, Britons and Swedes.

Calls for transparency

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky demanded Iran punish those responsible for the downing of the plane and pay compensation. "We expect Iran... to bring the guilty to the courts," he said on Facebook, before his office announced he would speak later on the phone with Rouhani.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said closure and accountability were needed. Trudeau also demanded "transparency, and justice for the families and loved ones of the victims".

"This is a national tragedy, and all Canadians are mourning together." The disaster came as tensions soared in the region after Soleimani's killing, and fears grew of an all-out war between Iran and its arch-enemy the United States.

Washington said the Soleimani strike was carried out to prevent "imminent", large-scale attacks on American embassies. Tehran had vowed "severe revenge" for the killing of Soleimani before launching missiles at the bases in Iraq.

Iran has invited the United States, Ukraine, Canada and others to join the crash investigation. It is Iran's worst civil aviation disaster since 1988 when the US military said it shot down an Iran Air plane over the Gulf by mistake, killing all 290 people on board. Video footage of the incident, which The New York Times said it had verified, emerged and appeared to show the moment the airliner was hit.

A fast-moving object is seen rising at an angle into the sky before a bright flash appears, which dims and then continues moving forward. Several seconds later, an explosion is heard and the sky lights up.

Many airlines from around the world cancelled flights to and from Iran in the wake of the crash, or rerouted flights away from Iranian airspace. Nations around the world have called for restraint and de-escalation, and fears of a full-blown conflict have subsided after US President Donald Trump said Iran appeared to be standing down after targeting the US bases in Iraq. —AFP

15 dead in Pakistan mosque bombing

QUATTA: A suicide bomber targeted a mosque in southwestern Pakistan during evening prayers Friday, killing at least 15 people and wounding 19 others, officials said. The blast took place in a satellite town of Quetta, the province's main city. Debris and shattered glass littered the scene.

Fida Mohammad, who was attending evening prayers, said about 60 people were present at the time of the attack on the mosque, which is located in a densely populated area.

The explosion ripped through the front row of worshippers seconds after the prayer began, he told AFP. "It was a powerful blast, people were screaming and running here and there—many people were injured because of the stampede," Mohammad said. Mohammad Waseem, a doctor at Quetta's Sandeman hospital, confirmed that 15 victims had died. The police chief of Balochistan province, Mohsin Hassan Butt, also confirmed the death toll, telling AFP: "Nineteen people are still taking medical treatment, the condition of three to four is critical."

A police officer was among the dead, he added. Provincial home minister Zia Ullah Langu told reporters that investigations by bomb disposal officers indicated that a suicide bomber carried out the attack. A spokesman for the provincial government, Liaqat Shahwani, confirmed a suicide bomber was to blame. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, according to the SITE intelligence group. A Pakistani military spokesman said on Twitter that paramilitary personnel has reached the mosque and cordoned off the area.

"A joint search operation with police is in progress, injured being evacuated to hospitals," said the spokesman, Asif Ghafoor. The attack comes two days after a motorcycle bomb targeting a paramilitary force vehicle killed two people and wounded 14 others at a busy market in Quetta.

Volatile area

Balochistan is Pakistan's largest and poorest province, bordering Afghanistan and Iran. It is rife with Islamist, separatist and sectarian insurgencies and attacks are frequent, even as the number of violent incidents has significantly dropped elsewhere in Pakistan. Militants still retain the ability to carry out attacks, including on major urban centers and tightly-guarded targets, and analysts have long warned that Pakistan has not yet tackled the root causes of extremism.

Balochistan is key to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), part of Beijing's Belt and Road initiative. CPEC seeks to connect China's restive western Xinjiang region with the Pakistani port of Gwadar, giving the world's second-largest economy access to the Arabian Sea. —AFP

Iranians turn to social media to grieve and rage over doomed jet

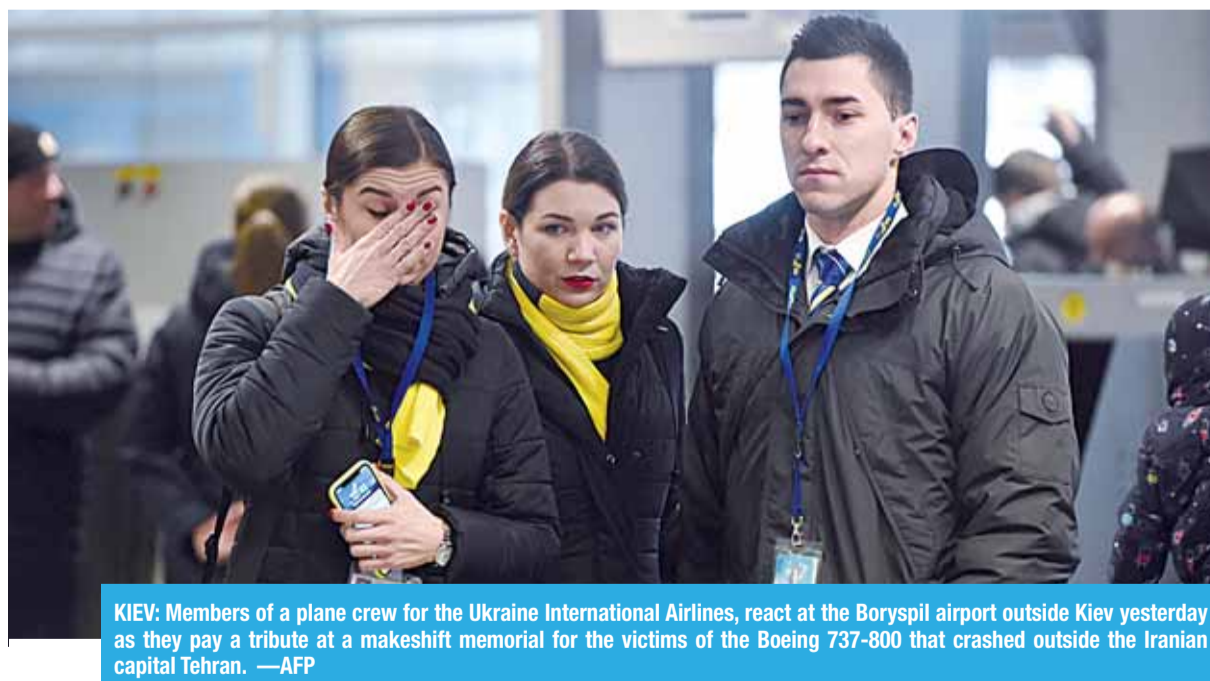
DUBAI: The last tweet sent by a user named Soroush before taking off from Iran on a doomed Ukrainian airliner on his way back to university in Canada suggested he knew he was flying into danger.

"I was predicting that war would break out just at the time of my flight. Forgive me for anything bad I might have done," he tweeted in Farsi before the plane left Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran on Wednesday. Minutes later, the Ukraine International Airlines Boeing 737 had crashed, and all 176 people on board were dead. Images circulating on social media, which could not be independently verified, suggest it came down in a ball of flames.

Canada, which had 63 nationals on the flight, many of them dual Canadian-Iranian citizens, said it had seen intelligence that an Iranian surface-to-air missile had brought the plane down, probably in error. U.S. officials agreed, although Iran vehemently denied the possibility.

As Soroush buckled up in his seat, Iran had just fired missiles at American military targets in Iraq in response to the killing of a prominent Iranian general by a US armed drone on Jan. 3. Iran was on alert for a US military response.

Many Iranians asked on social media – a focus for public grief, anger and fierce debate in the aftermath of the disaster – why commercial flights had not been suspended when Iran's air defenses were likely to be on edge. "Why were any civilian airlines flying out of Tehran airport in those conditions," a user named



KIEV: Members of a plane crew for the Ukraine International Airlines, react at the Boryspil airport outside Kiev yesterday as they pay a tribute at a makeshift memorial for the victims of the Boeing 737-800 that crashed outside the Iranian capital Tehran. —AFP

Shiva Balaghi tweeted on her @SBalaghi account, describing herself as "somewhere between academia & the art world".

Family photos

Others shared images of the victims. One was a selfie of a smiling mother and young daughter taken just before take-off, as they headed home to Toronto. The photo had been sent to a relative.

Another picture that went viral showed a child's red shoe in the dirt of the crash site.

On its Twitter account, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency posted an old photo of a couple who were killed in the crash standing next to General Qassem Soleimani, the elite Quds Force commander

killed in the US drone strikes. "The couple were graduates of Tehran's Sharif University and were studying in Canada. This photo was taken years ago in the city of Kerman (Soleimani's home town)," the agency said. Some angry Twitter users posted images that they said showed that the Iranian authorities had already cleared debris from the scene of the crash. Iran denied that it had bulldozed the site.

The disaster was the biggest single loss of Canadian life since an Air India flight blew up in 1985 over the Atlantic. Flags in Canada were flown at half mast, while Canadians also posted images of mourners lighting candles on photos of victims. "Iranian authorities should take lessons from Canadians on how to respect their citizens," one tweet read. —Reuters

International

Regime air strikes kill 18 civilians in Syria's Idlib

Syrians praise UN aid vote, aid groups wary of reductions

IDLIB: Regime air strikes on Syria's last major opposition bastion killed 18 civilians yesterday, a war monitor said, a day before a ceasefire is due to take hold. Six children were among the dead in the northwest province of Idlib, where a fresh ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey is expected to go into effect after midnight, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Air strikes on the city of Idlib killed seven civilians, while separate raids on two towns near the provincial capital killed 11 others, the Britain-based war monitor said. In Idlib city, the bombardment hit near a cultural centre, according to the Observatory and an AFP correspondent in the area.

Scores of students, many of them crying, ran from the site of the blast in panic, the AFP correspondent said. The bombardment surprised residents in a city that has been relatively free from the near-daily attacks that have hit the province's flash-point south, the correspondent added.

Less than 10 kilometers (six miles) away, regime air strikes hit a market in the town of Binnish, killing seven, according to the Observatory. The market was mostly reduced to rubble, as thick white smoke from the strikes created a fog, according to an AFP correspondent there.

He saw men carrying what the apparently lifeless bodies of two children from the scene, as women and children wailed. One woman pressed two children to her chest as she screamed for help, he said.

Volunteer rescue workers, meanwhile, carried bodies to an ambulance, and sifted through rubble searching for trapped civilians, he added. South of Idlib city, raids hit the area of Al-Nerab, killing four.

"All of these areas were far away from bombardment during the latest (regime) offensive but today, regime warplanes," have returned, said Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman. A southern strip of the jihadist-dominated Idlib region has come under mounting bombardment in recent weeks, displacing more than 300,000 people in December

alone, according to the United Nations. The Damascus government has repeatedly vowed to retake Idlib, which is run by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a group dominated by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate. A ceasefire announced in late August was supposed to stop Russia-backed regime bombardment of the region after strikes killed some 1,000 civilians in four months. But the Observatory says sporadic bombardment and clashes continued, before intensifying in the past month.

Syria's war has killed more than 380,000 people including over 115,000 civilians since it started in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

Meanwhile, residents of Syria's last major opposition bastion yesterday welcomed a UN vote renewing cross-border aid to the country, as relief groups condemned restrictions to the program which is helping millions.

The United Nations Security Council on Friday voted to extend humanitarian aid to Syria, including to some of the most needy in the northwestern region of Idlib. But under pressure from Syrian regime ally Russia it scaled back the program that allows the UN and its partners to deliver aid using border crossings not controlled by the Damascus government. The council agreed to prolong the assistance for only six months instead of renewing it for a year as it had done previously. It also decided that the aid will enter Syria through just two crossing points along the Turkish border, instead of four.

A key entry point for aid along the Iraq border which had been instrumental in channeling aid to around 1.3 million people in northeastern Syria was scrapped. Despite the restrictions, Syrians in Idlib breathed a sigh of relief. "I was so pleased when I heard the news this morning," said Abu Abdo, an unemployed father of four. The 36-year old said he, like millions of Idlib residents who rely on cross-border aid entering from Turkey, depends on humanitarian assistance for his and his family's survival.

"I live off this assistance," he told AFP, saying continued



IDLIB: Panicked residents run following an air strike by pro-regime forces in the northwestern Syrian city of Idlib yesterday. — AFP

aid deliveries would mean that he would not "die from hunger". Mohammad Abu Said, a 29-year-old father of two, echoed a similar sentiment.

Friday's vote, he said, was a positive development for a

province housing three million people, nearly half of whom have been displaced from other parts of the country.

"Most of us (in Idlib) rely on humanitarian aid because there is no work or income," he said. — AFP

Indian protesters condemn Modi visit as citizenship law demos rage

KOLKATA: Thousands of angry protesters took to the streets to tell India's leader he was unwelcome in Kolkata yesterday, in the latest rally against a citizenship law that critics say discriminates against Muslims. Widespread street demonstrations, and occasionally deadly clashes, have gripped the Hindu-majority nation since the law was approved by parliament last month.

Police said nearly 30,000 protesters took to the streets of Kolkata to denounce Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit, with many linking hands to form human chains that spanned miles through the streets of the eastern megacity. "What we are fighting for is the future of India," Surita Roy, a woman who joined the rally, told AFP.



KOLKATA: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses leftist students protesting against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and India's new citizenship law following a day of large protests against the controversial law in Kolkata yesterday. — AFP

A crowd mobbed the city's airport and chanted "We are against fascism" as the Indian leader's plane touched

down before he transferred to a military helicopter that carried him to the house of West Bengal state leader Mamata Banerjee—a vocal critic of Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist government.

Police stopped protesters from following Modi to the chief minister's house, but Banerjee told journalists after their meeting that she had asked him to repeal the law "for the larger interests of the country" and then joined the street protests herself. Critics say the law is a precursor to a national register of citizens that many among India's 200 million Muslims—around 15 percent of the country's population—fear will leave them stateless. Many poor Indians do not have documents to prove their nationality.

Modi has in turn accused his political opponents of "misleading" and "inciting" people against his Hindu nationalist government. His party has launched a door-to-door campaign in a bid to dispel "misinformation" about the law, which they insist is not discriminatory.

At least 27 people, mostly Muslims, have been killed during clashes with police after defying restrictions on demonstrations in several states of the country. But hundreds of thousands of protesters have continued to meet public across the country and demand a rollback of the law. — AFP

Iranian-Americans gloomy about prospects for detente with Iran

VIENNA: They are relieved but hardly at peace: Iranian-Americans in a town outside Washington say that even as tensions with Tehran ease, they're not optimistic about prospects for real detente between the two long-time enemies. "I hope, I wish, that war is not going to happen," said Massoud Mossadad, owner of a grocery store specializing in Iranian and other Middle Eastern products in Vienna, Virginia.

The community is home to a sizeable chunk of the estimated 80,000 Iranian-Americans in the Washington area. "Unfortunately, if it happens, imagine how many people will lose their husband, their parents, their sons," said Mossadad, 63. He has lived in America for 40 years after leaving his country following the Islamic revolution of 1979.

He and others spoke Thursday after the United States and Iran apparently stepped back from the brink of war following the US killing in a drone strike of the powerful Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani, in Iraq last week. Iran fired a barrage of ballistic missiles towards Iraqi military bases housing US troops but none were hurt. President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Iran was apparently "standing down" after the world feared a major conflagration.

Trump issued a call for peace, but in the grocery store and elsewhere in Vienna, people of Iranian origin were anything but upbeat. "I was very scared because my mom is supposed to leave for Iran in two weeks to visit our family after a long time," said Mitra Davani, a 37-year-old dentist.

Iranian-born but living in Vienna since 2005, Davani said she was particularly shocked by Trump's threats to attack Iranian cultural sites, in comments that caused an outrage because such an act would be considered a war crime. Trump later backed away, saying he likes to "obey the law."

"The Best President"

"This is scary. My family comes from a town near Persepolis," Davani said of the remains of an ancient Persian city listed as a UN World Heritage site. She said it would be devastating if it were attacked. She said she was skeptical of Trump's comments Wednesday that he was "ready to embrace peace with all who seek it."

"It does not come from the heart. It is not his own words. It does not sit well. Hopefully his advisors advise him well and everything will calm down," Davani said. Parvin Garakoui, speaking at one of Vienna's Iranian restaurants, also said she was very scared. "The US and Iran governments think about themselves and we are in the middle," said Garakoui, 37. "There is no hope" for the future."

Garakoui has been a permanent US resident since 2009 thanks to a lottery system that Trump wants to do away with. Since Iranians are denied entry to the US under Trump's travel ban targeting several mainly Muslim nations, Garakoui says she feels like a second-class resident of the country.

"I have a lot of family in Iran. My cousins are of a draft age. They can be drafted... I can't bring them to the US because of the travel ban. If I can't bring my family I feel I am not really a citizen," said Garakoui. But 80-year-old Edy Sharifi is one of the few who remains calm and optimistic. He says Iran has everything to lose in an open conflict with the United States and will negotiate behind the scenes.

"I believe nothing will happen. America will never attack Iran, ever," said Sharifi, who runs an oriental rug store and came to the US as a refugee in 1984. He practices the Bahai faith, which Iran sees as heresy. Sharifi admires Trump, "the best president I saw in my life." "He's strong. He knows what he is doing." — AFP

Restored synagogue heralds new chapter for Egypt's Jews

ALEXANDRIA: Egypt unveiled Friday a newly renovated 14th century synagogue in Alexandria as part of a push to market the country's rich cultural heritage.

The Eliyahu Hanavi synagogue, boasting green and violet stained glass windows and towering marble columns, was built in its current form in 1850 by an Italian architect on top of the original edifice dating back to 1354. The temple was bombed during Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798.

In cooperation with the military, Egypt's antiquities ministry oversaw the 64-billion-pound (\$4-million) renovation which lasted over three years after the roof and staircase collapsed in 2016.

Sitting in the back wooden rows, Yolande Mizrahi, a septuagenarian Jew born and raised in Alexandria, was delighted with the conservation. "If it wasn't for (President Abdel Fattah) al-Sisi, this would have never been done. A lot of things have changed since he's taken over," she told AFP.

In 2018, Sisi singled out preservation of places of worship for Egyptian Jews and Coptic Christians as a priority for his government. The Mediterranean city of Alexandria was once home to around 40,000 Jews, but Egypt is now home to

only a handful of Jewish citizens. The Arab country's Jewish community fled or were expelled during the 1950s and after the 1948 creation of Israel. For Mizrahi, she fondly recounted how the synagogue which she used to attend as a youngster was a communal gathering space for the Jewish minority in Alexandria.

She hoped Friday's opening of the temple to the public would spur other Jews abroad to visit the temple. "I have relatives who left to France, Italy and Israel and they would like to visit the synagogue now," she added.

The synagogue was closed in 2012 for security reasons following the 2011 revolution that unseated long-time autocrat Hosni Mubarak. Egypt has since sought to promote its cultural heritage to revive the vital tourism sector, badly hit by political insecurity and attacks.

Magda Haroun, one of the leaders of the dwindling Egyptian Jewish community in Cairo, choked back tears after the ceremony. "This is recognition of Egypt's Jews who were neglected for over sixty years," she told AFP. "It is recognition that we have always been here and that we have contributed to a lot of things just like any other Egyptian" Haroun said. — AFP



Magda Haroun (right), one of the leaders of the Egyptian Jewish community in the capital Cairo visits the newly renovated Eliyahu Hanavi synagogue in the northwestern Egyptian city of Alexandria on Friday. — AFP



ARBIL: Prime Minister of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (IKRG) Masrour Barzani (second left) meets with Iraq's caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi (left) in Arbil, the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region, yesterday. — AFP

Iraq premier tells Kurdish leaders he does not seek 'hostility' with US

ARBIL: Iraq's caretaker premier told Kurdish leaders yesterday he did not seek a hostile relationship with the United States, in his first visit to the autonomous region since coming to power in 2018.

Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi travelled to Arbil with a delegation of top ministers and his intelligence chief. The trip came at a time of political turmoil for Iraq, after months of anti-government rallies that saw Abdul Mahdi resign and worsening ties with the US as Iraqi lawmakers push for a withdrawal of foreign troops.

Abdel Mahdi met the region's Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, President Nechirvan Barzani and influential power-broker Masoud Barzani, who heads the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party.

A statement from Abdul Mahdi's office said he and the Barzanis discussed the ongoing anti-government protests, the presence of foreign troops in Iraq and broader regional tensions.

"We do not want hostility with anyone, including the United States," Abdul Mahdi said. He then travelled to the Kurdistan

region's second city, Sulaymaniyah, to meet leaders of the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) sees Abdul Mahdi as a reliable ally and had hoped he would help rebuild ties between Baghdad and Arbil, which frayed following the KRG's controversial independence referendum in 2017.

The KRG continued to back him as protests erupted across Baghdad and Iraq's Shiite-majority south in October, which eventually prompted Abdul Mahdi to step down. Days before his resignation, the KRG had agreed "in principle" with Baghdad on a revenue-sharing deal that granted it a share of the 2020 federal budget in exchange for exporting its oil through the national seller.

The KRG saw the terms of the agreement as favorable and feared that Abdul Mahdi's replacement would not stick to it, but political factions have not agreed on a candidate.

Kurdish authorities have also been worried by Baghdad's insistence that foreign troops leave Iraq, following a vote in the federal parliament last week. No Kurdish parliamentarians attended the vote and many see the US-led coalition's presence as a counterweight to Iran.

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. — AFP

International

Washington turns down Iraqi request to pull out US troops

Middle East still on edge despite pause in hostilities

BAGHDAD/WASHINGTON: Washington on Friday spurned an Iraqi request to prepare to pull out its troops, amid heightened US-Iranian tensions after the US killing of an Iranian commander in Baghdad, and said it was exploring a possible expansion of NATO's presence there.

Seeking to tighten pressure on its foe, the United States meanwhile imposed more sanctions on Iran, responding to an attack on US troops in Iraq launched by Tehran in retaliation for the death of General Qasem Soleimani.

Iraq could bear the brunt of any further violence between its neighbor Iran and the United States, its leaders caught in a bind as Washington and Tehran are also the Iraqi government's main allies and vie for influence there. President Donald Trump said Iran had probably planned to attack the US embassy in Baghdad and was aiming to strike four US embassies when Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike. "We will tell you probably it was going to be the embassy in Baghdad," Trump said in a clip of an interview with Fox News. "I can reveal that I believe it would have been four embassies."

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi made his request for preparations for a US troop withdrawal in a phone call with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday in line with a vote in Iraq's parliament last week, his office said.

Abdul Mahdi asked Pompeo to "send delegates to put in place the tools to carry out the parliament's decision," his office said in a statement, adding that the forces used in the killing had entered Iraq or used its airspace without permission. The State Department said any US delegation would not discuss the withdrawal of US troops as their presence in Iraq was "appropriate."

"There does, however, need to be a conversation between the US and Iraqi governments not just regarding security, but about our financial, economic, and diplomatic partnership," spokeswoman Morgan Ortugas said in a statement. Trump said in the Fox News interview that if Iraq wanted the United States to leave, he would tell them: "You have to pay us for the money we put in."

He said the United States has \$35 billion of Iraq's money "sitting in an account." "I think they'll agree to pay. Otherwise we'll stay there," Trump said. Pompeo told reporters a NATO delegation was in Washington on Friday to discuss the future of the Iraq mission and a plan to "get burden-sharing right in the region". Separately, the State Department said Pompeo had discussed Iran with Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne as well as "the opportunity for an expanded NATO force in Iraq and appropriate burden sharing".

The latest flare-up in the long covert war between Iran and the United States began with the US killing of Soleimani, Iran's top general, in a drone strike on Jan. 3. Iran responded on Wednesday by firing missiles at US forces in Iraq. In the aftermath, both sides backed off from intensifying the conflict but the region remains tense. Iraq's top Shiite Muslim cleric condemned the US-Iranian struggle happening on Iraqi soil, saying it risked plunging his country and the wider Middle East into deeper conflict.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani said it was Iraqis who stood to suffer most from the US-Iranian conflict. In a message delivered through a representative at Friday prayers in the holy city of Kerbala, Sistani said no foreign powers should be allowed to decide Iraq's fate.

Call to leave

"The latest dangerous aggressive acts, which are repeated violations of Iraqi sovereignty, are a part of the deteriorating situation" in the region, Sistani said. "Iraq must govern itself and there must be no role for outsiders in its decision-making." Iraq has suffered decades of war, sanctions and sectarian conflict, including the U.S.-led invasion of 2003.

At Friday prayers in Tehran, mid-ranking Iranian cleric Mohammad Javad Haj Aliakbari said US interests across the world were now exposed to threats. Since Soleimani's killing, Tehran has stepped up its calls for US forces to leave Iraq. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has said the retaliatory strikes were not enough and that ending the US military presence in the region was Tehran's main goal.



WASHINGTON, DC: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (center left) and US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper (center right) leave after attending closed briefings with law makers regarding escalating tensions with Iran on Thursday in Washington, DC. —AFP

Critics have called Soleimani's killing a reckless action.

But Pompeo said on Friday Washington had specific information about an imminent Iranian threat including to US embassies, adding: "American lives were at risk."

As part of his most recent activities in Iraq, Soleimani had encouraged pro-Iranian Iraqi militias to quash months of protests by Iraqis opposed to the influence in their country of foreign powers such as Iran and the United States. In Iraqi cities, demonstra-

tors took to the streets again on Friday, determined to keep up the momentum of their protests despite attention turning to the threat of a US-Iran conflict.

Gunmen killed two local journalists covering protests in the southern city of Basra, security sources and state media said. Ahmed Abdulsamad, Basra correspondent of Dija TV station - owned by senior Sunni politician Mohammed al-Karbouli - was killed immediately while his camera operator succumbed to his wounds in hospital, a medical source told Reuters. —Reuters

N Ireland assembly reopens

BELFAST: Northern Ireland's assembly reopened yesterday following three-year's of political deadlock after rival nationalist and unionist parties agreed to a new power-sharing deal with Brexit looming. Democratic Unionist Party leader Arlene Foster was later appointed as first minister, and effective head of government, while Republican Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill will serve as her deputy.

The region's devolved assembly at Stormont collapsed in January 2017 over a scandal caused by the runaway costs of a renewable energy scheme. Its 90 members have since sat only for one-off sessions, with numerous rounds of acrimonious negotiations failing to reach a solution, leaving basic services unattended. But they returned yesterday after Pro-Irish republicans and pro-British unionists struck a deal on Friday under the threat of a new regional election if they missed the latest deadline to reconvene on Monday.

Foster said she was "deeply humbled" to be re-installed as first minister, heading a new executive that features several prominent women. "The last three years have focused too much on division and recrimination," she said. "There's plenty of blame to go around but the time has come to move forward with resolution."

The UK government in London promised a large cash injection into the small but strategically important province if the republican Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) found an agreement. Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald told reporters that the party was "ready to do business" after the deal was agreed.

Foster called the draft power-sharing agreement "fair", while Downing Street said it was "a balanced package," adding that the precise amount of new funding would be spelled out when agreement was reached. "History is being made," said Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney after both sides confirmed their support for the devolved government. It can help "show that politics in Northern Ireland can be a force for good and brings people together," he said.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called the breakthrough "an extremely positive development for the people of Northern Ireland". Friday's deal came with thousands of the region's healthcare workers on strike. The latest talks were launched in the wake of a December 12 UK general election that saw both the DUP and Sinn Fein lose votes to smaller groups.

Analysts attributed the losses to voter frustration at their inability to reach a compromise that could let a government in Belfast take care of the region's daily needs. A 1998 peace accord that ended three decades of violence over British rule of Northern Ireland in which thousands died requires the two main parties to share power. The lack of an executive was especially fraught with danger for the region because of historic changes to its trade rules being imposed by Britain's pending withdrawal from the European Union. Northern Ireland's border with the Republic of Ireland becomes a UK-EU land frontier on Brexit. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's EU withdrawal agreement puts pressure on local authorities to maintain frictionless trade while preserving an open border on the island of Ireland. —AFP

Taiwan's Tsai wins landslide in key election

TAIPEI: Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen declared a landslide victory in yesterday's election as voters delivered a stunning rebuke of Beijing's campaign to isolate the self-ruled island and handed its first female leader a second term. Tsai, 63, announced her victory as thousands of jubilant supporters cheered and waved flags outside her party headquarters with the ongoing vote count revealing an all but unassailable lead.

"Taiwan is showing the world how much we cherish our free, democratic way of life and how much we cherish our nation," she told reporters. Her main rival, Han Kuo-yu of the China-friendly Kuomintang (KMT) party, had conceded defeat shortly beforehand. Official results showed Tsai was romping ahead with 57 percent-more than eight million votes-on Saturday evening. Han trailed behind with 38 percent.

The Central Election Commission was still counting votes when Tsai declared, but Han knew he could not close the gap. The result is a huge blow for Beijing, which has made no secret of wanting to

see Tsai turfed out and the KMT take her place.

Over the last four years it ramped up economic and diplomatic pressure on the self-ruled island, hoping it would encourage voters to support Tsai's opposition. But the strong arm tactics backfired and voters flocked to her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), fuelled in part by China's headline response to months of huge and violent pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

'No threats'

Tsai pitched herself as a defender of liberal democratic values against the increasingly authoritarian shadow cast by China under President Xi Jinping. Beijing views Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to retake the island one day, by force if necessary.

Her campaign frequently invoked Hong Kong's protests as a warning of what might lie ahead should China one day take control of Taiwan. During her victory speech yesterday night Tsai said she was committed to dialogue with China's leaders and wanted peace.

But she called on Beijing to halt its sabre rattling towards Taiwan and respect the idea that only the island's 23 million inhabitants can decide its future. "I also hope that the Beijing authorities understand that democratic Taiwan, and our democratically elected government,



TAIPEI: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (center) joins her hands with Vice President-elect William Lai (left) and Vice President Chen Chien-jen outside the campaign headquarters in Taipei yesterday. —AFP

will not concede to threats and intimidation," she said.

Tsai is loathed by Beijing because she refuses to acknowledge the idea that Taiwan is part of "one China". But China is also Taiwan's largest trade partner, leaving the island in a precariously dependent relationship.

Han, the 62-year-old mayor of the southern city of Kaohsiung, favored much warmer ties with China-saying it

would boost Taiwan's fortunes-and accused the current administration of needlessly antagonizing Beijing. But his campaign struggled to gain momentum or escape the perception that he was too cosy with Taiwan's giant neighbor.

"The citizens of the Republic of China have already made their decision and as a candidate I obey the outcome of the election," he said in his concession speech, using Taiwan's official name. —AFP

Merkel, Putin discuss Middle East flashpoints

MOSCOW: German Chancellor Angela Merkel met Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin yesterday for talks set to focus on flashpoints in the Middle East. Merkel and Putin shook hands at the start of the meeting which the German leader said would cover topics including turmoil in Libya and the Syria conflict as well as Ukraine's war with pro-Russian separatists.

"There is a lot to discuss," said Merkel, adding that "talking with one another is always better than talking about one another." Putin thanked the chancellor for visiting and said they would focus on "the hottest" topics. The leaders were set to give a press conference afterwards.

Germany and Russia said ahead of the talks that they would cover the confrontation between Washington and Tehran over the US killing of a top Iranian general and turmoil in Libya.

The visit by Merkel was her first to Russia since May 2018 when the leaders met at Putin's Black Sea residence. Putin visited Syria and Turkey this week and is keen to stress his role as a regional powerbroker.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who accompanied Merkel, said a "key rea-

son" for the meeting was the escalating crisis in Libya, where Berlin is acting as a mediator in a conflict he has warned could become a "second Syria". "We are involving Europe and those players who are influential there, for that we need Russia," Maas told Germany's NTV television. "For us, it's not too far to fly to Moscow to discuss that with Putin."

Merkel is to invite Putin to a Berlin conference on Libya later this month, diplomatic sources told AFP.

Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for a ceasefire in Libya on Wednesday, although they are seen as supporting opposing sides in the conflict. While Turkey has sent troops to support the UN-backed Tripoli government, Moscow is accused of backing mercenaries supporting strongman Khalifa Haftar in his fight against the government. Haftar said he would fight on despite the call for a ceasefire.

Iran tensions

The Kremlin has said the talks will also cover the "escalation of tensions" in the Middle East after the US killed top Iranian commander General Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike close to Baghdad.

Putin warned the killing could "seriously aggravate the situation in the region". Iran, an ally of Moscow, responded with missile attacks on Iraqi bases housing American troops. It also accidentally brought down a Ukrainian passenger plane with missiles after mistaking it for a hostile target.



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel leave a hall after a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, yesterday. —AFP

While Germany condemned the tit-for-tat violence and urged Tehran to end a "spiral" of conflict, Putin said using force would "not contribute to finding solutions to the complex problems in the Middle East". Tehran has announced a further rollback on its commitment to a 2015 nuclear accord following the United States' unilateral withdrawal in 2018. Russia and Germany are among world powers still backing the deal. The Moscow meeting with Merkel also comes after Putin in December took part in talks on the Ukraine

conflict in Paris in the "Normandy format" hosted by Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron. This was his first face-to-face meeting with his recently-installed Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky.

The war with Moscow-backed separatists broke out after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and has killed more than 13,000 people. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko tweeted on Friday that he had spoken to Maas about the Ukraine conflict and was "waiting for news" to emerge from the talks. —AFP

International

India blows up luxury high-rises over environmental violations

Two more apartment complexes to be demolished today

KOCHI: Two luxury waterfront high-rises in southern India were reduced to rubble in controlled explosions yesterday in a rare example of authorities getting tough on builders who break environmental rules. The 19-floor H2O Holy Faith complex of 90 flats overlooking Kerala state's famous lush backwaters was the first to go down, collapsing in just a matter of few seconds.

A thick grey cloud of dust and debris cascaded down after officials detonated explosives drilled into the walls of the building, which had been occupied for several years until the Supreme Court ruled last May that it was constructed in violation of coastal regulations. Minutes later, the twin towers of Alfa Serene tumbled down with an ear-splitting noise. The remaining two complexes will be razed today.

A crowd of onlookers who flocked to nearby terraces and roads watched the demolition, after officials in helicopters conducted aerial surveys. India has seen a construction boom in recent years but developers have often ridden roughshod over safety and other regulations, with the connivance of local officials.

The inhabitants of the apartment blocks in the well-off Maradu district of Kochi city had bought their 343 flats in good faith and now face a lengthy legal fight to recoup their money. Some had invested their life savings. Sirens went off yesterday warning people gathered for the demolition to remain at a safe distance while ambulances and fire engines stood on standby. Ahead of the work, nearby residents told AFP they were worried about the impact of the demolition on their homes.

"When they were demolishing the swimming pool, some of the houses in our neighborhood developed cracks, we are really worried," said Divya, who has moved into temporary accommodation. Over 2,000 residents living in the neighborhood were evacuated as a part of safety measures.



KOCHI: An apartment complex is pictured during a controlled implosion ordered by the Supreme Court for violating coastal construction regulations in Kochi yesterday. — AFP

Scenic and fragile

The demolition capped a saga that began in 2006 when a local governing body granted permission to private builders to erect the high-rises. But last year, the Supreme Court ruled that the builders were in breach of rules about construction in an ecologically sensitive coastal zone, calling it a "colossal loss" to the environment. "It's a high-tide area and hundreds of illegal structures have come up in the coastal zone," the court ruled as it ordered the buildings razed.

On Friday the court also ordered the demolition of a

resort in neighboring Alappuzha district after its owners lost the appeal of a 2013 ruling that said the structure violated environmental regulations and must be demolished. Kerala is famed for its brackish lagoons and lakes that run parallel to the Arabian Sea-creating an environmentally fragile region.

In 2018, the state was battered by its worst floods in almost a century that killed more than 400 people. Experts blamed the disaster on the government's eagerness to build houses, hotels and resorts with little regard for coastal planning regulations.

The residents of the Maradu apartments initially refused to vacate but moved out after local authorities cut water and power supplies. They have been given interim partial compensation by the state government while the builders are in the process of providing a refund.

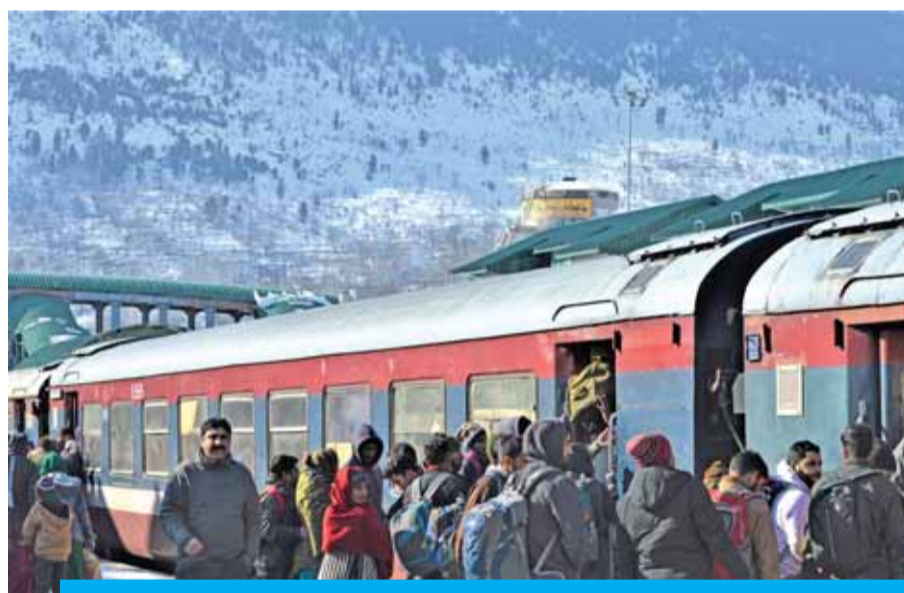
Shamshudeen Karunagapally, who bought a flat for \$145,000, said his wife and children did not watch the buildings go down as it was "too painful for them to see their dreams shatter before their eyes." "We are suffering without any fault," he said. — AFP

India's top court says indefinite Kashmir Internet shutdown illegal

NEW DELHI/SRINAGAR: India's Supreme Court said on Friday that an indefinite shutdown of the internet in Kashmir was illegal, rebuking the government for the communications lockdown imposed after it withdrew the majority region's autonomy in August. Internet suspensions can be imposed only for "temporary duration" and an indefinite suspension violated India's telecoms rules, the court said in an order published on its website.

It also ordered authorities to review all such curbs in Kashmir immediately. Authorities must consider immediately allowing the functioning of essential internet services such as for hospitals and limited e-banking in regions where internet cannot be restored right away, the court added.

"Freedom of Internet access is a fundamental right," Supreme Court justice N V Ramana said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist government has frequently used internet shutdowns as a tool to quell dissent in troubled parts of the country. Last month, authorities imposed an internet clampdown in parts of the capital and in areas of the eastern state of



BANIHAL, India: Commuters board a train to go back home in Banihal, India. — Reuters

Assam and Uttar Pradesh in the north as protests raged against a new citizenship law that Muslims see as discriminatory.

The shutdown in Kashmir, which has been on for more than 150 days, is the longest such outage in any democracy, according to digital rights group Access Now.

The government has argued that the blackout in Kashmir was needed to maintain order in a Himalayan region where security forces have been fighting a long-running separatist insurgency encouraged by neighboring Pakistan. The Supreme Court's decision, which also asks authori-

ties to make public all orders on internet shutdowns, should enable more scrutiny of suspensions, internet freedom activists said. "This sheds light on the rationale behind internet shutdowns which then can be challenged as being constitutional or proportionate or not," said Nikhil Pahwa, digital rights activist and editor of MediaNama, a Delhi-based publication.

"So if the state is forced to be transparent, they will be more accountable." In 2019, India's documented internet blackouts lasted for more than 4,000 hours, costing Asia's third-biggest economy \$1.3

billion, according to a report by website Top10VPN. India's home ministry and department of telecommunications did not respond to requests for comment.

Disrupting life

In Kashmir, the blackout has severely disrupted the lives of millions and has had an impact on everything from college admissions to businesses filing tax returns. For Yasin Tuman, who runs a travel agency in Kashmir's main city Srinagar, the loss of internet access has hit his business hard, as tourists stay away. "I've suffered losses of 7 million rupees (nearly \$100,000) in the past five months," he told Reuters. The government says it was necessary to block the internet to stop agitators orchestrating mass, potentially violent, protests against its decision to revoke Kashmir's special status. It also ordered a massive deployment of security forces, and after some protests in the initial days anti-government demonstrations have died down. Gouhar Geelani, a journalist and writer from Kashmir, said Modi's Hindu nationalist party had used the internet clampdown "to control the Kashmir narrative by placing restrictions on mainstream media and social media platforms."

Stricter regulations are necessary to safeguard users and the nation's security as the internet has emerged as a "potent tool to cause unimaginable disruption to the democratic polity," India's technology ministry has previously said. India is the biggest market for social media such as Facebook and its WhatsApp messenger, and with 450 million smartphone users it is second only to China. — Reuters

US appeals court upholds dismissal of lawsuits over Malaysia Air flight

WASHINGTON: A US appeals court on Friday upheld a lower court decision to dismiss nationwide litigation over the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 in which victims' families sought to hold the carrier, its insurer Allianz SE and Boeing Co liable for the still-unexplained disaster.

A three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals in Washington affirmed a November 2018 ruling from US Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson that found 40 wrongful death and product liability lawsuits "do not belong in the United States." Judge Neomi Rao, writing for the unanimous panel, said that while the court "has great sympathy for the victims of this tragedy and their families" she found no reason to reverse the decision. "We conclude that the district court did not clearly abuse its discretion in dismissing appellants' lawsuits," she wrote. Jackson said the case belonged in Malaysia, which has an "overwhelming interest" in and "substantial nexus" to the March 8, 2014 disappearance of Flight MH370, a Boeing 777 heading to Beijing from Kuala Lumpur with 239 people on board.

The decision is a new setback for plaintiffs from the United States, Australia, China, India and Malaysia who represented more than 100 Flight MH370 passengers, including from Japan.

The plane is believed to have crashed in the south Indian Ocean after veering far off course, but no remains or large pieces of wreckage have been found. Flight MH370's disappearance remains one of the world's greatest aviation mysteries. A Malaysian report concluded that its investigative team was "unable to determine the real cause for the disappearance of MH370," human interference or error were more likely the cause of the plane's disappearance than aircraft or system malfunction.

The plaintiffs sued under the Montreal Convention, an international treaty governing air transportation incidents, and various US state laws. — Reuters

Bushfires bring fears of 'new normal' to life Down Under

SYDNEY: A grim summer of fire and smoke has sullied Australia's outdoorsy and healthy image, and left many fearful for the future. For the unfortunate few, three long months of bushfires have brought almost unfathomable pain-homes lost, lives destroyed, families ripped apart.

But for many millions more the crisis has also shattered the long sunny days typically filled with beaches, barbecues and backyard cricket. Sporting events were cancelled, windows shuttered against weeks of menacing toxic haze and barbecues banned to prevent even more fires.

Famed beaches like Bondi were partially blackened, as the tide washed the ash of incinerated eucalypts back to shore. Holidays were cancelled as entire towns were shut off, highways were bumper-to-bumper with fleeing tourists and petrol stations mobbed as fuel ran out during the largest peacetime evacuations the country has ever seen. "We've seen the whole Australian way of life over summer across the continent upended," social researcher Rebecca Huntley, who has surveyed Australia's attitudes to the changing climate, told AFP.

"Instead of looking at the end of the year as a time to relax, (Australians) are getting quite anxious."

Images of military evacuations and frightened families huddled on beaches under red skies have challenged many people's previously idyllic idea of the continent. Huntley said the severity of the fires was challenging the perception that living in Australia meant having a high quality of life, with Sydney and Melbourne long-ranked as among the most liveable cities in the world.

Now residents have become expert at reading wind forecasts and fire maps to predict whether their kids will be able to play outside tomorrow. The Christmas dinner table featured debates about specific anti-pollution masks and air purifiers, topics often associated with daily life in New Delhi or Bangkok.

Kate Noble-Judge, whose parents were evacuated from their small New South Wales town over New Year, said the festive season turned into days of dread and worry.

"It wears you down because you feel so helpless. You can't visit because the roads might close or the fires might worsen," the Sydney resident said. "You can't even just go



LIMA: Climate activists and members of the environmentalist groups Citizen Movement Against Climate Change and Fridays For Future, protest outside the Australian embassy in Lima on Friday against the Australia's energy and climate policy as deadly climate-fuelled bushfires burned out of control. — AFP

for a walk to take your mind off it because the city is always full of smoke and that eerie orange glow. All you can do is stay at home and worry."

The nature of adaptation

All the while, the warnings from scientists have been stark. Australia is warming as a result of climate change, with new record temperatures set almost every year. Catastrophic fire conditions that usually occur once in several decades are becoming the new normal. "Those sort of conditions will become more frequent under the climate change scenario that we are looking at," Richard Thornton, from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre, said. "So while they used to be spread many years apart, they'll become more regular. There'll be things we'll need to do to live through the frequent arrival some these sorts of conditions." Many doctors say they cannot know what the impact

of prolonged exposure to bushfire smoke will be. With volunteer firefighters—the main service battling the blazes—already exhausted from months of work as climate change extends the fire season, Huntley said tackling emergencies rather than enjoying a vacation could define future summer seasons. "It may be that Christmas might not be a time where you relax. You may have a posting in the country where you help with bushfire support," she said.

David Bowman, a pyrogeography and fire science expert at the University of Tasmania, recently speculated how Australians' daily life may change. He called for rescheduling the peak holiday period to March-April instead of December-January, suggesting it was "absurd" to send thousands of tourists to bushfire prone coastal areas each year. "It's easy to dismiss this idea as stupid but that's the nature of adaptation. Things that once seemed absurd will now need serious consideration." — AFP

Suu Kyi visits China border state as Xi visit looms

MYITKYINA, Myanmar: Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi made a rare trip to a region bordering China days before President Xi Jinping is expected to push for controversial port and dam projects during a visit to the country. Wearing traditional ethnic attire Suu Kyi danced with a street procession on Friday in northern Kachin state's capital Myitkyina, a day after supporters cheered her arrival at the airport.

She urged a crowd of thousands to "focus on the present" and called for peace in the remote region, where insurgents have clashed with the army over autonomy and resources. She did not mention the China-backed Myitsone dam, a \$3.6 billion project halted in 2011 in the face of widespread opposition. A proposal to reinstate the dam drew thousands of protesters onto the streets last year. Myanmar is a vital piece of China's Belt and Road Initiative, Xi's \$1 trillion vision for maritime, rail and road projects across Asia, Africa and Europe.

During his two-day visit to the country starting January 17, Xi and top Myanmar political and military leaders are expected to discuss the initiative, according to a Friday briefing by China's Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaohui. Asked about the dam in Kachin, Luo said the two sides "are still maintaining close communication on this".

Suu Kyi was an opponent of the project before her party swept to power in 2015 elections, but in March last year she called on people to consider it "from a wider perspective". — AFP

Analysis

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Washington Watch

US decline continues

By Dr James J Zogby

Despite its claims of making America more respected and feared in the world, the Trump Administration's behaviors have only contributed to accelerating the decline in America's leadership. President Trump's demonstrated disdain for international agreements and law, his erratic behavior, and his reckless tweets, have left world leaders and their publics alternating between being confounded and frightened. One result has been that some allies and opponents have sought leadership and more predictable partnerships elsewhere.

This was not the way it was just three decades ago when the United States emerged victorious from the Cold War and the first Bush Administration appeared to seamlessly manage the transition to a unipolar world order. While the Clinton Administration largely maintained continuity with their predecessor's approach, President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq marked the beginning of the unraveling of American leadership and the end of the idea of a unipolar world.

Unlike the constructive use of diplomacy favored by his father and President Clinton, George W's policies were reckless and unilateral, and, more often than not, shaped more by ideology than reality. The results were devastating to the US and the world. Iraq was a case in point.

According to the neoconservative ideologues who were driving George W's approach to the Middle East, a decisive use of force against Iraq would accomplish a number of critical objectives. First and foremost, it would secure the US role as the dominant world hegemon, insuring a US-led unipolar world for the foreseeable future. They also believed that with Saddam gone, democracy would spontaneously take root in Iraq, transforming not only that country but the entire Middle East.

As we have seen, the opposite occurred. America became ground down in a long costly war that took a terrible toll not only in lives and treasure, but in America's standing in the world. As the war dragged on, it became clear that not only was America weaker and less respected, but other regional and international players began to assert themselves. As a result of this foolish war, the very multipolarity the neoconservatives sought to forestall became a reality.

Globally, Russia and China expanded their roles and, in the Middle East, Turkey and Iran sought increased influence, as did Saudi Arabia and its GCC partners. Maybe the most consequential impact of the Iraq war was the extent to which it emboldened and unleashed Iran, enabling it to pursue its meddlesome sectarian behavior across the region.

The Obama Administration began with great promise. Recognizing the damage done by his predecessor, President Obama declared his intention to correct course and rebuild confidence in America's role in the world. So desperate were some to see America restored as a stable leader and partner that the new president was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. The award proved to be premature. Obama's failure to deliver on his visionary promise and his administration's tendency to hesitate and/or meander when confronted by challenges, caused both frustration and deep disappointment.

Then came Donald Trump. Despite early signs of erratic behavior and his "shoot-first-ask-questions-later" approach to global and domestic problems, there was some hope - especially in parts of the Middle East - that given his business background, he would be fair and decisive in the policies he pursued in the world. This, too, proved to be premature.

After Bush and Obama, what many across the Middle East hoped for was a "Goldilocks and Three Bears" US president. One who wouldn't be "too much" or "too little" - but "just right." They wanted American leadership that was decisive, principled, and predictable. What they got instead was the worst of the past combined in one president. He has been reckless, bombastic, and unpredictable. And he has made great promises that have elevated expectations, only to fail to deliver on them.

Recent polling from Pew Research demonstrates how the public's attitudes toward the US and President Trump have witnessed sharp declines in many nations across the world. In Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East favorable attitudes toward the US went from lows during the years of George W. Bush's presidency to highs in the early Obama years to lows, once again, in the Trump era. And in our Zogby Research Services (ZRS) polling we found, with a few exceptions, much the same trajectory across the Middle East.

In the fall of 2019, for example, we found that the initial optimism in some Arab countries that Trump Administration policies toward some regional concerns might move in a positive direction has now dissipated. There is a sharp decline in respondents' views of US policies toward resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict, helping to stabilize Syria and Iraq, deal constructively with the Muslim World, and coherently address the threats posed by Iran's nuclear and regional agendas.

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

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In this photograph on Jan 7, 2020, protesters sit as they listen to a speaker during a demonstration in Shaheen Bagh area, that has been blocked off for almost four weeks to protest against India's new citizenship law near the Jamia Millia Islamia university in New Delhi. — AFP

India's roadblock women vow to fight on

Every night, 75-year-old Noornissa braves the freezing cold to help block one of the main roads into the capital of India, in a protest that is at the forefront of a rising challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. For nearly four weeks, Noornissa and more than 200 other women have sat and slept across the four-lane road between Delhi and the satellite city Noida, gaining nationwide attention as protests erupted across India over a controversial citizenship law that critics say is anti-Muslim.

Men stand guard as the women, from the mainly Muslim area of Shaheen Bagh, sing the US civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" and chant against the Citizenship Amendment Act, passed last month by Modi's Hindu nationalist government. The law has added to the fears of India's 200 million Muslims. It gives Hindus, Buddhists, Sikh and other minorities who have fled neighboring countries the right to Indian citizenship - but Muslims are excluded.

Modi has insisted the law is "humanitarian" and that Muslims have nothing to worry about, but opponents are not convinced and have held rallies across the South Asian nation - often met with police force. Authorities have warned the Shaheen Bagh protesters that the police will clear the road if they do not leave, but the women are

determined to stay. "I was born in India and I want to die here," Noornissa told AFP, her frail frame shaking with emotion. "I will fight this law until my last breath."

Gul Bano, 51, her face covered with a veil, described the protest as "a fight for our identity". Suffering some of the lowest temperatures in Delhi for decades, Noornissa sleeps on the street, wrapped in blankets with only her silver hair visible. The women with her include grandmothers and younger women, many with toddlers in tow. A tent has been put up to block the wind. Stray goats walk around the road alongside the protesters.

The Shaheen Bagh protest is a sign that "the pushback has begun across India", according to Syeda Hameed, head of the Muslim Women's Forum. People bring blankets, hot tea, snacks and meals for the women. The doors of nearby homes are always open for the women if they want to use the bathroom.

Mothers and Modi

Tens of thousands of people have taken part in protests against the citizenship law and more than 25 people have been killed. Hundreds have been detained, mostly in northern Uttar Pradesh state where police have been accused of using disproportionate force against protesters. The

Shaheen Bagh women took over the road after clashes between police and students at nearby Jamia Millia Islamia university.

Critics say the citizenship law is a precursor to a national register that many Indian Muslims fear will leave them stateless. Many poor Indians do not have documents to prove their nationality. "We don't trust Modi anymore. He says one thing and does something else," said Shaheen Bagh shopkeeper Jawid Iqbal. Iqbal and other men clapped as the women read poetry and shouted "long live the revolution" from a makeshift stage.

"We salute them, especially the mothers for sticking out there with small babies," said Nadeem Ali, watching with his six-year-old son. Like the grandmothers, the young mums insist they will not be moved from the rugs spread on the road where they feed babies and try to get them to sleep in the cold and the din from microphones and speakers.

"I used to avoid stepping out of the house because my baby is still small but not anymore," said Samreen Sami, who is taking part with her mother and sister-in-law. "I want to tell Modi-ji that we are not going anywhere," she declared. "One day you will have to listen to us and take this law back." — AFP

Infant deaths, poor conditions at Indian hospital spark uproar

In a dimly lit shanty in northwestern India, Padma Rawal sobs inconsolably as she recalls losing her 5-month-old infant, and recounts the hospital ordeal she endured last month. Her infant, Tejash, is one of more than a 100 children who have died at a government hospital in Kota in the state of Rajasthan since early December. Infant deaths are common in India, but the spike in fatalities at a state-run institution and evidence of poor hygiene, broken equipment and staff shortages has made headlines and triggered a row between the two main political parties.

District data in fact shows the infant mortality rate at the JK Lon Hospital in Kota has improved to 5.69 percent with 963 deaths in 2019 down from 6.11 percent in 2018, when 1,005 deaths were reported. But details from affected families and two preliminary investigations have emerged, embarrassing the regional government and local health authorities. Padma said there were three or four infants in each bed when she was there in late December. "Why are you crying? Your child is going to die anyway," Padma recalled one doctor telling her, as she sat weeping beside her husband, Sanjay, and daughters - Kanika, 6, and Purvi, 4.

Reuters spoke with the parents of nine children who either died or were being treated at the hospital. All

described staff shortages, poor sanitary conditions and a lack of basic provisions such as blankets despite very cold weather. Rajasthan Health Minister Raghu Sharma tweeted that most of the infants who died had low birth weights and were in critical condition. He vowed "strict action" would be taken against any officials found guilty of negligence.

'Living in hell'

At least 112 children have died at the hospital since the start of December, even as authorities scrambled to bring in additional staff and equipment amid public outcry. Around three quarters of the recent deaths occurred in JK Lon's neo-natal intensive care unit (NICU), which treats babies up to a month old, said an official directly aware of the matter. Hospital officials said infant mortality rates may appear high, partly because it handles many referral cases and is a hospital of last resort. It is the only one with a NICU in a 200 km radius.

Shubham Hada, who lost his two-day-old son at the hospital to what he was told was a severe infection, said: "Parents had to monitor their babies all night by themselves in the NICU. There were no doctors after 10 pm, when the shift changed." Pooja, holding her sick 2-month-old infant in her lap, said authorities distributed blankets and room heaters only late last week, despite a severe cold wave across northern India since late December. "We've been living in hell," she said. "At least they have started cleaning the place once a day after the media uproar and visits by ministers."

Broken equipment, 'roaming pigs'

A preliminary probe into the deaths at JK Lon found

that of 533 pieces of equipment in its pediatrics section, 320 were out of order, including defibrillators and ventilators. JK Lon's medical superintendent, Suresh Dulara, who took additional charge of the center in late December, said that the hospital had started repairing equipment. A separate probe by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, a government agency, found that infrastructure and sanitation was "pathetic". "Pigs were found roaming inside the campus of the hospital," it said.

The deaths and surrounding furor set off a row between India's two main political parties. The Congress party, which sits in opposition nationally, won Rajasthan state in Dec 2018 elections. It pointed to the higher overall death rate at the hospital under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which ran Rajasthan previously.

The BJP hit back, saying appropriate funding has been assigned to the state under the National Health Mission and urged the state to request further financial support. Modi's government has raised expenditure on healthcare recently and set a target to take the annual health spending to 2.5 percent of GDP by 2025. It was 1.4 percent in 2017-18. Latest government data show a decrease in infant mortality nationwide to 33 per 1000 live births in 2017 from 53 in 2008.

Despite the government's attempts to improve healthcare in India, infant mortality remains a concern. The United Nations in a 2017 report said more babies die in India than any other country, with roughly 600,000 deaths recorded annually, or one quarter of the world total. India, in comparison, accounts for about 18 percent of global population. — Reuters

Trump playbook: Insult opponents, but not too soon

"The economy, stupid" goes one of the most famous mantras of US presidential campaign history. Donald Trump is hitting the 2020 trail with his own twist: Brand your opponents stupid (or worse). Name calling and character smearing is an integral part of Trump's reelection campaign. It's right up there with touting US military strength or, for that matter, following the advice given to Bill Clinton in 1992 to focus on the economy.

With his characteristic openness - critics say shamelessness - Trump laid out the insults strategy at his first rally of the year late Thursday in Toledo, Ohio. Trump referred to Democratic frontrunner Joe Biden as "sleepy Joe", journalists at the rally as "sick" and another Democratic challenger, Bernie Sanders, as "crazy". Milking the audience's laughter, Trump characterized top House of Representatives Democrat Nancy Pelosi as "not operating with a full deck". He called another senior Democrat behind his impeachment vote, Adam Schiff, "pencil neck". "He buys the smallest shirt collar you can get and it's loose," Trump jeered.

Timing is everything

But with all the acting skills picked up during years as a reality TV performer, Trump then dropped his voice to a conspiratorial hush and confided to the cheering, baying audience that his taunts need a little something extra: Timing. He chastised himself for coming up too early with the idea of labeling Democratic challenger Elizabeth Warren "Pocahontas," in mockery of her false claim to have Native American ancestry.

"I came up with this great name, I came up with a lot of different stuff. I said she was a total fraud and everybody believed me and she went down. Then she started coming up," he said wistfully. "It doesn't help me to do it a year and a half before the election," he said. "I don't like doing this too soon."

Quaint past

As far back as the 18th century, White House occupants and hopefuls have tossed around words like "pimp", "drunkard" and "b*****d brat". But more recent presidential history looks quaint compared to Trump's trash talk. Back in 1988, Democratic vice presidential candidate Lloyd Bentsen delivered a famous putdown of Republican counterpart Dan Quayle - who had claimed to have as much experience as John F. Kennedy at the same age. "Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're not Jack Kennedy," came the zinger from the silver-haired Bentsen.

The line still echoes but it was Quayle who had the

last laugh, accompanying George H W Bush to the White House - in large part thanks to a devastating TV ad mocking the military credentials of liberal Democrat Michael Dukakis. That so-called "tank ad" is still seen as a classic of attack politics, mixing serious messaging with personal ridicule and ruthless absence of context - a genre that increasingly became a fixture of White House races these past few decades.

Political cage fight

Trump, however, has shifted presidential elections from occasional attack ad to full-on, 24/7 cage fight. His 2016 surprise victory revolved partly around an unprecedented campaign to brand Democrat Hillary Clinton a criminal. Trump led chants at rallies of "lock her up!" He continues even today, a full three years after beating her. The eventual Democratic nominee challenging Trump can expect to meet worse.

Trump brazenly warned Biden that he will troll him incessantly if he wins the nomination by raising unproven allegations of corruption against the Democrat's son Hunter. "I sort of hope it's Joe because he will hear 'Where's Hunter?' every single debate, nine times a debate," Trump said gleefully. And the best - or worst - is yet to come, Trump said. "We're too far ahead of the election," Trump said. "We're going to just take our time and we're going to relax. You're going to join some rallies about a month before - you're going to hear the real facts." — AFP

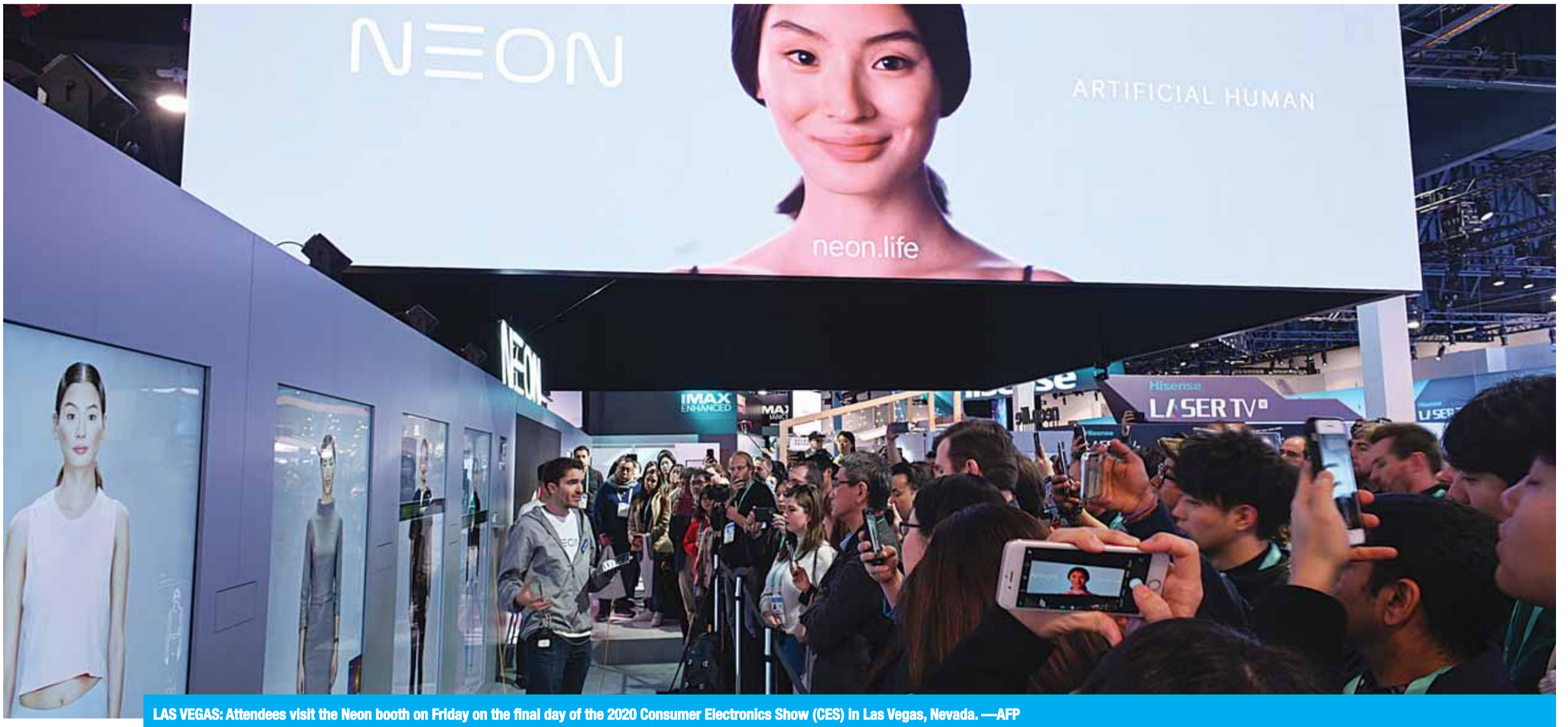
Business

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 2020

12 Middle East tensions could impact markets after strong end to 2019

13 US job creation in 2019 slowest in 8 years; labor market tightening

14 Al Mulla Automobiles launches exclusive Mercedes-Benz vans showroom in Kuwait



LAS VEGAS: Attendees visit the Neon booth on Friday on the final day of the 2020 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

Future of mobility: Some wild rides ahead

Tech-inspired solutions for mobility on land, air and water featured at CES

LAS VEGAS: In the not-too-distant future you could ride one, two or three wheels... or maybe none at all. Tech-inspired solutions for mobility on land, air and water featured prominently at the 2020 Consumer Electronics Show this week. Some innovators played with long-established ideas like the bicycle or scooter by adding artificial intelligence, electric power and other technologies. With bold and striking designs, the new transportation gadgetry suggests a wild ride ahead.

Autonomous and shared

Autonomous and shared vehicles intended to curb traffic and emissions were front and center. Swiss-based group Rinspeed showed its latest "modular mobility" vehicle "Metrosnap," which is built on a skateboard-like chassis and looks like a futuristic minibus. Different components can be swapped in to accommodate passengers, deliveries or even a mobile retail outlet.

Germany's Bosch showed a similar autonomous shuttle bus-style vehicle that can offer "customized on-demand mobility." "If there is demand, it can transport people, and then if there is a need to move goods, it

can be adapted for that as well," said Bosch's Andrew Yip.

Juergen Reers, a mobility analyst with Accenture, said people are looking for flexible solutions. "People want something more than (transit) where they are tied to rigid schedules and pickup stations," he said.

Pedal power, with extras

Adaptations of the bicycle, infused with new tech for the connected generation, appeared at CES. French startup Wello showed its open-sided, three-wheeled car-bike that relies on pedaling, electric power and solar panels on the roof, already in use by French postal services.

"It's taking the best from the bicycle and the best from the car," said Arnaud Chereau, co-founder of the group, which is based in Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean. "It's 100 percent sustainable because it produces energy from the solar panels."

Also seen at the show was an off-road electric cargo bike from Sweden-based startup Cake, which riders can customize for various kinds of trips. "You can commute to work, pick up your groceries and then grab your surfboard and head to the beach," Cake

spokesman Garin Fons said of the two-wheeler.

Another electric-assisted tricycle concept from Italian startup Measy adds another dimension: a cargo bay for a small delivery robot that can be set free to bring goods inside buildings.

"This is a concept for multi-mobility," said Measy engineer Matta De Santis, demonstrating with a robot from fellow Italian startup Yape. China-based Smacircle offered a simpler, lighter electric bicycle designed as two small, connected rings that fold up and fit a backpack or commuter case. "If you take a train to work, you can use this for the first mile or last mile," said Smacircle's Darren Pike of the e-bike, which is only 53 centimeters (20 inches) high and weighs just over 10 kilos (24 pounds).

Breaking the mold

Some models presented a more outlandish way to get from A to B. Ninebot Segway, which makes personal transporters and scooters, unveiled its S-Pod, a self-balancing armchair designed for urban streets. "We are looking at different solutions for urban mobility," said company spokeswoman Julie Tang.

According to Segway, the new personal transport pod can travel up to 24 miles (39 kilometers) an hour and is designed with intuitive controls to avoid tipping over.

New Zealand startup Manta5 presented its water bike, which also uses electricity. "Our founder had a dream that he was riding a bicycle, and he saw dolphins, and that's how this started," said spokesman Louis Wilks. The Manta5 hydrofoiler, with variable electric power assistance, is "a new category of water sport" that is quiet, environmentally friendly and allows you "to see directly into the water," Wilks said.

Flying above the crowd

Some CES exhibitors said the best way to cope with traffic on the ground is to rise above it. Aeroneer unveiled a scaled-down model of its "flying gondola" designed as a personal transporter. The gondola uses so-called "4D gravity" to keep the passenger compartment stable even during turbulence.

"This is original technology. Conventional air mobility drones are not stable," said Keisuke Toji, chief executive of the group, which has offices in Japan and China. Toji said

the company hopes to have a working prototype in the next year as it moves toward commercialization.

South Korea's Hyundai meanwhile announced it would begin mass-producing flying cars for Uber, moving the idea of aerial robo-taxis closer to reality.

Putting it all together

The vast array of new transport options could lead to a more sustainable future, but only if coordinated, Accenture's Reers said. Hyundai proposed a network of hubs to connect various forms of personal and mass transit with stations for its drones. Toyota said it would create a "woven city" in Japan, powered by hydrogen fuel cells, where it would test autonomous driving and related technologies.

At the moment, Reers said cities have resisted new modes of transport like scooters because they don't fit into the ecosystem, highlighting the need for better planning. "These new developments create huge opportunities to manage the system in a more sustainable way," he said. "Instead of looking for the next big thing, we should be thinking about making things work together." —AFP

'Damning' Boeing emails say 737 MAX was 'designed by clowns'

NEW YORK: Boeing employees bantered about whether the 737 MAX was safe to fly and joked that the aircraft was "designed by clowns who in turn are supervised by monkeys," according to emails released late Thursday. "Would you put your family on a MAX simulator trained aircraft? I wouldn't," a Boeing employee wrote to a colleague in one newly-released exchange conducted about eight months before the first of two fatal MAX crashes.

"No," the colleague answered. The communications, released by Boeing following their disclosure to lawmakers and regulators, raised fresh questions about the aerospace giant, which has been in crisis mode since March following a pair of MAX crashes that claimed 346 lives and grounded the company's best-selling plane. Adding to the problems, a top MAX supplier, Spirit AeroSystems, announced Friday it will lay off 2,800 employees, and possibly more, after Boeing halted production of the top-selling plane, and the Federal Aviation Administration proposed a \$5.4 million civil fine on Boeing for installing defective parts on the MAX. The latest

disclosures could complicate efforts by Boeing to win FAA approval to return the plane to service and may amplify calls in Congress for more profound steps to address company culture after the aerospace giant ousted its chief executive in December.

The new emails-called "incredibly damning" by one top lawmaker-come on the heels of a shock exchange publicly disclosed in October in which a Boeing pilot called a flight handling system implicated in the two crashes "egregious."

In late December, after months in crisis mode, Boeing pushed out its embattled chief executive, Dennis Muilenburg, in part due to tensions with the FAA, replacing him with long-time board member David Calhoun, who is set to take over Monday. Boeing disclosed late Friday that Muilenburg will not receive a severance payment or bonus awards for 2019. The company's share price dropped 1.9 percent to close Friday at \$329.92, the biggest loser in the Dow.

Clowns and monkeys

The latest exchanges happened as Boeing was working to persuade the FAA that pilots would not need simulator training to fly the new MAX, arguing that training on computer tablets would be sufficient.

"I still haven't been forgiven by God for the covering up I did last year," one employee wrote in a message from 2018 in reference to dealings with the FAA. "I know but this is what these regulators get when they try and get in the way. They impede progress," another wrote in August 2015.

"This airplane is designed by clowns, who in turn are supervised by monkeys," another employee said in 2017, apparently in reference to the FAA. Boeing apologized for the

tone of the messages, which it said were sent to congressional investigators in the interest of transparency.

"We regret the content of these communications, and apologize to the FAA, Congress, our airline customers, and to the flying public for them," the company said.

"We have made significant changes as a company to enhance our safety processes, organizations, and culture," the company said, adding that it will ultimately take "disciplinary or other personnel action."

And despite jokes about problems with MAX simulators, "we are confident that all of Boeing's MAX simulators are functioning effectively," the statement said.

FAA: 'No new safety risks'

The FAA called the language in the documents "disappointing," the emails did not reveal any new safety risks. "Our first priority is safety, and we have set no timeframe for when the work will be completed," an FAA spokesman said.

Representative Peter DeFazio, the Oregon Democrat leading the House investigation of the MAX, called the emails "incredibly damning." "They paint a deeply disturbing picture of the lengths Boeing was apparently willing to go to in order to evade scrutiny from regulators, flight crews and the flying public." Robert Clifford, who represents family members of victims, said employees in the exchanges demonstrate "a lack of concern for human life is beyond cold-heartedness," adding that the company's conduct "goes far beyond negligence."

Boeing on Tuesday reversed its earlier position and endorsed simulator training for MAX pilots prior to resuming flights, a change likely to further delay the aircraft's return to



In this file photo, employees work on Boeing 737 MAX airplanes at the Boeing Renton Factory in Renton, Washington. Boeing employees bantered about whether the 737 MAX was safe to fly and joked that the aircraft was "designed by clowns who in turn are supervised by monkeys," according to emails released late on Thursday. —AFP

the skies. In another development late Friday, the FAA announced a \$5.4 million penalty against Boeing for allegedly installing parts on 178 MAX aircraft that did not meet quality standards. Boeing allegedly failed to adequately oversee its suppliers on the parts and "knowingly submitted" the aircraft for certification, the FAA said. The FAA company last month announced a \$3.9 million fine on Boeing for the same issue involving some 737 NGS, a predecessor to the MAX. —AFP

Business

NBK International Markets Report

Middle East tensions could impact markets after strong end to 2019

Oil prices rise on spike in geopolitical risks

KUWAIT: Financial markets enjoyed a strong end to 2019 with the US S&P equity index up 3 percent m/m and 10-year treasury yields edging back above 1.9 percent as optimism grew over the outlook for global growth amid mildly encouraging economic data and the agreement of a 'phase one' trade deal between the US and China. Some of this optimism was punctured in January however with the escalation in military tensions between the US and Iran that if sustained could jeopardize conditions in the broader Middle East region. These developments saw the price of Brent crude oil spike to nearly \$70/bbl having already finished 2019 on a strong note thanks to the better global demand outlook and fresh OPEC+ supply cuts announced in December.

Trade deal helps lift optimism

Pessimism over the US growth climate has mostly ebbed over the past month amid decent economic data especially on jobs, housing and service sector activity and also the boost to sentiment from the partial US-China trade deal which could ease pressure on the still-weak US manufacturing sector. Estimates of fourth quarter GDP growth have been rising and the Atlanta Fed 'nowcast' suggests growth could even have reached an annualized 2.3 percent in 4Q19 from 2.1 percent in Q3. This would leave growth at a decent 2.4 percent for 2019 overall, though still down from 2.9 percent a year earlier and versus a consensus forecast of 1.6 percent for 2020. A reasonably solid economic picture, a strong stock market, contained inflation and reduced risks from overseas trade point to little urgency from the Federal Reserve to change interest rates from current levels, a view supported by minutes from the bank's December meeting that showed a growing consensus among officials for keeping policy on hold through 2020.

There was at last some positive news on trade with the US and China agreeing a 'phase one' deal that effectively calls a provisional truce on their now 18-month dispute, and is scheduled to go into force from January 15th. The deal sees China purchase \$40 billion more US agricultural goods per year, take steps to end forced technology transfer and also avoid currency devaluation to gain competitive advantage. The US on the other hand will halve the 15 percent duties on imports from China introduced in September and shelved further tariff hikes that were scheduled for December.

While the agreement represents a first step in deescalating the quarrel which has dented confidence,

trade, and manufacturing worldwide and should ensure no further duty hikes, it leaves tariffs on around \$250 billion in US imports from China imposed before September in place and difficult issues such as Chinese state subsidies and cyber intrusions unresolved. Prospects for a substantive 'phase two' deal could be influenced by political factors ahead of the November presidential election and to the extent that the deal discourages the Federal Reserve from further policy loosening, the net boost to the US economy could be positive but modest.

In the eurozone, the December composite PMI edged up to 50.9 from 50.6 in November, but points to overall growth remaining at negligible levels. Based on previous trends, this could be consistent with GDP growth of just 0.1 percent q/q in 4Q19, well below trend and even lower than the 0.2 percent growth recorded in Q2 and Q3. Other sentiment surveys suggest that the worst of the downturn in activity may be over, but any pick-up is likely to be gradual given the still-fragile external climate, signs of a cooling job market and the continued reluctance of the German government to provide significant fiscal stimulus.

The European Central Bank, having cut interest rates to -0.5 percent in September and restarted quantitative easing in November may look to loosen policy a bit further over coming months given that core inflation at 1.3 percent y/y in December remains well below the ECB's 'close to but below 2 percent' target. But the extent could be limited by concerns over the impact on financial stability of negative interest rates, the recent departure of the dovish but influential Mario Draghi as president and as the bank assesses the consequences of ultra-loose policy as part of its broader strategic review of monetary policy this year.

In the UK, the Conservative party won a resounding victory at the December 12 general election, leaving PM Boris Johnson with a large 80-seat majority in the 650 seat House of Commons for the next five years. The following week, parliament easily approved Johnson's renegotiated Brexit deal, clearing the way for the UK to leave the EU at the end of January 2020. The UK will enter into an 11-month transition period from February during which the two sides will look to negotiate an agreement to govern their future trading relationship, with the EU likely to insist on considerable regulatory alignment from the UK in exchange for better access to EU markets. Johnson prefers a looser arrangement and has ruled out extending the transition

period beyond 2020, which could see the UK default to trading on WTO terms if no agreement is reached by then. Worries about 'no deal' saw the pound give up its immediate post-election gains, though somewhat reduced political uncertainty and the prospect of an expansionary budget in March should help keep economic growth above 1 percent in 2020 and interest rates on hold.

Japanese growth in Q3 upgraded

Japan's third quarter growth was revised up to an annualized 1.8 percent, well above the initial estimate of 0.2 percent mainly thanks to an increase in investment and household spending. However, the pick-up in household spending was likely driven by consumers' looking to beat the sales tax hike in October, and is therefore unlikely to be sustained in Q4. As one indicator of this, the decline in import growth moderated to 4.8 percent y/y in 3Q19, but had returned to a much steeper 15 percent fall by November, reflecting underlying weakness in domestic demand. Meanwhile exports continue to struggle, having fallen for a year and were down 7.9 percent in November. Nonetheless, during its monetary policy meeting in December, the Bank of Japan maintained a largely positive stance on the economy and refrained from policy easing measures, as uncertainty over the global economy waned not least because of the US-China trade agreement.

Outlook for Chinese economy more promising

China's economy will be offered some reprieve as a 'Phase-One' trade deal with the US comes into effect from January 15th. This should give its external sector a much-needed boost after exports were down (-1.2 percent y/y) for the fourth straight month in November. Meanwhile, additional monetary and fiscal easing measures are expected to further support the economy. The central bank announced a 50bps cut in the reserve ratio (effective January 6th) that will inject RMB800 billion (\$115 billion) of liquidity into the banking system, allowing banks to reduce lending costs to the private sector, SMEs in particular. It is also likely to give cash demand a boost ahead of the Chinese New Year holiday.

Growth in India slows in Q3

GDP growth slowed to a more than six-year low of 4.5 percent in 3Q19 from 5.0 percent in Q2, marking the sixth consecutive quarterly decline in growth and affected by the slowest pace of investment since 2014

(1 percent). Investment has been hit by tighter credit conditions after the collapse of a major non-bank lender in 2018. Exports meanwhile contracted by 0.4 percent, likely affected by softer world demand. Growth in private consumption, while still relatively soft, rose to 5 percent from a five-year low of 3.1 percent in Q2.

However more recent data suggest some grounds for optimism. PMI activity indices have gradually risen, with the manufacturing and services measures at 52.7 and 53.3 respectively in December, lifted by new orders and higher employment. The outlook has been helped by interest rate cuts of a combined 135 bps in 2019 and a reduction in corporate tax (from 35 percent to 25 percent and 17 percent for manufacturing) in September. But given that the scope for further fiscal and monetary stimulus may be limited by rising twin deficits and inflation, and the banking sector remains burdened with bad debt, the consensus view is that any pick-up in growth will be modest over coming quarters.

Oil prices up as US-Iran tensions spike

The new year started with geopolitical risk back on the oil market's agenda. The price of Brent crude oil jumped more than 3 percent to \$69/bbl after a US drone attacked killed Iranian general Qassem Soleimani while in Iraq. With regional tensions spiking and Iran later retaliating with a strike on a US military base in Iraq, oil prices look set to benefit (only for a short period) from elevated geopolitical risk premia in the near term, as well as more constructive demand-supply dynamics that emerged towards the end of 2019. The latter helped Brent finish the year with annual gains of 23 percent - its best performance since 2016. These included the US-China trade agreement and the OPEC+ decision to cut oil production by an additional 500 kb/d from current levels (taking total cuts to 2.1 mb/d) until at least March. Markets expect the new deal to help reduce the supply overhang and minimize stock increases.

Meanwhile, on 1 January, tighter regulations on sulfur emissions in shipping (bunker) fuels by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) went into effect. Seaborne freight is mandated to run fuel containing no more than 0.5 percent sulfur from the previous limit of 3.5 percent. These regulations should favor light, sweet crude oils such as Brent and WTI that yield greater quantities of low sulfur shipping fuels compared to the regionally more prevalent medium, sour crudes that yield less after refining.

Connected cars moving targets for hackers

LAS VEGAS: As cars evolve into rolling mobile computers, the potential for disastrous cyber-attacks has become a new road hazard. Israeli cybersecurity firm GuardKnox demonstrated the threat in a Formula 1 driving simulation at the Consumer Electronics show this week in Las Vegas. Moments into the virtual drive, a GuardKnox engineer playing the role of hacker struck and the steering wheel no longer controlled the speeding car. The faux race was over for the driver, stuck on the side of the road in a scenario that cybersecurity specialists say could become very real.

New car models are packed with computer chips, sensors and mobile technology that hackers could exploit to sabotage systems or commandeer controls. Opportunities for attacks are being revved up by the trend of self-driving, electric cars communicating in real-time with the cloud, smart city infrastructures, and one another.

GuardKnox chief executive Moshe Shlissel gave an example of a hacker

remotely taking control of a fuel tanker truck, sending it to crash into a building. "It's September 11 on wheels," Shlissel said in an interview at CES. Cybersecurity has become as integral to vehicle engineering as crash safety and fuel efficiency, according to Henry Zbeih, a former member of the Council for Automobile Cybersecurity, who spoke at the Las Vegas event. "Connectivity is the reason why this is happening," Zbeih said. "Now, all elements have to be designed with cybersecurity in mind."

'Anything is possible'

Israeli startup Upstream logged more than 150 cybersecurity incidents involving automobiles last year, twice as many as in 2018. The majority of those hacks involve remotely car door locks, but an increasing number targeted software applications or connections to the cloud. Last year in Chicago, dozens of luxury cars were stolen by hacking Daimler's Car2Go app. "The ultimate worst-case scenario would be if somebody applies one of the car functions when it's not supposed to do that, and does that across multiple vehicles," said Upstream vice president Dan Sahar.

"For example, someone hits the brakes on all vehicles of a specific model at the same time. That would be catastrophic." Since cars in model lines share engineering specifications, they share system vulnerabilities by design. —AFP

The countdown to Gulf Bank's Al-Danah millionaire begins!

KUWAIT: The countdown to the making of yet another Al-Danah millionaire has begun! This week, Gulf Bank is hosting its annual Al-Danah Account draw event for the 'One Million Kuwaiti Dinar' prize, starting from today (Jan 12) to Thursday Jan 16. The event will take place at The Avenues, near the Cheesecake Factory, and will culminate in the reveal of the Al Danah Millionaire in a live draw on stage on Thursday evening. Throughout the week, attendees will be able to take part in a variety of activities, including a mosaic photo wall, pin & win map, and arcade games for the chance to win cash prizes. On Thursday, attendees will also be treated to a live musical performance by Abdulaziz Al-Dhuwaih.

Throughout the week, Gulf Bank's stage area will play host to a variety of entertainment activities, giving participants the chance to take home cash prizes of up to KD 100. Everyone is welcome to participate, and choose from activities that include a Pin & Win map, a Luster Wall, an arcade claw game, vending machine, and more. At the Pin & Win activity, participants will be able to pin their

location on an enlarged map of Kuwait, highlighting the part of town they are coming from. Participants will also get a chance to try their luck at the arcade claw game and the vending machine to win cash prizes. At the Luster Wall, attendees will be able to take a selfie or picture to post on their social media channels. Upon posting, their images will appear as part of a larger mosaic that will spell out a hidden message whose meaning will be unveiled at the end of the week.

Commenting on the event, Ahmad Al Amir, Assistant General Manager of External Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "Every year, Gulf Bank is proud to designate one lucky person as this year's Al-Danah Millionaire. At Gulf Bank, we are proud to offer our clients multiple chances throughout the year to win valuable prizes, with the Al-Danah millionaire prize being our biggest prize yet. We can't wait to reveal this year's Al-Danah millionaire, but that won't be our only announcement! Throughout the week, we will also be dropping hints for one of our biggest announcements to date, and while we can't reveal exactly what it is yet, we can definitely say that this Al-Danah event is going to be bigger than anything we've done before!"

On Thursday evening, with the countdown to the Al-Danah millionaire reveal in full swing, attendees will be able to celebrate as Gulf Bank names the Al-Danah millionaire in a live draw at 7:30 PM. The draw will take place live on stage in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce, and presented by Ossama Fouda, an anchor



Ahmad Al Amir

at Kuwait Pulse FM 88.8, and Ahmad Al-Matari, an employee at Gulf Bank. The countdown to the Al-Danah Millionaire event will also include a live musical performance from Abdulaziz Al-Dhuwaih.

Kuwait Pulse anchor Ossama Fouda will also be hosting exciting activities on stage on Thursday, leading participants through a variety of games with a competitive twist. Participants can try their luck against others at the safe combination game, in which they must find the correct safe combination in the fastest amount of time. Participants will also get a chance to play the darts money collector, in which they will be able to collect cash prizes depending on the locations their darts hit - the closer to the bullseye, the more valuable the prize! Finally, participants will also get to try their hands at a variety of digital gaming competitions, competing with others for the chance to take home cash prizes.

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.776
Indian Rupees	4.290
Pakistani Rupees	1.960
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.672
Nepali Rupees	2.668
Singapore Dollar	227.030
Hongkong Dollar	39.160
Bangladesh Taka	3.555
Philippine Peso	6.021
Thai Baht	10.115
Malaysian Ringgit	77.775

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.147
Qatari Riyal	83.578
UAE Dirham	790.383
Bahraini Dinar	808.020
UAE Dirham	82.850

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.750
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.025
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.221
Tunisian Dinar	114.750
Jordanian Dinar	429.190
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.203
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.214

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.100
Euro	341.050
Sterling Pound	401.110
Canadian dollar	234.650
Turkish lira	52.890
Swiss Franc	315.950
US Dollar Buying	296.750

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	303.750
Canadian Dollar	233.415
Sterling Pound	398.295
Euro	339.190
Swiss Frank	298.060
Bahrain Dinar	807.785
UAE Dirhams	83.100
Qatari Riyals	84.340
Saudi Riyals	81.895
Jordanian Dinar	429.705
Egyptian Pound	19.039
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.674
Indian Rupees	4.279
Pakistani Rupees	1.960
Bangladesh Taka	3.548
Philippines Peso	5.997
Cyprus pound	18.075
Japanese Yen	3.775
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.669
Malaysian Ringgit	75.350

Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.085
Thai Bhat	11.030
Turkish Lira	52.090
Singapore dollars	224.704

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.390802	0.404702
Czech Korune	0.005374	0.014674
Danish Krone	0.04189	0.046189
Euro	0.331291	0.344991
Georgian Lari	0.114060	0.114060
Hungarian	0.001146	0.001336
Norwegian Krone	0.030208	0.035408
Romanian Leu	0.065150	0.082000
Russian Ruble	0.004989	0.004989
Slovakia	0.009085	0.019085
Swedish Krona	0.028014	0.033014
Swiss Franc	0.306622	0.317622
Australia Dollar	0.202105	0.214105
New Zealand Dollar	0.195913	0.205413
Canada Dollar	0.228447	0.236847
US Dollars	0.300000	0.304550
US Dollars Mint	0.300500	0.304550
Bangladesh Taka	0.002928	0.003729

Chinese Yuan	0.042535	0.046035
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037199	0.039949
Indian Rupee	0.003640	0.004412
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002693	0.002873
Korean Won	0.000252	0.000267
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070729	0.076729
Nepalese Rupee	0.002622	0.002962
Pakistan Rupee	0.001315	0.002085
Philippine Peso	0.005898	0.006198
Singapore Dollar	0.220158	0.230158
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001317	0.001897
Taiwan	0.010115	0.010295
Thai Baht	0.009726	0.010276
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.000103

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.800486	0.808532
Egyptian Pound	0.019071	0.021812
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000199	0.000259
Jordanian Dinar	0.424008	0.433008
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000103	0.000253
Moroccan Dirhams	0.020978	0.044978
Omani Riyal	0.784475	0.792632
Qatar Riyal	0.082874	0.083706
Saudi Riyal	0.080007	0.081307
Syrian Pound	0.001289	0.001509
Tunisian Dinar	0.104039	0.110309
Turkish Lira	0.045041	0.054886
UAE Dirhams	0.082163	0.082989
Yemeni Riyal	0.000988	0.001068

Business

US job creation in 2019 slowest in 8 years; labor market tightening

Economy created only 2.1 million jobs in 2019

WASHINGTON: America's solid job creation continued in December but gains in for 2019 were the lowest in eight years, according to the closely-watched government report released Friday.

After a decade of rising employment, hiring last year slowed notably from the brisk pace seen in 2018: With 2.1 million jobs created, that made 2019 the weakest year since 2011, according to the Labor Department data. The economy added an average of 175,000 new positions a month last year, a sharp drop from the 225,000 monthly average in the prior year.

The decline—which is not unusual after such a long stretch of brisk hiring—still could tarnish President Donald Trump's economic record as he battles to win re-election in November. In the final month of the year, the US jobs engine added another 145,000 new positions, the slowest pace in seven months and a bit short of economists' expectations. The unemployment rate held steady at 3.5 percent, remaining at a 50-year low, according to the report.

The ailing manufacturing sector, driven into recession by Trump's multi-front trade wars and a sluggish global economy, shed workers for third time in 2019. But retailers, hotels, bars, restaurants, education, construction and health

care led hiring last month, showing the resilience of America's dominant service sector. Worker pay was a disappointment, rising only 2.9 percent compared to December 2018 — the first time that measure has fallen below three percent since July 2018. That still put wage gains well above consumer inflation for the period, leaving workers with more cash to spend.

Will unemployment keep falling?

As US growth slowed in 2019, persistent consumer spending has been a mainstay of the world's largest economy, but economists say it could weaken if the labor market begins to falter. The total labor force—the sum of those people working or actively looking for work—grew a touch more quickly than job creation in December, something that could cause unemployment to begin to rise if it becomes a trend. "The labor market performance continues to provide a solid foundation for the main pillar of growth: consumer spending," Oxford Economics' analysts said in a commentary. "However, as we look into 2020, lingering global headwinds, policy uncertainty and cautious businesses are likely to restrain labor demand amid an increasingly tight labor market." The solid hiring seems

unlikely to change the Federal Reserve's assessment that the economy does not need additional stimulus for now. Fed policymakers have repeatedly said interest rates at the moment are in a "good place" after three cuts in a row during the latter half of 2019, and they would only reconsider if something materially changes the economic outlook.

However, economist Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics sees the potential for interest rate increases by the Fed, since businesses "appear to have overestimated the real impact of the trade war" on hiring. "If we're right, the unemployment rate will keep falling, heading towards 3 percent by the end of the year," he said, adding that "we'd expect to see the Fed talking about higher rates, not easing." Several sectors had an obvious slowdown in 2019: after adding 216,000 workers in 2018, the transportation and warehousing industry took in just 57,000 during all of last year.

Hiring in professional and business services and manufacturing also tumbled last year.

The figures released Friday also showed women may now be in the slight majority among American workers, holding a fraction more than 50 percent of all jobs. Wall



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo, construction workers put up support scaffolding on the side of a building in Washington, DC. America's solid job creation continued in December but at a slower pace while wages cooled off, according to the closely-watched government report released on Friday. — AFP

Street was briefly lifted by the numbers but sank later in the day, driven lower in part by crisis-stricken Boeing, closing the day in the red. — AFP

Tensions flare in protests as French pension dispute grinds on

PARIS: Tens of thousands of demonstrators took to streets across France on Thursday in the latest mass protests against a pensions overhaul that critics say could cut benefits even while requiring people to work longer before retiring. Tensions flared in Paris and other cities as some black-clad protesters smashed glass-panned shopfronts and bus stops, while others hurled paving stones against police who tried to disperse crowds with tear gas.

It was the fourth day of demonstrations since the

protest began on December 5 with a massive public transport strike now in its 36th day. Police said at least 24 people had been detained in Paris, where 56,000 people marched toward the Saint-Lazare train station, according to the interior ministry. Some 452,000 protesters turned out across France, the ministry said, as teachers and other public-sector employees joined train and metro workers. The headline CGT union said almost 1.7 million people protested around the country. "Teachers like us stand to lose the most. Some could see their pensions cut by up to 100 euros a month!" Marylou Crampette, a 25-year-old school teacher, said at the Paris march.

Unions have staged their biggest show of strength in decades against plans for a single points-based system that would sweep away the country's 42 pension schemes, many offering early retirement mainly to public workers. The government on Thursday night unveiled two bills that aim to appease the unions by committing to salary rises for teachers and researchers.

However, the unions are unlikely to agree to the meas-

ures, which still contain the key sticking point of the "pivot age"—that would effectively extend the minimum age for receiving a full pension from 62 to 64.

Fuel shortages?

Commuters in Paris were again hit hard by scaled-back metro services, and the Eiffel Tower was shut as during the previous protests. National train services also remained severely disrupted during what is now France's longest continuous rail strike.

"Between the government's stance of 'We're talking, everything is on the table' and the reality, you have to wonder if it really intends to... take the views of unions into account," CGT's Philippe Martinez said ahead of the Paris march. Thousands of people also demonstrated in Toulouse, Nantes, Marseilles and other cities against the pension reform, a key plank in President Emmanuel Macron's pledge to shake up the French economy.

Unions have warned the strike could widen, with CGT energy workers this week blockading fuel refineries and

depots, raising fears of petrol shortages. Another day of mass demonstrations had been called for yesterday, and further protests were planned for January 14, 15 and 16, unions said. A flurry of polls have shown support for the protest eroding in recent days. "It's normal that they defend their rights, but they're doing it at the expense of the rest of the population," said Cedric Chevalier, 40, a manager at a clothing store in Paris. Apart from his daily commute having doubled due to the strike, the store's "sales are down at least 20 to 30 percent, which means I'm losing money", he said.

'Work a bit longer'

Even the moderate CFDT union, which backs the plan for a single pension system, balks at the new pension age of 64, which the government says is needed to plug a gaping deficit. The CFDT, France's largest union, has urged the government to drop the measure and agree to a separate "financing conference" with unions, who want companies to pay more in payroll taxes to cover pension payouts. — AFP



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Business

Al Mulla Automobiles launches exclusive Mercedes-Benz vans showroom in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Imad Flayhan, the Managing Director for the automotive group at Al Mulla Group, cuts the opening ribbon in the presence of Mercedes-Benz MENA representatives and a number of Mercedes-Benz Commercial Vehicles team.



KUWAIT: Al Mulla Automobiles Company, the authorized General distributor of Mercedes-Benz in Kuwait, has officially inaugurated the exclusive showroom for Mercedes-Benz Vans for the first time in Kuwait in Al-Rai area.

Imad Flayhan, the Managing Director for the automotive group at Al Mulla Group, cut the opening ribbon in the presence of Mercedes-Benz MENA representatives and a number of Mercedes-Benz Commercial Vehicles team. Commenting on the event, Flayhan said: "The opening of this showroom with the latest technological equipment is in line with our commitment to provide the best services and products according to the highest levels of international quality. We are one of the first to use the advanced Mercedes-Benz MAR2020 design for showrooms in the region, and we look forward to launch more facilities in the near future to meet all the requirements of our customers and implement our plans to expand the spread of Mercedes-Benz in the Kuwaiti market.

We have designed the showroom on the new MAR2020 model to give our customers a unique experience from the moment they enter the showroom until they receive the car of their preference that fulfills their desires whether it is a family Van or a multi-use van to transport passengers or goods. "The showroom provides the latest digital technology and technical support services to ensure a smoother customer experience. The new showroom also provides an interactive experience for customers that enables them to learn about the brand and its services through digital displays or by talking directly with the showroom staff. The showroom also includes modern waiting areas for customer convenience.

The design of the showroom embodies the new concept of the Mercedes-Benz brand in providing a comfortable and friendly atmosphere. We used interactive digital technology to give visitors a distinct



experience through which they can identify the brand interactively using digital touch screens to get to know the most accurate details of the vehicle they prefer. They can also view all products on special LED screens. The showroom is operated with a team of expertise ready to answer all inquiries and provide advice on how to use the car's features. The Mercedes-Benz Showroom Kuwait provides an exceptional experience for its guests and customers from the moment they enter the showroom to the moment they receive the new Mercedes-Benz vehicle they wish.

The Showroom includes a selection of Mercedes-Benz Vans such as Sprinter, Vito Tourer and V-Class. The all-new Mercedes-Benz Sprinter is considered one of the best large size vans in its class. It provides a wide range of transportation solutions for individuals and professionals in the passenger or cargo transport sectors (school transport, tourist transport, corporate employees transport), family transport and personal transport as well as small and medium enterprise applications and special applications.

The vehicle also has a high technology that includes the ability to connect to the Internet, in addition to providing all the comforts in a car with seats that are more spacious for more comfort. The Vito Tourer model is just as unique as its users due to its wide range of configurations along with several seats ranging from 2 to 9 seats, in addition to many options related to equipment. This model is available in three basic designs Vito Tourer BASE, Tourer PRO and Tourer SELECT and serves all segments in the area of domestic and commercial passenger transport. The Mercedes-Benz V-Class is reformulating the concept of the Luxury. As the latest and largest in its class of van, the V-Class sets new standards in the sector through its distinct design that adds to a wide range of other innovations. The car combines the interior spaciousness of its 8-seat cabin, with exemplary practical features, a high level of elegance, attractiveness, comfort, efficiency, safety and enjoyable driving, making it one of Mercedes' most distinctive vans, all of which contributes to making Mercedes-Benz bars the ideal solution for those



looking for spaciousness without compromising the standards of aesthetics and comfort.

Al Mulla Automobiles aims to provide an extensive network of facilities and a variety of new services to its customers, while ensuring the provision of the best services and commitment to international quality standards.

Jazeera Airways announcement

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways announces changes in some of its flights scheduled between January 13 and 18, 2020. The changes are due to the Kuwait Aviation Show 2020 held during that period. Passengers are being informed of the changes and updates can be found on the dedicated page at: <https://www.jazeeraairways.com/en-kw/plan/flight-information/flight-delays>.



AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad weekly draw

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank announced on the 8th of January 2020 the winners of its weekly draw of Al Hassad Islamic account which is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait that has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners. Al-Hassad has have over 850 prizes over period of 12 months.

The weekly draw announced the grand prize winner of KD 10,000 as Fouzeyah Abdullah Mohammad.

20 other winners won prizes of KD 1,000 as follows: Afeefah Ali Bin Nekhi, Jameelah Jdaie Mubarak, Osama Abdulrahman Alduaij, Ali Ahmad Almahawesh, Ahmed Hasan Dashti, Hamad H Alshakhs, Musthafa Unniyalukkal, Fatemah Abdulkareem Mohammad, Marzouk Sulima A Al-

Huawei Watch GT 2 adds a digital makeover to the traditional watch

KUWAIT: A watch has always been the finishing touch to any outfit. Be it a classic analog watch or a trendy digital watch, or even one of those complicated ones with multiple clocks and features, each watch has its own identity. However, the arrival of smart phones and users depending more on their devices led to an era of various everyday products getting smarter. Traditional watches also took part in this technological revolution, leading to the development and popularity of smartwatches.

Smartwatches basically acted as extensions of smartphones by doing simple tasks such as showing notifications, allowing customizations and even health tracking and monitoring. Huawei's latest smartwatch, the Huawei Watch GT 2, brings all of these features into one while also adding some extra features of its own to make it one of preferred smart wearables to opt for.

By incorporating into it the Kirin A1, Huawei's first self-developed wearable chipset, the Huawei Watch GT 2 unleashed a new era of wearable intelligence. Handling complex processes such as heart rate tracking and fitness tracking among many others, this chipset also ensures a combination of high performance with ultra-efficient power management. This took care of one of the most common peeves of using a smartwatch - battery life and re-charging. Thanks to the Kirin A1 chipset, the Huawei Watch GT 2 46mm is able to last for up to 2 weeks on a single charge, while the 42mm will last up to one week, even with a variety of complex features running. The Huawei Watch GT 2 also took a step further, incorporating Bluetooth calling and music playback into the device, making you even less dependent on your smartphone at all times.

The introduction of smartwatches also presented a whole new method of health and fitness monitoring. Thanks to a variety of different sensors, the Huawei Watch GT 2 is able to give you accurate readings of your body during each physical activity. With 15 sports modes, the watch is capable on intelligently reading your body for a detailed reading about



your body, which can be used to further optimize your fitness regime. In terms of health reading, with the Huawei Watch GT 2 you can keep an eye on your heart rate with the Huawei TruSeen 3.5 heart rate monitoring feature, while the Huawei TruSleep 2.0 monitors how you sleep, collecting valuable data that you can use to improve your sleep quality overall.

While traditional watches are limited to just one watch face, one of the prime advantages of smartwatches is the availability of creative watch faces. The Huawei

Watch GT 2 houses a wide variety of watch faces, each of those can be changed to match your style for the day. This is paired with a 3D glass screen and a HD display for more premium viewing experience.

Putting a spin on traditional watches, smartwatches are truly the next step into a more connected future. The Huawei Watch GT 2 is the perfect device to make this transition as well, thanks to its premium design and feel, smart features and most importantly, its focus on health and wellness.

Mutawa, Baqer Ali Abbas Baqer, Turki Humoud Aldhafaeri, Suad Abdulmohsen Alsaleh, Abdulhadi Khairo Draireh, Ahmad Ali Alabras, Yousef Abdulraheem Alkandari, Makki Ali Hussain, Cheriano V Miranda, Khairiya Abdulla Dashty, Ahmed Bahman Ali and Najat Rabee Hussain.

On the occasion Ahli United Bank congratulate its winning customers, and commented that there are many chances to win waiting for our customers. Draws are held every Wednesday at AUB Kuwait or AUB Bahrain depending on the draw plan. On public holidays, the draw is postponed to the next business day.

Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents also 4 quarterly mega prizes of KD 250,000 that will help the lucky winners achieve their dreams and aspirations in addition the monthly draw to win a prize of KD 100,000.

One powerful new aspect of the Al-Hassad Islamic Account is the prize draws on the holy occasion of both Eid ul Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, when the winning customers will receive the Eid prizes of KD 100,000 each. May the Eid always bring prosperity and blessings to the Islamic nation. Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents also 21 weekly prizes comprised of a grand prize of KD 10,000 and 20 prizes of KD 1,000 each.

KFH launches campaign for KFH Oasis Club prepaid MasterCard customers

KUWAIT: "The Journey of 18 Million Miles Begins with a Card" campaign, launched by Kuwait Finance House (KFH) exclusively for KFH Oasis Club prepaid MasterCard cardholders and in collaboration with Kuwait Airways and Oasis Club, offers great benefits to KFH customers.

Through the campaign that ends on March 12th, 2020, there will be 311 winners for total prizes up to 18 million miles. The 1st winner gets 1,000,000 Miles, the 2nd winner get 500,000 Miles, the 3rd to 6th winners get 250,000 miles, the 7th to 11th winners get 100,000 miles, and 300 winners get 50,000 miles each.

Customers get 1 chance to enter draw for every KD 1 of total local purchases, and 2 chances to enter draw for every KD 1 of total international purchases, applicable for purchase transactions and Online transactions only. KFH Oasis Club card is a prepaid card issued in cooperation between KFH and Kuwait Airways "Oasis Club". In addition to the privileges and discounts, it offers chances

to gain extra miles from "Oasis Club" with every transaction. Accumulated miles can be later exchanged for special promotions and privileges from Kuwait Airways.

The collaboration with Kuwait Airways in introducing the KFH Oasis Card is aimed at serving their joint customers. KFH is keen through its products and services to support the activities of the national companies. This improves the quality of performance and the rolled-out services.

KFH is keen on launching exclusive campaigns that meet the expectations of customers and strengthen KFH's position in the banking cards market. This maintains the leadership position of KFH in offering services, products and promotions that meet the needs and expectations of customers.

It is worth noting that one million miles can allow a passenger to fly first class 10 times to the United States and 12 times to Europe, worth about KD 20,000.

What's On

Tajikistan woos Kuwaiti tourists

By Ben Garcia

In 2019 only 300 Kuwaitis visited Tajikistan. According to Tajikistan Ambassador to Kuwait, Zubaydov Zubaydullo, the number is too small and he wants the number to double if not triple at least. "We are trying to win more visitors in 2020 from Kuwait. We hope to welcome more visitors as our relations go stronger every day," he added. Zubaydullo takes pride of his country's beautiful attractions such as their rich historical heritage, and historical places, the best food recipes, hot spring, crystal clear water and spas. "We have a beautiful landscape as well, in fact 93 percent of our country can be considered mountainous plus we have rivers, waterfalls and lakes," he said.

He also highlighted some important events of cooperation between the Republic of Tajikistan and Kuwait:

From January 11-17, 2019, the delegation of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, including students, visited the projects implemented with the help of this fund and got acquainted with the tourist places and opportunities of the country.

During the visit, the delegation visited the second irrigation project in the Olimtoy area of the Dangara district, the Kulob-Kalai Khumb road, the Norak hydroelectric station, the Khulbuk and Gisar fortresses, Safeddara and other tourist destinations in Dushanbe and the countryside.

Details of the visit were covered by the Kuwait National News Agency (KUNA).

On February 9, 2019, the Embassy took part in the Kuwait Market exhibition, which presented Tajik embroideries, national dishes, photographs of the country's tourist destinations and other Tajik domestic goods.

On March 19, 2019, with the participation of Amiri Divan Advisor Muhammad Abdullah Abulhasan, Deputy Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ali Suleiman Al-Said, the country's diplomatic corps, representatives of science and literature, ministries, journalists, citizens of Tajikistan and residents of Kuwait where a ceremony was held on the occasion of the Navruz holiday in the Embassy premises, during which the attention of the audience was drawn to the rich history and culture of Tajikistan.

On March 20-24, 2019, the Kuwaiti Charity Society "Salom", led by the Chairman of the Society, Dr Nabil Hamad Al-Aun, paid a visit to Tajikistan to implement irrigation and construction projects in various regions of the country.

In order to represent the country, uplift its image in the international arena, attract tourists and investors, and promote a genuine Tajik culture, director Mukhsin Rahimi filmed "The Navruz Symphony in Tajikistan", which was broadcast on the BBC Persian.

On April 8-12, 2019, the Secretary General of the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan, Bahodur Kurboniyon, visited Kuwait to discuss cooperation with the Red Crescent of the two countries and to attract more donations.

On May 15-16, 2019 the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Kuwait to the Republic of Tajikistan with a residence in Pakistan Nasser Al Mutairi took part in the conference "International and Regional Cooperation in the fight against terrorism and its sources of financing, including drug trafficking and organized crime" in Dushanbe.

Also, in 2019, the Kuwaiti side provided \$400,000 for the reconstruction of the hospital building in the Toskala sanatorium in the Vose district.

The "Salom" charitable organization donated medical equipment amounting to \$3 million, which were delivered by three planes to Dushanbe on July 7, 9 and 10, 2019.

From 4-7 September 2019, Counselor of the HH the Amir of Kuwait, Chairman of the International Islamic Institute of Charity, Dr Abdullah Matuk Al-Matuk visited Dushanbe for an official ceremony of transferring medical equipment and met with the Prime Minister, ministers of justice, health and social protection of Tajikistan, where they discussed prospects for cooperation.

From September 7 to 11, 2019, a delegation of Kuwaiti journalists visited Tajikistan to cover the launch of the second unit of the Roghun Hydroelectric Power Station.

From October 13 to 19, 2019, the Republic of Tajikistan hosted the Days of Culture of the State of Kuwait, where the Kuwaiti delegation was headed by the Deputy Secretary General of the Council for Culture, Literature and Art for Cultural Affairs Badr Al-Duwaihi.

On November 11-13, 2019, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan, His Excellency Qohir Rasulzoda, made an official visit to the State of Kuwait. In order to attract tourists and investors to Tajikistan, investment and tourism forums were held in Kuwait with participation of business and tourism companies' representatives and the results of the forums were widely covered in the media.

Within the framework of the Prime Minister's visit, the "Program of the Agreement on Cooperation in Tourism between the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Government of Kuwait for 2020-



— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

2023" was signed.

Key indicators of tourism of the Republic of Tajikistan
Location: Central Asia
Area: 142.6 square kilometers, mountains cover 93%
It borders Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan
Climate: Dry continental, with over 300 sunny days a year
Water Resources: about 1,000 rivers, 2,000 lakes, 8,000 glaciers
Cultural and historical heritage: part of the Great Silk Road, a site of ancient settlement "Sarazm" and National Park are included in the List of World Heritage (UNESCO).

The territory of Tajikistan from the most ancient times lay on the important historical routes of the Silk Road, connecting the East and the West.

The territory of Tajikistan from the most ancient times lay on the important historical routes of the Silk Road, connecting the East and the West.

The territory of Tajikistan from the most ancient times lay on the important historical routes of the Silk Road, connecting the East and the West.

Slovak Republic national day



The Ambassador of the Slovak Republic Igor Hajdusek hosted a reception on the occasion of national day at Palm Beach Hotel over the weekend. Higher officials, diplomats and media persons attended the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Busy events, activities schedule for HORECA 2020

The general manager of Leaders Group for Consulting and Development and head of Horeca Kuwait organizing committee, Nabila Al-Anjeri said that Horeca Kuwait exhibition 2020, due to be held in the period of January 22-24, 2020 at Mishref International fairgrounds, would have a busy schedule of events and activities as all the display areas had been already booked and participating and sponsoring companies had already reached a record number.



Nabila Al-Anjeri

Al-Anjeri added that the exhibition would be held over a total area of 6,500 square meters at hall number 8 at the Mishref International Fair Grounds and that it intends keeping the valuable trust it gained from leading hospitality, food industries and hotel equipment companies during previous exhibitions.

"Preparations for the coming cycle of the exhibition have gone a long way", Al-Anjeri said noting that participants increased to a record number of over 80 companies and bodies, which reflects growth in hospitality business that is expected to last for several years ahead, not only in food industries, but also in hospitality businesses as already predicted by studies made by Leaders Group and Colliers International who expected annual growth rates to surpass 10 per cent by 2022. "Those predictions were based on the growing number of hotels, luxury malls and what is worth over \$3 billion of projects still under construction", the statement explained.

"This rise in the number of projects matches recent World Travel & Tourism Council statistics that expected a rise in the tourism sector contributions in from less than KD one billion in 2017 to gradually reach KD 1.68 billion within 8 years", Al-Anjeri added noting that this would entail growth in demand for hospitality services in general.

Further, Al-Anjeri warned that KSA's openness and activation of recreational events might have its negative impact on the number of Saudis visiting Kuwait on medium and long runs. "This requires combining the efforts of stakeholders in both the public and private sectors to accelerate developing the free zones, economic cities and island projects already included within the New Kuwait 2035 vision", she underlined.

In addition, Al-Anjeri reiterated that, sooner or later, the current 'Tourist renaissance' in other GCC states must include Kuwait with a lion's cut in the form of package trips and touristic groups. "That is why experts agree that putting the New Silk Road agreements between Kuwait and China into practice would lead to substantial developments as Kuwait is one of the focal stops and cities in the new Chinese commercial belt that is expected to attract more Chinese tourists", Al-Anjeri added noting that Chinese tourists visiting GCC states are expected to increase from 1.4 million in 2018 to 2.2 million by 2023.

Finally, Al-Anjeri said that several seminars and workshops would be held through the three-day exhibition and that they would be presented by experts and specialists in culinary issues, restaurant projects, food industries and hotels.

Health & Science

China reports first death from mystery pneumonia outbreak

SHANGHAI: China yesterday said a 61-year-old man had become the first person to die from a respiratory illness believed caused by a new virus from the same family as SARS, which claimed hundreds of lives more than a decade ago.

Forty-one people with pneumonia-like symptoms have so far been diagnosed with the new virus in Wuhan, with one of the victims dying on Thursday, the central Chinese city's health commission said on its website. Seven others remained in serious condition, two were discharged from treatment, and the rest were stable, it added.

The episode has caused alarm due to the specter of SARS, or Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which in 2002-2003 killed 349 people in mainland China and another 299 in Hong Kong, whose economy was hit hard by the epidemic's devastating impact on tourism.

Chinese scientists investigating the outbreak said last week they believe the pathogen to be a previously unknown type of coronavirus, a broad family ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses like SARS.

Scientists in Hong Kong's Department of Health said Saturday that genetic sequencing of the virus found in one of the Wuhan patients and published online by a Chinese expert indicated it was 80 percent similar to SARS found in bats.

Speaking at a news conference in Hong Kong, they said it was too early to conclude definitively that it was a SARS strain, adding that the city needed to stay vigilant. "We will remain alert as we believe the epidemic will continue to develop," said Wong Ka-hing, director of the department's Health Protection Centre. Hong Kong authorities have taken a range of precautions including stepping up the disinfection of trains and planes, and checks of passengers.

Travel rush looms

The Wuhan health commission said the man who died had purchased goods from a seafood market in the city identified by authorities as the center of the outbreak. It was closed on January 1. The man, who also had underlying health issues including chronic liver disease, died in hospital on Thursday of "respiratory failure and severe pneumonia", the commission added.

No new cases have been detected since January 3 nor any "clear evidence of human-to-human transmission", it said. The WHO said Thursday it was not recommending any specific measures for travellers or restrictions on trade with China, and expressed confidence in the ability of Chinese authorities to contain the virus.

China has entered its annual Lunar New Year holiday travel rush, raising concerns about the mass movement of people serving as a vector for the pathogen. In the world's largest annual human migration, hundreds of millions will pack together on trains, buses and planes for the festival in late January. China has not announced any travel restrictions.

Hong Kong authorities said yesterday that the number of people who have been hospitalized with flu-like symptoms in recent days after travelling to Wuhan had grown to 60, including seven new cases since Friday. Forty-six of that total, however, have already been discharged. None have yet been diagnosed with the new coronavirus. City residents worried about the outbreak have rushed to buy face masks from local pharmacies, with many selling out earlier this week, while officials in Taiwan have urged the island's health and welfare ministry to strengthen quarantine controls. — AFP

Bzigo marks mosquitoes for death

LAS VEGAS: Startup Bzigo was at the Consumer Electronics Show this week with a gadget designed to spot mosquitos and then mark them for death. Bzigo, pronounced like "buzz" and "go" combined, watches constantly for flying mosquitoes and then hits them with a beam of laser light after they land.

The first generation of the device marks mosquitoes for termination, sending an alert to people's smartphones to prompt them to execute the insects. "A big problem with flying mosquitoes is finding them, that is what we solved," said Nadav Benedek of Bzigo.

The World Health Organization has branded mosquitoes among the planet's deadliest creatures due to their ability to carry diseases that kill millions of people annually. Even in locations where mosquito-borne diseases are not a problem, the buzzing blood-suckers are often abhorred.

Benedek said a second-generation Bzigo device, already built but kept out of the public eye for now, will automatically dispatch a flying "nano-drone" to kill targeted mosquitoes, sparing people from getting blood on their hands.

"A nano-drone flies from a docking station on the



LAS VEGAS: Startup Bzigo displays a mosquito hunting gadget at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on January 9, 2020. — AFP

device, goes to the mosquito, kills it, and it comes back to recharge," Benedek said, prompting a nearby visitor to the CES booth to laugh uncontrollably.

Bzigo has already raised a million dollars in funding, and is out to raise \$5 million to begin mass production of the device, which will be about the size of an apple when it reaches market, according to Benedek. "Right now, we have a fully functioning prototype," he said. "The drone will kill in a way we aren't disclosing yet: not a laser." — AFP

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- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
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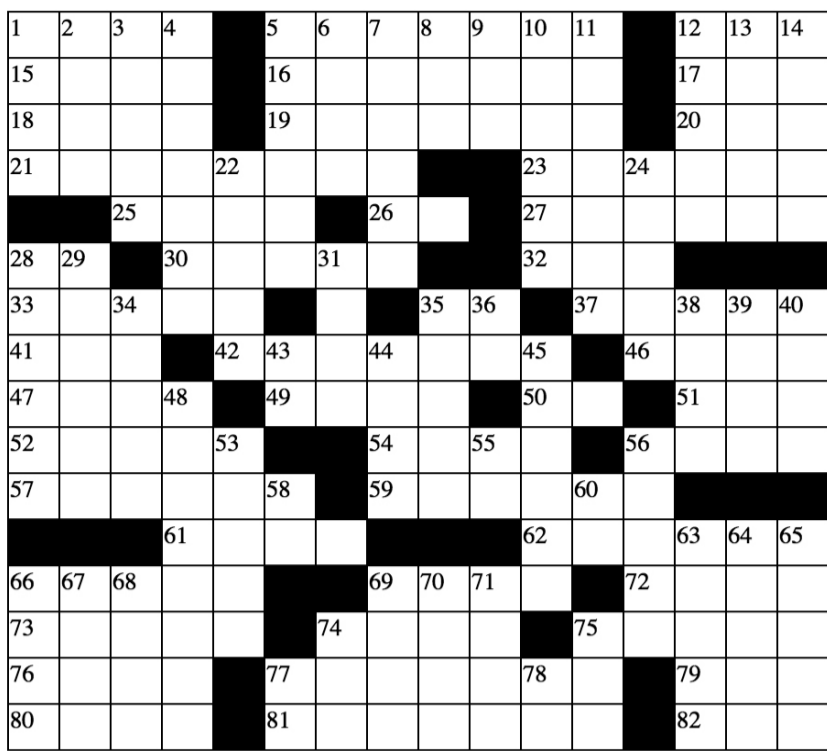
Scope of clinical Practice.

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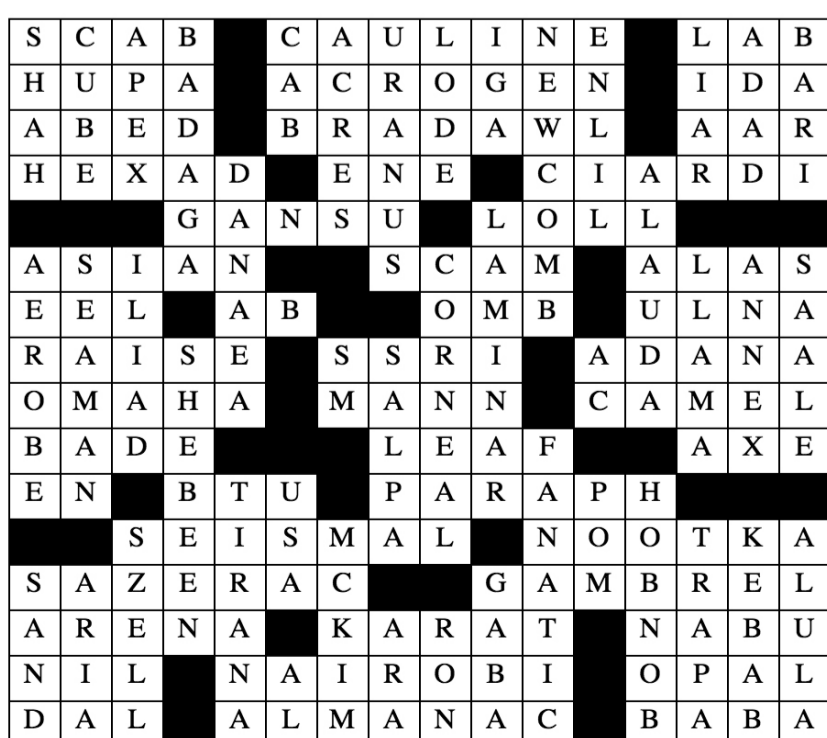
ACROSS

- Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls.
- The trait of lacking restraint or control.
- A master's degree in fine arts.
- An informal term for a father.
- A movement back from an impact.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- The face of a timepiece.
- Of or relating to the island or republic of Malta or its inhabitants.
- An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
- City in central Iran.
- In the same place (used when citing a reference).
- Harsh or corrosive in tone.
- A metallic element of the rare earth group.
- Lay bare.
- A public promotion of some product or service.
- A rugged box (usually made of wood).
- Late time of life.
- The capital and largest city of Yemen.
- German chemist who did research on high-speed chemical reactions (born in 1927).
- A health resort near a spring or at the sea-side.
- Alternative names for the body of a human being.
- Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
- The capital of Western Samoa.
- A tax on employees and employers that is used to fund the Social Security system.
- Being nine more than ninety.
- The month following September and preceding November.
- Tropical American tree grown in southern United States having a whitish pink-tinged fruit.
- Similar or related in quality or character.
- Any visible abnormal structural change in a bodily part.
- African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
- (British) Traditional jazz as revived in the 1950s.
- A state in northwestern North America.
- The superior of an abbey of monks.
- A branch of the Tai languages.
- A republic on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean.
- Small ornamental ladies' bag for small articles.
- A light touch or stroke.
- A lawman concerned with narcotics violations.
- A clothing fabric in a plaid weave.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- Tropical starchy tuberous root.
- A platform raised above the surrounding level to give prominence to the person on it.
- (Babylonian) A demigod or first man.
- Stem of the rattan palm used for making canes and umbrella handles.
- A large fleet.
- Any of various edible seeds of plants of the family Leguminosae.
- Wear away through erosion or vaporization.
- Negation of a word or group of words.
- Owed and payable immediately or on demand.
- (sports) Not offside.
- A Bantu language sometimes considered a dialect of Zulu.
- A member of a North American Indian people living east of the Sacramento river in California.
- Having lost freshness or brilliance of color.
- An edible seaweed with a mild flavor.
- English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
- A republic in the Asian subcontinent in southern Asia.
- A small contrasting part of something.
- Of or relating to or characteristic of Thailand of its people.
- Sole genus of the family Naiadaceae.
- Port city on southern Honshu on Osaka Bay.
- A heavy brittle diamagnetic trivalent metallic element (resembles arsenic and antimony chemically).
- Take by theft.
- Electronic warfare undertaken to insure effective friendly use of the electromagnetic spectrum in spite of the enemy's use of electronic warfare.
- An international organization created in 1949 by the North Atlantic Treaty for purposes of collective security.
- A gray tetravalent metallic element that resembles zirconium chemically and is found in zirconium minerals.
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- In the Arabian Nights a hero who tells of the fantastic adventures he had in his voyages.
- Pertaining to a simple method of cell division.
- The large trunk artery that carries blood from the left ventricle of the heart to branch arteries.
- (Greek mythology) A maiden seduced by Zeus.
- Lower in esteem.
- A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- The main city of ancient Phoenicia.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- Jordan's port.
- A Chad language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- A hazy or indistinct representation.
- Stately heavy-bodied aquatic bird with very long neck and usually white plumage as adult v 1.
- Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
- An Indian nursemaid who looks after children.
- American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
- A rotating disk shaped to convert circular into linear motion.
- A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
- Informal terms for a mother.

Friday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Your relationships with just about everyone - friends, lovers, children, colleagues, and even strangers - should be smooth, warm, and supportive today, Aries. Feelings are easily expressed, although more on a subtle than a verbal level. New business opportunities may open up through contact with new and interesting people. Social events and group activities should therefore contribute more to your personal growth and emotional well-being than they usually do. Make the most of them!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Reflections on your recent success and good fortune with regard to career matters are likely to have you feeling strong, optimistic, and enthusiastic for the future, Taurus. Creative projects are going very well, as are relationships with the opposite sex. This should be a very gratifying day for you, full of warm and loving contact with those closest to you, and signs of continued progress. Enjoy your day, and treat yourself to an evening out.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Good news from a distant state or foreign country could make your day, Gemini. You could well spend the rest of the day basking in the glow of what you've heard. However, this isn't going to affect your relations with others or your work on whatever projects you're involved with right now. This is a good day to get out in the sunshine. Take a walk or drive in the country! Enjoy your day.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

An increase in money could bring a lot of happiness and good feeling into your home. You might be a bit concerned as to how to keep the energy going, but don't worry about it, Cancer. All signs are that your success and good fortune are going to be around for a while. You could, however, explore the idea of making a few cautious investments. This way you'll feel more financially secure than you have in the past.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

The prospect of future business opportunities could have you spending a lot of time on the phone today in discussion with friends or acquaintances who might have information you need, Leo. Perhaps someone you know has been very successful at an activity he thinks might interest you. All should go very well, but you'll definitely want to be thoroughly informed. You're doing the right thing by securing the facts before plunging on ahead.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

A rosy glow over your recent career successes could cause you to congratulate yourself over your growing bank account. This trend should continue for a while, Virgo, if you keep on working as you have and maintain a positive and optimistic attitude. Your relationships with others around you, particularly the opposite sex, should be especially warm and loving right now. This should prove to be a thoroughly gratifying day. Use it to your advantage.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Recent successes in your career might inspire you to throw a celebration of some kind with a few close friends, Libra. You're feeling especially positive and particularly charming at this time, and your confidence is likely to contribute to a new sense of closeness to those around you. Love and romance should also go very well. You've worked hard and it's time to reward yourself. Have a successful day and an enjoyable evening.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Relations with those closest to you should be warm and rewarding, Scorpio. Financial matters are going so well for you right now that you're apt to be feeling that everything will be perfect from here on out. This optimism and enthusiasm, however, doesn't mean you're taking your good fortune for granted. Rather, it is likely to give you the impetus to continue as you have been, only with more serenity than before.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You've been working very hard for a long time, Sagittarius, and now you might be thinking of ways to reward yourself. A trip that you might have dreamed of taking might suddenly seem to be more attainable. Today you might decide to actually make the arrangements. You could well decide to stay for a long time, for there is much that you can learn through this trip.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Capricorn, visitors in your home might include partners in business activities, members of a group with which you're affiliated, or creative people with great ideas. Therefore, you're likely to enjoy some intense discussions today and a lot of intriguing exchanges of information. Love and romance should also go well, particularly since you're feeling so enthusiastic about life. Take the time to share your dreams with your guests. They might have some good ideas for making a dream a reality.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Get-togethers in your neighborhood should prove enjoyable right now, Aquarius. Communication with others, particularly about possible new business interests, should bring a lot of positive information your way that you're apt to put to work for you. The level of respect that you get from those around you could be particularly gratifying. Your hard work has not only enriched your socioeconomic standing but your friendships as well. Enjoy your day.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

This is a good day for meditation or spiritual studies of some kind, Pisces. Your intuition should be operating at a very high level and thus it's going to be easier for you to tune in to the thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires of others, particularly the opposite sex. You might even experience psychic insights or visions that shed light on some questions you've been asking yourself for a while. Write down your thoughts. You'll want to remember them.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Transportation

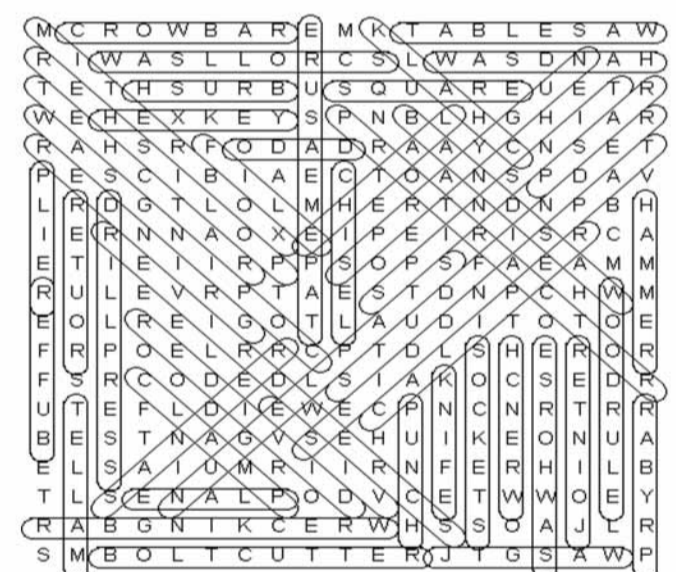
Find and circle all of the transportation words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters will reveal an additional method of transportation.



- | | | | |
|-----------|------------|---------------|------------|
| AIRPLANE | FERRY | RIKSHAW | SNOWMOBILE |
| BICYCLE | GONDOLA | ROCKET | SUBMARINE |
| BLIMP | HORSE | ROLLER BLADES | TRAIN |
| BOAT | JET | SCOOTER | TRAM |
| CAMEL | MOPED | SHIP | TRUCK |
| CANOE | MOTORCYCLE | SKATEBOARD | VAN |
| CARRIAGE | PARACHUTE | SKIS | WAGON |
| ELEVATOR | RAFT | SLED | YACHT |
| ESCALATOR | | | |

Friday's Solution

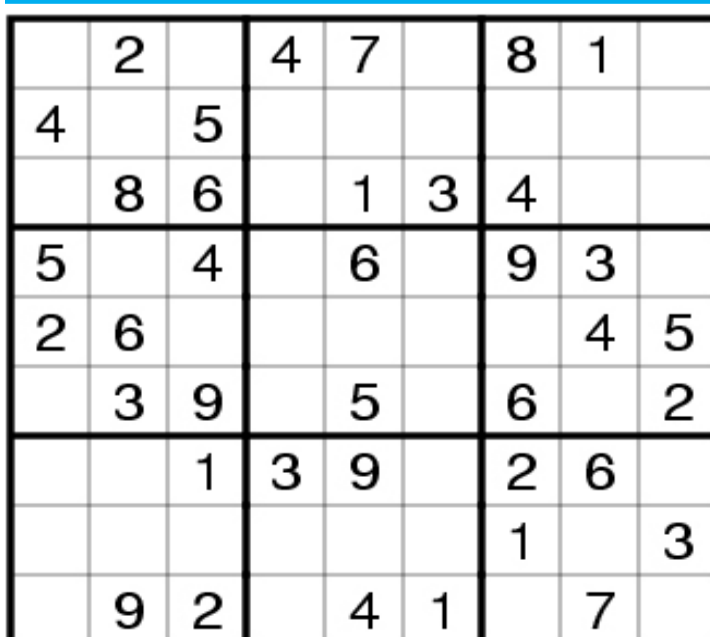
Tools



- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|
| BAND SAW | FILE | POLISHER | SPRAY GUN |
| BOLT CUTTER | GRINDER | PROTRACTOR | SQUARE |
| BRUSH | HAMMER | PRY BAR | STAPLE GUN |
| BUFFER | HAND SAW | PUNCH | STUD FINDER |
| CALIPER | HEX KEY | RASP | TABLE SAW |
| CHALK | JIG SAW | RATCHET | TAPE MEASURE |
| CHISEL | JOINTER | ROUTER | TAPS AND DIES |
| CLAMP | KNIFE | SANDER | TINSNIPS |
| COPING SAW | LATHE | SAWHORSE | VICE |
| CROWBAR | MALLET | SCREWDRIVER | WOOD RULE |
| DADO | MITER BOX | PLANE | WRECKING BAR |
| DIVIDER | PLANE | SCROLL SAW | WRENCH |
| DRILL PRESS | PLIER | SOCKETS | |

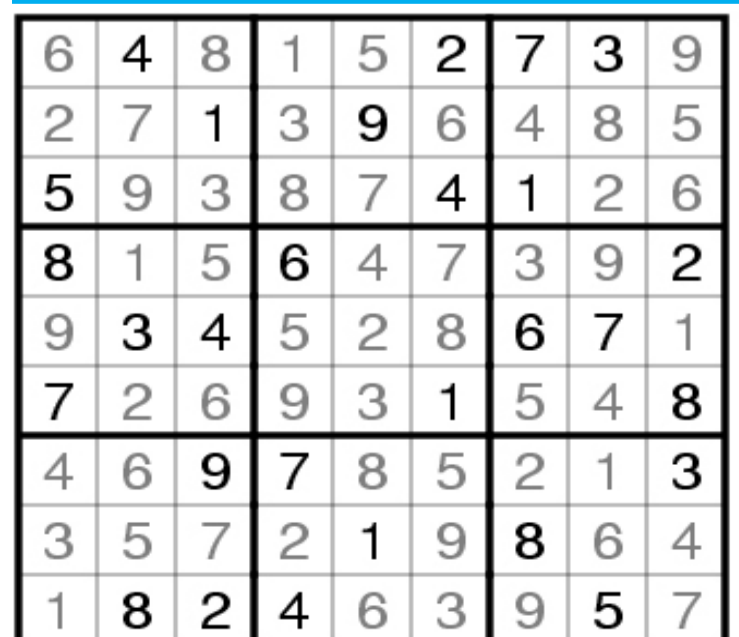
The hidden sentence is: MEN HAVE BECOME THE TOOLS OF THEIR TOOLS

Daily SuDoku



easy

Friday's Solution



hard

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 2020



This photo taken on Sept 7, 2019 shows a group of people next to Wuhan Bridge preparing to swim across the Yangtze River in Wuhan in China's Hubei province. — AFP photos

Asia's Great Rivers: Climate crisis, pollution put billions at risk

The year is 2100. The glaciers of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region - the world's "Third Pole" - are vanishing as the planet warms, the ice that once fed the great rivers of Asia is all but lost, and with it much of the water needed to nurture and grow a continent. Further stressed by extreme heatwaves, erratic monsoons, and pollution, the waterways are in crisis and the lives of hundreds of millions hang in the balance. Access to clean water, now more precious than oil, is a preserve of the rich and has become a resource so valuable that people - and nations - are willing to fight for it.

This apocalyptic vision is the continent's future if nothing is done to limit global warming, scientists and environmentalists warn. "If urgent climate action is not taken rapidly, starting today, and current emission trends continue unabated, it is starting to look conceivable that this will entail grave threats to all of humanity as we know it," says David Molden, director general of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

The 2015 Paris agreement saw nations commit to limiting global warming to two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels as a way of curbing the worst impacts of global warming. A lower cap of 1.5C was set, only as a goal for nations to work towards. But this year's Hindu Kush-Himalaya (HKH) Assessment Report says unless it is met - two-thirds of the region's glaciers will be lost by the end of the century.

'Devastating health impact'

Running from Afghanistan to Myanmar, the HKH region takes in the Tibetan Plateau, and the Himalaya, Hindu Kush, and Karakoram mountain ranges. Functioning as a vast water tower, some of the world's largest and most important rivers, including the Brahmaputra, Yangtze, Mekong and Indus, begin here. Its health is inextricably linked to that of the continent: Some 1.65 billion people directly rely on these waters - for their lives and livelihoods.

But tens of millions more rely on the agriculture, hydropower, and industries the rivers fuel. "This is the climate crisis you haven't heard of," ICIMOD's Philippus Wester explains, adding that alongside glacier melt, there will be increased risk of floods, droughts, landslides and avalanches. But many in Asia are already living this dystopian future.

In the southern Indian city of Chennai, 2019 brought a drought so severe reservoirs ran dry.

Residents were forced to queue for water from government tanks or pay black-market prices. In some cases, desperation led to violence. Northern India was lashed by flooding as the Brahmaputra and Ganges rivers burst their banks, with more than 100 reported dead and many more displaced. In Pakistan, thousands of glacial lakes have formed, with its mountain people facing the threat of at least 30 bursting.

In parts of China, villagers must choose between paying a premium for bottles or risking their health with the potentially contaminated stream or river water. More than half the world's population lives in Asia, but there is less fresh water available per person there than on any continent, according to the UN, often leaving the most vulnerable at risk. "Climate change is rapidly diminishing our access to clean water, which will have a devastating impact on human health, access to food, and sanitation, radically reshaping communities and cities," Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, tells AFP. "As always, the poorest people are and will be the most affected."

Catastrophic food shortages

Asia's rivers feed the continent's breadbaskets and rice bowls - the Indus, Yangtze, and Yellow basins rely heavily on meltwater to irrigate agriculture that helps sustain not only those that live there, but national economies too. Any change - either the initial surge of meltwater - or the later drastic decline in river flow could cause catastrophic food shortages, with Molden warning the worst-case scenario, if nothing is done to combat global warming, would be "starvation and conflict".

Despite proclamations that we are in "the Asian Century", there are fears lack of proper planning for the coming water crisis may stifle the economic dreams of a rapidly growing region. Debra Tan, director of the NGO China Water Risk, adds: "Asia faces a triple threat in terms of water because 1) some parts - including China and India - have very limited water resources to develop, 2) climate change exacerbates scarcity, and 3) our cities and populations are clustered along vulnerable rivers."

Every key industry on the continent - from electronics and automobiles to clothing and agriculture - requires water but few use the resource judiciously. Irrigation methods are often inefficient and crops grown can be

water-intensive, while many industries still discharge untreated water in the rivers with few facilities for recycling. Tan insists: "If the risks are not managed well, they will not only have detrimental consequences to billions of livelihoods but also to trillions of dollars of economic growth."

Water wars?

Mass migration away from most affected areas will put intense pressure on other towns and cities. This may exacerbate tensions in a conflict-prone area - both within and between countries, Wester says. In a 2008 report, Goldman Sachs hailed water as the "the petroleum for the next century", underlining fears its scarcity will lead to unrest. Already ranked among the planet's most water-stressed nations according to the World Resources Institute, India and Pakistan's access to the Indus and its tributaries is governed by a dedicated treaty.

But there have long been fears that India, which sits upstream, could weaponize the resource, as it has threatened more than once to restrict Pakistan's access. In 2017, China withheld hydrological data on the flow of the Brahmaputra and Sutlej rivers, which flow from its territory into India. The move heightened tensions with New Delhi as authorities rely on upstream information for flood control.

Geopolitics may dictate the very survival of the Mekong, says Brian Eyster, South East Asia program director for The Stimson Center. There are more than 100 dams across the five countries that rely on the river. China alone has built 11 "mega-dams" which impact flow downstream in the dry season. The issue is not just the loss of water flow, but also diminishing sediment and a decline in migratory fish downstream.

"Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake produces 500,000 tons of wild-caught fish per year and this feeds the Khmer people with 70 percent of their protein intake. Vietnam needs sediment to keep its delta agricultural production strong," Eyster says. Without the sediment, a key building block of any delta, the Mekong's wetlands may slip into the ocean faster - leaving millions homeless and destitute. Alston says: "Governments need to stop taking access to clean water for granted and urgently plan for how they will guarantee the right to water for everyone, not just those who can afford it." — AFP

River people: Life along Asia's key waterways

From the flood-ravaged banks of the Brahmaputra to the disappearing wetlands of the Mekong, Asia's main waterways - and the people that live along them - are fighting for survival. Climate change, international politics, spiralling population growth, and unchecked development are putting unprecedented strain on key waterways in some of the most densely populated nations on earth.

The continent's ten major rivers flow out of the Tibetan Plateau, which China has political control over, creating unique challenges and requiring international cooperation if Asia is to boom in the century ahead. India is grappling with a water crisis on all fronts as global warming creates more extreme weather and poor environmental planning puts millions at risk.

"The water crisis is expected to worsen as the country's population is set to grow to about 1.6 billion by 2050," says Pradeep Purandare, a former professor with the Water and Land Management Institute. Flooding on the Brahmaputra is becoming increasingly violent, displacing entire communities and causing hundreds of deaths. But along its banks, as with much of India, there are few provisions in place to harness or conserve water when there's an abundance, and a lack of proper management when there's too little.

As a result, some 163 million people in India, which is set to become the world's most populous nation in the next eight years, live without access to clean water, according to WaterAid. In neighboring Pakistan, the mighty Indus is under threat from global warming. The waterway's basin produces 90 percent of Pakistan's food supply, according to the United Nations, with

agriculture dependent on irrigation from the river, which in turn heavily relies on meltwater from the Himalayas.

With its surging population, experts warn the nation faces "absolute water scarcity" by 2025, citing the loss of the Himalayan glaciers as a key threat. The Mekong nations - China, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam - are struggling to ensure sustainable development, jeopardizing hundreds of millions of lives. Under the tagline "Shared River, Shared Future", China - which sits upstream - insists it seeks only the sustainable development of the river and to split the spoils of a trade and energy boom.

But squeezed for value by the dams lacing China's portion of the river, and further downstream, the Mekong is already changing. Fish stocks have collapsed, say Thai fishermen, while endemic species like the giant Mekong catfish and river dolphins are on the brink of extinction. Internally, China faces challenges of its own. Decades of rapid development has left the Yangtze, the world's third-longest river, and its tributaries choked with toxic chemicals, plastic and garbage, threatening the main drinking water source of nearly 400 million people - a third of China's population.

Authorities even publicly disclosed the existence of more than 250 "cancer villages" - mostly in the Yangtze basin, according to the China Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, which linked the increases to water pollution. Protecting the Yangtze - which irrigates an area responsible for 45 percent of the country's GDP - is now a priority, with President Xi Jinping calling for an end to "destructive" development along it. — AFP

Hell and ice water: Glacier melt threatens Pakistan's future

The villagers of Hassanabad live in constant fear. Above them the vast Shisper glacier dominates the landscape: A river of jagged black ice moving towards them at as much as four metres per day. Climate change is causing most glaciers worldwide to shrink, but due to a meteorological anomaly this is one of a few in the Karakoram mountain range in northern Pakistan that are surging. This means hundreds of tons of ice and debris are pushing down the valley at ten times the normal rate or more, threatening the safety of the people and homes below. "People's lives, properties and animals are in danger," warns villager Basir Ali.

Flash floods caused by glacial lakes, ice and rock falls, and a lack of clean and accessible water are all serious risks for those close to its path. "When a glacial lake bursts there is an enormous amount of not only ice, water and debris that falls through, but also mud and this has devastating effects, it basically destroys everything that comes in its way," said Ignacio Artaza of UNDP Pakistan.

But repercussions of the Shisper glacier surge extend far beyond its path: The mighty Indus River is reliant on seasonal melt for more than half of its flow and changes in Pakistan's ice fields affect this. That has implications not just for those living in its basin, but for the whole nation, which relies on it for much of its food. Shifting water levels also have implications for the fragile relationship between nuclear-armed neighbors Pakistan and India.

Already ranked among the planet's most water-stressed nations according to the World Resources Institute, both need the Indus and its tributaries. Their access to the water is governed by the 1960 Indus Water Treaty, which aims for fair usage. But there have long been fears India, which sits upstream, could weaponize the resource, it has threatened more than once to restrict Pakistan's access - including just last year.

Millions in danger

The Karakoram, which contains some of the world's tallest mountains including K2, is just one of the mountain ranges that crisscross the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. Sometimes called The Third Pole, the region holds more ice than anywhere other than the Arctic or Antarctica. But a

third of the glaciers here are expected to melt by 2100, endangering the lives of hundreds of millions, according to this year's Hindu Kush-Himalaya Assessment Report.

Rising in Tibet, the Indus crosses through India and Pakistan fed by a multitude of tributaries before it reaches the Arabian Sea. The waterway's basin produces 90 percent of Pakistan's food, according to the UN, and agriculture is dependent on irrigation from the river, which heavily relies on meltwater from the ice sheets. With its surging population experts warn the nation faces "absolute water scarcity" by 2025, with the loss of the Himalayan glaciers a key threat.

While scientists cite climate change and topography, it's not clear exactly what causes the Karakoram anomaly where glaciers are surging and in some cases growing. But many say these changes will also impact the Indus because they alter meltwater patterns, causing flash flooding or water shortages that are difficult to predict and manage.

"The Shisper glacier is increasing its length and width, furthermore it is also moving downhill," explained Shehzad Baig of the Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority. He warned climate change meant there was heavier snowfall during the winters and warmer temperatures in the summers, leading to the ice mass producing more meltwater, swelling the Hunza River, a churning mountain tributary of the Indus. "This may cause harm to the local community and deprive the people of the Indus basin blocking or disturbing drinking water and irrigation channels," Baig warned, adding that changing weather patterns were also creating more glacial lakes.

Water wars

The UNDP estimates that more than 3,000 glacial lakes have been formed in the region, with 33 posing an imminent threat of 'outburst floods', known as GLOFs, that could impact as many as seven million people. Last year the surging Shisper glacier effectively dammed a meltwater stream from a neighbouring glacier creating a large lake. Authorities were forced to issue safety warnings to Hassanabad and local villages before the water was drained.



This picture taken on June 28, 2019 shows a general view of the black Shisper glacier in the Karakoram mountain range of Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan region. — AFP photos

But satellite data shows the lake is already reforming, leaving residents fearing not only the progression of the crushing ice sheet but that they will be swept to their deaths in flash floods. "This whole area will be devastated...the whole population and people's properties will go into river," cautions villager Didar Karim.

Professor Andreas Kaab from the University of Oslo says Pakistan must adapt its "monitoring and response strategies, and risk management in general" to contend with both surging and shrinking glaciers. Authorities, working with the UN, are setting up early warning systems using sensors positioned on top of the Shisper glacier and downstream to alert communities.

But the challenge for Pakistan extends beyond crisis management to the long-term water conservation and storage, experts say. "Pakistan has to increase its water storage

capacity which is now 33 days - it should be at least 100 days to ensure sustainable development," cautions Dr. Ghulam Rasul of the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development. He estimates that 60 percent of water is currently lost as run-off to the sea.

With few functioning reservoirs the nation is ill-equipped to harness the short-term excess water as climate change causes more glaciers to melt, or from the increasingly erratic monsoon deluges. And by 2050, with so much of the ice sheets lost scientists say the flow of the Indus will dramatically decrease, leaving Pakistanis more vulnerable than ever. Rasul says: "Water is the capital of agrarian economies and guarantees food and energy security. Shortage of water against increasing demand could lead to conflict." — AFP

'Everything is lost': Life on the edge of the Brahmaputra

Once a vast river island in the heart of the Brahmaputra, now Majuli's days are numbered: Experts warn it may disappear entirely by 2040 as ever more violent flooding swells the river, wreaking havoc on the lives of those that live along its banks. Millions rely on the vast waterway, which rises in Tibet and runs some 2,900 km through the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, for their livelihoods but climate change means the deluge from the annual monsoon is increasingly extreme.

Human mismanagement is exacerbating the problem and for Majuli's 170,000 islanders the future looks bleak: the flood waters are submerging more and more areas of the island and for longer periods, wrecking crops and rendering land infertile. The inhabitants - mostly indigenous Mishings tribespeople who follow a unique offshoot of Hinduism - move to higher ground with their animals when the rains come, but soon there may be no place for them to migrate up to.

"We love the river but we know it will one day devour all our land. We can only pray that Brahmaputra relents and we can live in harmony like generations before us," says Sunil Mili, a farmer who grows mustard and rice. India is grappling with a water crisis on all fronts as global warming creates more extreme weather and poor environmental planning puts millions at risk.

The nation is struggling to cope with multiple crises - from severe drought as well as heavy flooding and rising sea and river levels - all leading to chronic water shortages. "The water crisis is expected to worsen as the country's population is set to grow to about 1.6 billion by 2050," says Pradeep Purandare, a former professor with the Water and Land Management Institute.

Swept away

Majuli, famed for its historic 16th century monasteries, was 1,250 sq km in 1890 but the Brahmaputra's fast-flowing waters have eaten away at it. Now just 515 sq km remain - and the island could disappear entirely in the next 15-20 years, according to the Majuli Island Protection and



In this picture taken on Sept 17, 2019, villagers collect wood from the Brahmaputra river at Majuli island in the northeastern Indian state of Assam.

Development Council, a local non-profit agency. It is a reality that Nandiram Payeng knows only too well - his entire village was swept away by the Brahmaputra.

"We had our houses, farms and cattle in our village. We were content and happy. But in 2007 the river came and took everything away," the widower recalls. "Now we do cultivation in other people's fields and we need to give them half the harvest," the 55-year-old tells AFP, the creases on his weather-beaten forehead deepening.

Islanders began to leave in the mid-20th century but recently it has become an exodus - some 10,000 families have been displaced in the past 12 years, according to local officials. Named after the son of the Hindu deity Brahma - the river is considered sacred and people place offerings of earthen lamps and flowers to appease it. "Every year the Brahmaputra is getting bigger. It is losing its depth and is getting wider. It is attacking the banks and eroding our land continually," said Mitu Khatamiar, a local journalist.

Experts say fast melting Himalayan glaciers - two-thirds of which could disappear by 2100 according to a major report in February - caused by global warming are a major culprit for the heavy flooding. The Brahmaputra and many of India's other

major rivers are reliant on snow and ice from the mountains, and while an increase in melting means more water in the short term, it's arrival is uncontrolled - and intense.

Climate change has made the monsoons more unpredictable: They come later, the deluges are heavier, but overall total rainfall has dropped. "There are sudden showers of high intensity which the region is not used to which has led to catastrophe," says Suruchi Bhadwal, senior fellow, Earth Science and Climate Change at The Energy and Resources Institute. "Such occurrences may increase in the coming years," she explains adding that glacier melt will initially lead to fuller rivers and a surplus of water.

But there are few provisions in place to harness or conserve water when there's an abundance, and a lack of proper management when there's too little - leaving people still facing water shortages. "Water management, governance and regulation is lacking at the national level. Once water is available it should be used efficiently and in an equitable manner," Purandare says. He adds that while harvesting rainwater is one solution it's vital that industry, agriculture, and communities look at the way they use and can conserve water now.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently created the Ministry of Jal Shakti, dedicated to looking at ways to better manage water resources and tackles everything from access to clean drinking water to flood management. Human encroachment along the river has also added to the problem - more people live in the Brahmaputra valley than ever before and protective wetlands have been destroyed making way for homes and villages.

Environmental expert Himanshu Thakkar says hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent building concrete river embankments in a bid to mitigate flooding along the Indus. But this has instead exacerbated the situation by inadvertently speeding up the flow of the river - making it more dangerous when water levels are high. Thakkar: "The Brahmaputra is a flood-prone river but we are worsening the situation." — AFP



This picture taken on Sept 20, 2019 shows a man standing near a board reading 'The Wettest Place On Earth' at Mawsynram in the northeastern Indian state of Meghalaya.

Dispatches from the wettest place on earth

Every drop of rain water trickling down Tylod Khongwir's rusty tin roof and into her house is collected - even though she lives in one of the wettest places on earth. The widowed mother-of-eight lives in Meghalaya, a remote state in India's northeast, where heavy rainfall no longer equates to an abundance of water. It was not always like this. "We had plenty of water throughout the year earlier because there were a lot of natural springs and it rained so much," Khongwir recalls. "Now we collect whatever we can when it rains and save it for later," she says.

Today the natural springs and aquifers of the area are dwindling - so residents must save what they can, when they can, and by whatever means they can. Meghalaya is India in microcosm, a stark example of its dual conundrum of having both too much and too little water. Climate change is bringing erratic weather - flood and drought, sometimes in the same area. Scientists say the monsoons now bring less rain in total, while the demand for water increases as the population, economy, and industry grows.

The rains come in increasingly violent deluges, but with little storage options, most of the rain is lost as run-off. Last July, nearly a thousand people were killed as floods swept through the eastern Indian states of Bihar, West Bengal and Assam, as well as in neighboring Nepal and Bangladesh. At the same time large swathes of southern and western India faced severe drought. Chennai officials

declared it had reached 'Day Zero' as the taps ran dry: special water trucks were brought in, while residents were forced to queue for handouts or deal with escalating prices from black-market gangs.

Some 163 million people in India, which is set to become the world's most populous nation in the next eight years, live without access to clean water according to WaterAid, and the situation is set to deteriorate.

'Dire consequences'

A report by the World Resources Institute warned the nation is facing extremely high water stress, putting the health of hundreds of millions, as well as national development, at risk. "Even small dry shocks - which are set to increase due to climate change - can produce dire consequences," the think-tank said in a report released last year. Deforestation and rapid unplanned urbanization have compounded India's woes, with floods becoming massive and drought persisting for longer periods.

"The destruction of forests affects weather patterns locally and globally both in the short and long term," said Harjeet Singh, the global lead on climate change at ActionAid International. "Forests absorb heat-trapping carbon dioxide, helping to stabilise the planet's climate. So deforestation means that more greenhouse gases are left in the atmosphere, heating up and disrupting the earth's weather patterns." — AFP



This picture taken on Sept 19, 2019 shows a general view of the water harvesting pond and drainage retaining wall at Nongthymmai-Lumthangding village on the outskirts of Shillong in Meghalaya.



In this picture taken on Sept 17, 2019, Indian Mishings tribe community people work near their houses on the banks of the Brahmaputra on Majuli.

Lifestyle | Environment



This picture taken on Sept 20, 2019 shows fisherman Kome Wilai (center) fishing from his boat along the Mekong River between Chiang Rai province in Thailand and the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos (in background). — AFP photos



This aerial photo shows a giant Buddha on the Thai side of the Golden Triangle in Chiang Rai province, with Myanmar in the background.

The 97 km between China and mastery of the Mekong

Ninety-seven kilometres of rocks in Thai waters stand between Beijing and dominance over the Mekong, a mighty river that feeds millions as it threads south from the Tibetan plateau through five countries before emptying into the South China Sea. China has long wanted to dredge the riverbed in northern Thailand to open passage for massive cargo ships - and potentially military vessels.

Ultimately a link could be carved from Yunnan province thousands of kilometres south through the Mekong countries - Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. There, the river emerges into the South China Sea, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes and the centerpiece of Beijing's trade and security strategy for its Asian neighborhood.

Under the tagline "Shared River, Shared Future" China insists it seeks only the sustainable development of the river and to split the spoils of a trade and energy boom with its Mekong neighbors and their market of 240 million people. But squeezed for value by the dams lacing China's portion of the river - and further downstream - the Mekong is already changing.

Fish stocks have collapsed say Thai fisherman, and nutrient-rich land in the Vietnamese delta is sinking as the sediment flow shrinks. The river is rivalled only by the Amazon for its biodiversity, environmentalists say, but now endemic species like the giant Mekong catfish and river dolphins are facing extinction. Environment versus big business. Geopolitics throttling a lifeline to 60 million people - big themes are playing out on a slow-moving river.



Wilai holds a fish he caught at his settlement on the Thai side of the Mekong.

The Golden Triangle - Sop Ruak village, Kilometre 1:

Zhang Jingjin's tour group run through a catalogue of selfie poses in front of the "Welcome to The Golden Triangle" gate. Below swirls a few hundred muddy metres of the Mekong. It is the 'Golden Triangle', the intersection of northern Thailand with Myanmar and Laos, notorious for conflict and drugs-but now getting plump on Chinese investment. "If more boats can pass there will be more visitors, more trade and more business," Zhang, a jovial elevator salesman from Beijing, says. "Business is good for everyone."

First the shoal at the Golden Triangle will have to go - one of 15 sets of rocks, rapids and sandbars impeding ships' progress along the river. Once removed and dredged, deep-hulled boats carrying 500-plus tons of cargo could make the 600 km journey from Yunnan to the

Laotian colonial-era jewel of Luang Prabang. The vision is to festoon both banks of the waterway with Special Economic Zones (SEZs) replete with condos, ports, rail and road links.

The bend in the river - Chiang Sean, Kilometre 10:

A short drift downstream, Kome Wilai and his friends putter out midstream on long boats, returning to polish off beers and measure the river's changes in their nets. The catch has been pitiful for a fortnight, says the 38-year-old Kome, after a sudden drop in water level in the middle of the monsoon season. "I've laid my nets twice today and got nothing. It's the Chinese dam... there is no water for the fish to swim or lay their eggs," he explains.

The dam - the Jinghong - is one of 11 in China's portion of the river, established as part of a hydro-electric power drive to help wean the country off coal. Laos, through which a third of Mekong flows, plans many more across key tributaries. A thicket of agreements encourage upstream countries to announce when they plan to store or discharge large amounts of water from their dams. Still, in Chiang Sean the water often drops by 1.5-3 m without warning. "When they close the gate at the dam it affects everyone along the river," says Prasong La-on, Chiang Sean district chief. "We have to accept it."

The Chinese Embassy in Bangkok insists it does not hold back water for its farmers or turbines and "pays great attention" to the needs of its neighbors. Meanwhile other analysts say the finger is pointing in the wrong direction. "The reality is that China only accounts for 12 percent of the Mekong's sur-



Chinese tourists disembark from a sightseeing boat along the Mekong River on the Thai side of the Golden Triangle in Chiang Rai province.

face water," says China Water Risk, a Hong Kong-based consultancy. The "Western press has a pre-determined view of China which has spilled into how it approaches transboundary water," it says, arguing downstream dams including in Laos, where the Thai-owned Xayaburi has just come online, cause the biggest impacts.

The Rapids - Khon Pi Long, Kilometre 45:

If anyone has reasons for optimism about the river's future it should be Niwat Roikaew. The ponytailed conservationist leads 'Love Chiang Khong Group' which fought an unlikely 20-year rearguard defence against the blasting of the rapids. In March, 2019, the Chinese government formally shelved its plans after his campaign led the argument that both the unique ecology of the river and Thailand's sovereignty will be hollowed out by China's dredgers.

"This is the egg-laying area for fish and birds," Niwat says, gesturing to the boulders at Khon Pi Long, where water rushes as the river tightens up.

"This key ecosystem used to be seasonal. But now the river levels depend on the opening of the dam gates and the ecosystem can't function," he says. "And they want to blast the rapids too? You'd kill the Mekong." Fish

are confused by the shallow waters at spawning season, while nutrient packed algae - favored food of the critically endangered giant Mekong catfish - grows later and less prolifically.

The final holdout - Chiang Khong, Kilometre 67:

It's festival time and elders with big smiles and elegant hand-woven skirts sit in front of the Golden Phaya Naga - fire-breathing serpents of river lore - presiding over the entrance to a Buddhist temple decorated with frescos of Mekong life. "Our culture and history is linked to the water," says Samai Rinnasak after kneeling for blessings from the assembly of monks. Economic growth and environmental change have long been reshaping that relationship. Eventually China is "going to do what it wants," according to Thitinan Pongsudhirak, of the Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, citing the build-up of dams, SEZs and cultivation of allies Laos and Cambodia. "This is China's way of power," he adds. An hour downstream in Huai Luek (km 90-97) where pomelo plantations roll down to the river bank, the final kilometres of rocks block Beijing's decades-old aspiration. — AFP

Citizens battle to save China's sickly 'mother river'

Water has been a source of death as well as a source of life for a generation in Shenqiu, a region fed by a tributary of China's heavily polluted Yangtze river and pockmarked with notorious "cancer villages". Residents often faced a bitter choice: drink dirty, discolored water and risk sickness, or pay high prices for bottled water and risk poverty. But artist-turned-environmentalist Huo Yalun has been on a mission to change that, installing filters to purify groundwater in the area in a bid to offer a safe alternative for ordinary people.

"We have seen many people in villages get cancer and skin diseases because of drinking the polluted water. But I wanted to ... actually find a solution to the villagers' drinking water problems," he told AFP. It has been a monumental task. Decades of rapid development has left the world's third longest river and its tributaries choked with toxic chemicals, plastic and garbage, threatening the main drinking water source of nearly 400 million people - a third of China's population.

Protecting the Yangtze - which irrigates an area responsible for 45 percent of the country's GDP - is now a priority, with President Xi Jinping calling for an end to "destructive" development along it. But impatient citizens, like Huo, whose father was an award-winning environmental reporter who first highlighted the issue in the 1990s, have already taken action. His prototype water filters were created before authorities even publicly disclosed the existence of more than 250 "cancer villages" in 2013 - mostly in the Yangtze river basin, including the provinces of Anhui, Jiangsu and Henan, where Shenqiu is located.

Death rates from stomach, esophagus or liver cancer in these places were two or three times the national average, according to the China Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, which linked the increases to water pollution. Huo has installed more than

50 filters and offered safe drinking water to some 100,000 families. "Before we installed the filters, a few villagers who could afford it were spending nearly 14 yuan (\$2) a day to buy bottled water," said Huo. "The others were still drinking the discolored, smelly river water," he added.

'Buried my neighbors'

Shenqiu sits on the Huai river basin, a major tributary to the Yangtze the country's "mother river" which stretches 6,300 km from Tibet to Shanghai. The major causes of water pollution in the region were factories producing MSG, paper, and leather, with toxic industrial run-off pouring into the waterways. The county has more than a dozen cancer blackspots, including Huangmengying village that sits on the Shaying river, which feeds into the Huai. Here ponds and streams, traditionally sources of drinking water, turned rust-red. Little survived in the waterways and the birds all but disappeared.

Cancer rates rose 196 percent from 1973 to 2004 - nine times the national average - according to a government report. "Many villagers were suffering from cancer. The



This aerial view taken on Sept 6, 2019 shows the Yangtze River in the city of Wuhan in China's Hubei province.

doctor only started telling us not to drink the river water several years ago. By then I had already helped bury my three neighbors," recalled local Wang Shiyong. Most residents have died or moved away to protect their health, he added.

Earlier this year China unveiled an action plan to restore the Yangtze by the end of 2020. As part of this, the city of Yichang aims to close all 134 of its riverside chemical

factories, while authorities in Hunan have been using drones with infrared cameras to spot factories dumping unprocessed waste water into the river. Central government is also considering stricter laws to punish "ecological crimes" such as dumping untreated sewage and industrial waste in the Yangtze basin, state media reported in November.

"There has been a flurry of activity in

recent months to save the Yangtze. But many of them are patchwork solutions that don't address core issues" said Ma Jun, a Beijing-based environmentalist. Lax environmental standards and tampering of pollution data by local officials has meant that "the Yangtze river basin was cleaner on paper than on the ground", Ma warned. — AFP



A family stands on the banks of the Yangtze River in Nanjing in China's Jiangsu province.



This photo taken on Nov 8, 2019 shows a worker at the Boyin leather tannery in Shenqiu, in China's central Henan province.

Lifestyle | Cocktail

Meghan returns to Canada amid royal storm

Prince Harry's wife Meghan has returned to Canada following the couple's bombshell announcement that they were quitting their frontline royal duties, it emerged Friday, as the monarch held urgent talks with her family to resolve the crisis. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex spent an extended Christmas holiday in Canada with their son before returning to break the news this week that they would "step back" from their royal roles.

The Daily Mail newspaper reported that Meghan flew back on Thursday, having never intended to be in Britain long, and "may stay there for the foreseeable future". "I can confirm reports that the duchess is in Canada," the couple's spokeswoman told AFP, without confirming the Mail's report that Harry was likely to join his wife and eight-month-old son in Canada shortly.

Several Canadian media reported Meghan had returned to Vancouver island off the country's Pacific coast, where the family spent the year-end holidays and where baby Archie had remained with his nanny. Senior royals were caught off guard by Wednesday's announcement that the Sussexes wanted to seek a "progressive new role" and divide their time between Britain and North America.

In Washington, President Donald Trump weighed in, telling Fox News that he found the spat "sad". "I just have such respect for the queen. I don't think this should be happening," he said. Queen Elizabeth II's office issued a terse statement the same evening, saying there were "complicated issues that will take time to work through". But a palace source on Thursday said the queen had instructed aides to work "at pace"



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

with Meghan and Harry and the government "to find workable solutions". The process was expected to take "days, not weeks", the source said.

Media reports said the queen held a series of calls on Thursday involving Harry, his brother Prince William and their father Prince Charles, the heir to the throne. Harry and Meghan said they intended to continue to "fully support" the queen and "collaborate" with senior royals. They also want to keep their home on the queen's Windsor Castle estate as their British base, while aiming to become financially independent. But questions are being raised about what

this means in practice, as their security is paid for by the state and they receive funds from the queen and from Charles.

Finding a role

William and Harry have always held a special place in many Britons' hearts because of their mother, Diana, who was killed in a Paris car crash in 1997. With their wives, Kate and Meghan, they have been viewed as the modern face of the royal family, hailed for bringing fresh energy to the institution. But the younger prince, who has struggled with his role, last year revealed he has been growing apart

from his brother, who as second in line to the throne is increasingly pursuing a different path.

Harry has been open about his mental health issues and he and Meghan last year admitted to struggling with the spotlight following their wedding at Windsor Castle in May 2018 and Archie's birth a year later. The couple have also lashed out at negative news coverage, some of which Harry says was racist - in light of Meghan's biracial heritage. They have recently taken several newspapers to court - a highly confrontational approach by royal standards.

Royal media expert Peter Hunt, who has interviewed Harry several times, told AFP that he thought the prince feared "the media might play a part in him losing her" through their critical reporting. "Prince Harry's relationship with the media went bad and has got progressively worse ever since his mother died," he added.

The decision by the couple, who recently registered the trademark Sussex Royal, to effectively resign their royal roles follows a turbulent year for the Windsors. Harry's uncle Prince Andrew announced he was retiring from public duties after a disastrous TV interview about his friendship with the late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

There was one bright spot for Harry, though: If he ever moved to Canada, a majority of Canadians would welcome him as the country's next governor general, a poll found. Sixty one percent would support Harry replacing the current holder of the post - who represents Queen Elizabeth II in the former colony - when her term expires, according to the poll. — AFP

Mendes war epic of grandfather's heroics shakes Hollywood

Sam Mendes says that "1917" is his "most personal" film, and it could yet be his most praised after it ripped up the form books to win him best film and best director at the Golden Globes earlier this week. His adrenalin-filled World War I epic, which the British director shot as if it was one continuous take, could yet match the five Oscars his debut feature "American Beauty" picked up in 2000. "It was clearly a technical challenge," Mendes told AFP before his unexpected triumph, with Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman" seemingly the clear favourite to clean up at the Globes, which open the Hollywood awards season.

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. The story for the film, which follows two British soldiers who must cross no-man's land to deliver a vital message to abort a planned attack on German lines, comes directly from Mendes' own family history. His grandfather, the Trinidad-born writer Alfred Mendes, was given a similar almost suicidal mission when he served as a rifleman in Flanders, where he won a Military Medal. Mendes' idea for the film came from "listening to my grandfather (as a child) tell stories of his experiences."

Herculean feat

"He told one particular story of carrying a message" across the battlefield, and "that became the basis for

this", he added. "But then everything after that was invented or based on real accounts of the war, first person accounts, letters, and diaries of other people. I suppose it is my most personal (film) because it comes directly from me. I'd never written a script for a film before," said the maker of the last two "Bond" sagas, "Skyfall" and "Spectre".

But even compared to those enormous minutely-planned blockbuster productions, the making of "1917" was a Herculean feat for Mendes and cinematographer Deakin, who won an Oscar for "Blade Runner 2049" two years ago. Shooting all over Britain and in Shepperton Studios near London, the two men had to make sure the action looked like it happened in one two-hour take - a technical nightmare which demanded that everything from weather right down to continuity had to be perfect.

The camera follows the two soldiers and we see everything from their point of view without recourse to all the usual editing tricks and narrative jumps that go into conventional filmmaking. "I wanted the audience to connect emotionally with the central characters and never leave their side," Mendes said. "It was very long process because we had to walk every bit of the journey with the actors before we designed the set," he added.

Best on big screen

"We had to understand how long every set needed to be. So if you wrote, 'They walked down a hillside through an orchard to a farmhouse,' you had to walk that journey and design the orchard just for the length of the conversation, and design the distance between the orchard and the farmhouse, the farmhouse and the barn, and the barn and the road, the road and the canal. Everything had to be interlinked." But the sets could not be built until "we had rehearsed it fully with the actors. So we were rehearsing for months and months. And then building, rehearsing again, then building again. We built over a mile of trench-



British film director Sam Mendes poses in the press room with the awards for Best Director - Motion Picture and Best Motion Picture - Drama during the 77th annual Golden Globe Awards on Jan 5, 2020 at The Beverly Hilton hotel. — AFP

es," he revealed.

Mendes said he wanted to make his two messengers, played by George MacKay and Dean Charles Chapman (Tommen Baratheon in "Game of Thrones"), "to feel like two men among two million. They're not heroes, they're just men. And for the audience, I wanted them to know that maybe they won't survive. Maybe both of them will be killed."

For Mendes, an acclaimed theatre director who still loves the pull of the live, his movie works best on the big screen rather than streamed. "I think it's up to filmmakers to make films that need to be seen on the big screen, and make an audience feel like if they don't see it on a big screen, they are going to miss out." — AFP



In this file photo taken on April 25, 2019, fans of the Avengers strike a pose while dressed in costumes for a costume contest before the first screening of "Avengers: Endgame" at the TCL Chinese Theater in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Global box office has biggest ever year thanks to Disney mega-hits

If streaming was meant to mark the demise of movie theaters, Disney did not get the memo. Theaters around the world took in an all-time record \$42.5 billion last year, thanks largely to an unprecedented string of international mega-hits from the Mouse House such as "Avengers: Endgame", "The Lion King" and "Frozen II". Most of the growth came outside North America, in booming markets such as China, Japan and South Korea, as well as Russia, Brazil, Mexico and western Europe, industry analyst Comscore found in its annual report Friday.

But North American theaters still had their second-biggest ever year, taking more than \$11 billion despite a relatively sluggish first six months. "Endgame" became the world's highest-grossing film, taking \$2.798 billion to surpass "Avatar" (2009), although it fell short of the domestic box office record held by 2015's "Star Wars: The Force Awakens". In a sign of its popularity, the movie was still showing in US picture houses four months after its release.

Superhero films "Captain Marvel" and "Spider-Man: Far From Home" (co-produced with Sony) rounded out an all-Disney global top five. "The stars really did align for

Disney in 2019, it was just a spectacular year," said Comscore senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian. "Having another year like 2019, I don't know when we'll see that from any studio in the new future," he said, adding that Disney does have blockbusters like "Mulan" and "Black Widow" lined up for 2020.

The overall \$42.5 billion take surpassed last year's record, which was set at \$41.7 billion. Figures were not adjusted for inflation. Streaming platforms such as Netflix have disrupted the industry by luring top talent and vastly out-spending Tinseltown's traditional studios in recent years, leading many to predict movie theaters would suffer.

For instance Netflix gave its prestige production, Martin Scorsese crime epic "The Irishman", a relatively minuscule 26-day window in theaters before the movie launched on its small-screen streaming platform. "Streaming is great - it makes people more excited about content in general," said Dergarabedian. "One does not exclude the other... They are competing platforms, but they are both fueling excitement." — AFP



Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone leaves after visiting a Hindu temple in Mumbai on Friday. — AFP

Under-fire Bollywood star prays for new film

Bollywood's top actress was snapped praying in a temple on Friday ahead of the release of her new film as a storm continued to rage over her attendance at a recent student protest. The presence of Deepika Padukone, 34, at the demonstration in New Delhi on Tuesday broke with the unspoken tradition of Bollywood stars remaining for the most part apolitical. It unleashed a furor on social media with detractors accusing the actress of a publicity stunt to promote her latest role as an acid attack survivor, while others applauded her courage.

On Thursday Smriti Irani, a former model and TV actress who is now a minister in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet, accused her of being unpatriotic. Padukone was "standing with people who celebrate every time a CRPF jawan is killed", Irani said, referring to an Indian paramilitary soldier. Members of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have called for a boycott of her film "Chhapaak" ("Splash"), which came out on Friday. They have urged moviegoers to watch "Tanhaji", a swashbuckling historical epic about a Hindu general, instead.

Padukone was attending a protest after an attack blamed on a group close to the BJP at a Delhi university last Sunday injured 34 students while police allegedly stood by. The incident followed several weeks of protests nationwide against a new citizenship law during which police have been accused of using excessive force, with at least 25 people killed.

Media reports said that Modi's government has also shelved a promotional video featuring Padukone in which she speaks about the need to give acid attack survivors equal opportunities. Meanwhile two Indian states and one union territory run by the main opposition Congress party have cut government taxes on tickets for Padukone's film. — AFP

From Thor to Fleabag, stars dig deep for Aussie bushfire relief

Social media stars and sporting champions are splashing the cash for Australian bushfire relief efforts and urging fans to do the same. Twenty-six people have died since the start of the disaster in September, more than 2,000 homes have been destroyed, and some eight million hectares (80,000 sq km) has burned - an area roughly the size of Ireland or South Carolina.

Aussie A-listers donate

Australian Marvel actor Chris Hemsworth said he would donate AU\$1 million, singers Kylie and Dani Minogue pledged AU\$500,000 to the country's rural firefighters, a donation matched by Nicole Kidman and her husband Keith Urban. Compatriots including Russell Crowe - who used his Golden Globe win to speak about the tragedy - and Rebel Wilson have pledged donations, with singer Dami Im also donating.

Serena plays for charity

Athletes like Lewis Hamilton, tennis players Ashleigh Barty, Maria Sharapova and Novak Djokovic, and cricketers - including Chris Lynn and Glenn Maxwell - offered to donate their winnings. On Wednesday, organizers of the Australian Open said Roger Federer, Serena Williams and Rafael Nadal will headline a charity match ahead of the tournament.

\$1m for 'baggy green'

Many celebrities will auction clothes: Williams is donating a signed dress, while British actor and writer Phoebe Waller-Bridge announced her Golden Globes suit would be auctioned off, and Shane Warne sold his baggy green cap to an anonymous bidder for AU\$1 million.

Kylie contributes

American stars - including Kylie Jenner, singers Pink, Lizzo, and Shawn Mendes, talkshow host Ellen DeGeneres, and actor Patricia Arquette - all pledged to contribute to relief efforts. Leonardo DiCaprio's environmental group, Earth Alliance, also said it was giving US\$3 million.

Rocket Man

Elton John announced during a performance on Tuesday he would donate \$1 million, and Metallica said they would give \$500,000 to the county's fire service. Celebrities such as Margot Robbie, Naomi Watts, Hugh Jackman, and Selena Gomez also announced they had donated but declined to state how much. — AFP

Female presenter wins equal pay claim against BBC

British female news presenter who was paid one sixth of the fee earned by a male presenter on a similar show won her discrimination case against the BBC on Friday. An employment tribunal ruled the corporation failed to prove the disparity in pay between Samira Ahmed and Jeremy Vine was "because of a material factor which did not involve subjecting the claimant to sex discrimination". Both journalists present shows where the viewers are given a chance to air their opinions.

The BBC is regularly scrutinized over the amounts it pays top stars and has also faced several major stories about female staff being paid less than their male equivalents. Ahmed, who argued she was owed almost £700,000 (\$914,000) in back pay, welcomed the ruling. "No woman wants to have to take action against their own employer. I love working for the BBC," she said in a statement released through the National Union of Journalists (NUJ).

The BBC responded that Ahmed was "an excellent journalist and presenter, and we regret that this case ever had to go to tribunal". But it defended its actions. "We have always believed that the pay of Samira and Jeremy Vine was not determined by their gender," it said. "Presenters - female as well as male - had always been paid more on 'Points of View' than 'Newswatch'."

The BBC said "Points of View" requires the presenter to deal with issues "in a light-hearted way", so its presenters have tended to be "well-known figures in the world of light entertainment" meriting a higher market fee. "Newswatch" "deals with matters seriously" on the "relatively niche" BBC News Channel. It is only repeated on the main BBC One channel during the Saturday breakfast show "to fill out the program", the corporation said.

The 15-minute weekly "Points of View" show started in 1961 and features viewers' praise and criticisms across the whole spectrum of BBC programs in a dry, humorous style. "Newswatch", a 10-minute weekly program, started in 2004 in an attempt to make the corporation's news output more accountable, and gives viewers the right of reply on news coverage. Ahmed started fronting "Newswatch" in 2012 on £440 - the same as her male predecessor Ray Snoddy. Her occasional male stand-ins have been paid a near-identical amount. — AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, January 12, 2020



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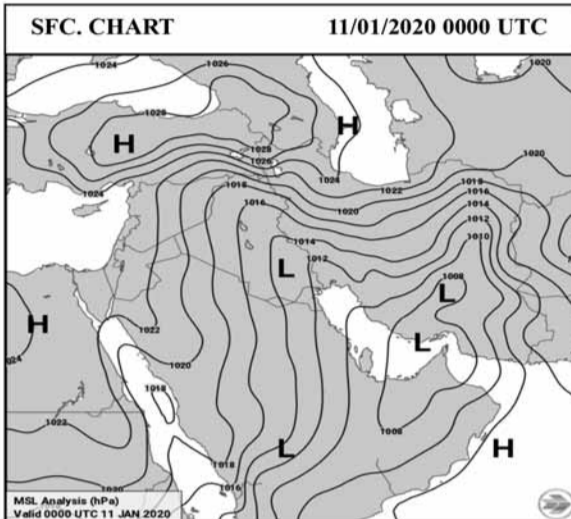


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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Rather cool with moderate to fresh north westerly wind, with speed of 20 - 50 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

BY NIGHT: Cold with moderate to fresh north westerly wind, with speed of 20 - 45 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 11/01/2020 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	18 °C	13 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	18 °C	11 °C			
ABDALY	20 °C	09 °C			
BUBYAN	19 °C	10 °C			
JAHRA	19 °C	10 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C			
SALMIYAH	18 °C	13 °C			
AHMADI	17 °C	13 °C			
NUWASIB	19 °C	11 °C			
WAFRA	18 °C	10 °C			
SALMY	18 °C	07 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	01/12	Rather cool with a chance for rising dust over open areas and some scattered clouds will appear	18 °C	07 °C	NW	20 - 45 km/h
Monday	01/13	Rather cool and Partly cloudy	19 °C	04 °C	NW	10 - 30 km/h
Tuesday	01/14	Fair and some high clouds will appear	20 °C	05 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 28 km/h
Wednesday	01/15	Fair	21 °C	05 °C	NW	10 - 35 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:20
Sunrise	06:44
Zuhr	11:56
Asr	14:49
Sunset	17:08
Isha	18:30

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	19 °C
MIN. Temp.	06 °C
MAX. RH	75 %
MIN. RH	28 %
MAX. Wind	N 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

My son DALTON IMMANUEL SAM JONATHAN DAVID DURAI PANDIAN, Indian Passport holder N1871481 born on 26.09.2007 residing in Salmiya, Kuwait. Shall henceforth be known as given name: DALTON IMMANUEL, Surname: SAM. (C 5604)

Old name: ANMOLIKA, Passport No. N9725963, new name only surname: ANMOLIKA SINGH. (C 5488) 10-1-2020

I, Nasim Mohammed Ishaque Karjkar, holder of Indian Passport No. J5393280 issued at Kuwait on 13-03-2011 presently residing at Kuwait do hereby declare henceforth my name will be read as given name: Nasim Mohammed Ishaque, Surname: Karjkar. Objection if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015. (C 5603) 9-1-2020

I, Mustafakhan Hamzakhan Jummal holder of Indian Passport No. Z2402486, issued at Kuwait on 25-09-2012, permanent address of India A-1148, Jummal Mohalla, Goregaon Raigad, 402103, M.S. and presently residing at Kuwait do hereby change my name as: Given Name: Mustafa Hamzakhan, Surname: Jummal. (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.

I, Shibi Joseph (Kuttiyil Geo Vila, Chandanappally P.O., Pathanamthitta, Kerala, Pin: 689648) holder of Indian Passport No. R8270784 issued at Kuwait on 13-08-2017, presently residing at Kuwait do 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 Laya 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 Laya Surname: Sunil
Objection if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave, Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015.

I, Kripa Anna Sunil holder of Indian Passport No. T8211186 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)

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Emirates	22921555
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Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578



Flight Schedule

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

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Sunday 12/1/2020				Departure Flights on Sunday 12/1/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	JZR	215	Jeddah	00:05
FEQ	241	Alexandria	00:30	QTR	1093	Doha	00:25
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	FDB	072	Dubai	00:35
NIA	561	Asyut	00:45	BBC	044	Dhaka	00:45
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
KAC	102	London	00:55	FEQ	342	Sohag	01:30
KAC	504	Beirut	00:55	NIA	364	Alexandria	01:40
PJT	858	Istanbul	00:55	JZR	119	Dubai	01:55
ETH	3424	Addis Ababa/Bahrain	01:30	KAC	677	Dubai	01:55
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	JZR	111	Doha	01:55
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
PGT	840	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	363	Colombo	02:00
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	THY	773	Istanbul	02:20
JZR	002	LGW	01:55	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	KAC	417	Manila	02:30
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	PGT	841	Istanbul	02:50
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	ETH	3425	Addis Ababa	02:55
RBG	551	Alexandria	02:25	IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	RBG	552	Alexandria	03:05
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	UAE	854	Cairo	03:40
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	621	Doha	03:50
RJA	648	Amman	03:05	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	OMA	644	Muscat	04:00
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	JZR	713	Sohag	04:30
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	KKK	1269	Istanbul	04:35
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	JZR	707	Luxor	04:40
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	KAC	103	London	05:00
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	THY	771	Istanbul	06:25
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
KAC	382	Delhi	05:20	JZR	113	Doha	06:40
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	JZR	001D	LGW	06:45
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	RJA	649	Amman	06:55
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
QTR	8511	Doha	05:45	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:55	QTR	8512	Doha	07:45
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
JZR	120	Dubai	06:50	KAC	165	Rome	08:15
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	161	Geneva	08:20
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
BAW	157	London	07:10	KAC	545	Cairo	08:50
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	BAW	156	London	09:00
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	163	MXP	09:00
KAC	622	Doha	08:00	JZR	539	KTM	09:05
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	691	Muscat	09:20
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	KAC	671	Dubai	09:35
KAC	334	Trivandrum	09:00	QTR	1085	Doha	09:40
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	101	London	09:45
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	KAC	561	Amman	09:45
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	KAC	117	New York	10:00
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	KAC	791	Madinah	10:00
JZR	114	Doha	10:20	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
JZR	714	Sohag	10:50	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
JZR	708	Luxor	10:55	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25	QTR	611	Tbilisi	10:45
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	KAC	741	Dammam	11:05

Sports

Former grand prix racer Coulthard expects Hamilton to stay at Mercedes

Lewis is on course to break Schumacher's record 91 career wins this year

BIRMINGHAM: Former grand prix racer David Coulthard expects Lewis Hamilton to resist the allure of Ferrari and stay with Formula One champions Mercedes for some years to come. Ferrari bosses confirmed last month that Britain's six-times world champion, whose Mercedes contract expires at the end of 2020, had met their chairman John Elkann at a couple of social events.

They said they were flattered by the Briton's interest in a possible move. Coulthard, who finished overall runner-up to Ferrari's seven-times champion Michael Schumacher in 2001 while with McLaren, doubted a move would really happen.

"I've never felt that Lewis was ever going to go anywhere else (than Mercedes)," the Scot, president of the British Racing Drivers' Club and also a commentator for Channel Four television, told Reuters.

"I'm sure he is talking to Ferrari... but he's only ever been with Mercedes. Why go and break that?" Coulthard said at the Autosport International Show where he was promoting the all-female W Series ahead of its second season.

"Some people want that European twist to their life, but I think Lewis is quite happy in English-

speaking territory. Britain and America. America for his play time, Britain for his racing. "I don't think he needs the huggy, cuddly, emotional ride that would come with Ferrari. And I don't believe that Ferrari badge is etched on the inside of his mind since he was a wee kid. So why do it? Money? He's got plenty of that."

Hamilton, who won his first title with McLaren in 2008 and joined the Mercedes team in 2013, has always driven F1 cars powered by the German manufacturer's engines. The 35-year-old is on course to break Schumacher's record 91 career wins this year, when he can also equal the German's title tally.

Coulthard said he felt up until the U.S. Grand Prix in Austin last November, when Hamilton won his sixth title, that the Briton could walk away at any point but that had changed.

"I have a much stronger feeling that he's in it for another few years. So it does set us up for what could be an absolutely golden era of Formula One," he said.

CLEAR NUMBER TWO

Ferrari have 22-year-old Monegasque Charles Leclerc tied up on a long-term deal, with four-times

world champion Sebastian Vettel in the final year of his contract, while Red Bull recently extended Max Verstappen's contract to 2023.

Coulthard said Vettel, who won his titles with Red Bull, faced a critical year after being out-performed by Leclerc last season. "I think Seb has got a shorter duration to his career now than before. A lot depends on this year," he said.

"If... Charles continues to be up front, then it just doesn't really make financial sense for Ferrari to apportion that amount of money to someone that could end up becoming a clear number two.

"Right now he (Vettel) is number one equal. But he went in as number one plus at the beginning of the year (2019), became number one equal as the year went on and he's on the cusp of maybe dropping, as we've seen with Kimi (Raikkonen). Raikkonen, 2007 world champion for Ferrari, became an effective number two to Vettel before being replaced by Leclerc. The Finn is now racing for Alfa Romeo.

Speculation about who might replace Vettel alongside Leclerc is already rife, with Renault's Australian Daniel Ricciardo in the spotlight. "A lot again depends on this year, but I wouldn't be sur-



Lewis Hamilton

prised if he's already talking to Ferrari and Mercedes and all the teams that didn't want him last time round," said Coulthard. The season starts in Australia on March 15. — Reuters

Amir's 9th shooting competition begins

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Tournament of HH the Amir continues its competitions today at Sheikh Sabah Olympic Shooting Complex, as official training for 10m pistol and rifle will start at 9 am, while the trap competition for men and women, shooting at 75 targets will start at 9 am. The 70 meter archery competition will kick off at 8 am and the finals will follow 45 minutes later.

Shooters Talal Al-Rashidi and Abdelrahman Al-Faihan, who already qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, will get into competitions with shooters from Italy, Kazakhstan, UAE, Qatar, and Lebanon, while Khalid Al-Mudhaf, Nasser Al-Miqid and Fahad Lafi will be in competition also. Kuwait's women shooters Sarah and Shahad Al-Hawal will also compete with Italian, Kazakhstan and Lebanon champions.

Meanwhile, Abdallah Al-Harby will find the rifle competition, Hamad Al-Namshan and Abdallah Al-Mulla the pistol competition a difficult one in the presence of world champions from Serbia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Iran and Bahrain.

Meanwhile, Secretary General of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations, Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi, President of African and Egyptian Shooting Federation Major General Hazem Hosny, and lecturer Pekka distributed certificates to referees who successfully passed the running targets course, which was organized by Kuwait Shooting Federation (KSF) under the patronage of International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF).

Al-Osaimi said KSF always support referees be them the new ones or veterans through organizing courses in order to allow them run major international competitions.

The new referees who passed the course are



KUWAIT: Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi seen in this group photo with referees who successfully passed the running targets course.



Equipment control in progress

Khalid Al-Jurayyed, Abdallah Al-Shimmari, Salem Al-Dahish, Amina Ismail, Awatef Hamdan, Shaima Dashdi, Ali Hassan, Mutlaq Al-Thafiri, Muhanna Al-Ghurba, Showq Al-Hajji, Wafaa Abdelrahim, Hind Al-Harby, Ali Hussein, Assyel Al-Shimmari, Ali Ghalib and Faisal Al-Shimmari.

On the other hand, the technical meeting of the tournament was held yesterday morning in presence of delegations representatives. Tournament Director Obaid Al-Osaimi thanked HH the Amir for patronizing the tournament in which shooters representing 30 countries are participating. He said all obstacles were removed away from the shooters to allow them compete at their best.

Al-Osaimi conveyed condolences to the

Sultanate of Oman's government and people on the sad demise of Sultan Qaboos bin Said who died yesterday. He said the tournament's higher organizing committee postponed the opening ceremony due to the official mourning of the Sultan's death in the State of Kuwait.

Head of the shotgun referees committee Hamad Aqel Al-Ruwaisan said his committee prepared for the tournament by holding special training camp, and a refresher course for international and local referees (16 international and 9 local). He said all referees in the tournament are highly experienced Kuwaitis who participated in several tournaments including the World Cup, Asian games and Arab championships.

GCC to organize cycling competition

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Gulf Cooperation Council states cycling's organizing committee had its first meeting in two years, which was held at the Raddison Blue hotel, approved the Gulf championships agenda for this year, and laid down a policy that relies on gender equality and a plan to develop the game from all aspects.

Kuwait succeeded in restoring Gulf unity through the hosting of the meeting by Cycling Club.

The meeting was chaired by Bahrain's representative, chairman of the committee Sheikh Khalid Al-Khalifa in the presence of Fahad Al-Mutairi (Kuwait), Abdelnasser Al-Shamsi (UAE), Abdallah Al-Mizyed (Saudi Arabia) and Khalifa Al-Jabry (Oman).

The meeting was also attended by

Secretary of Kuwait Cycling Club Abdallah Al-Shimmari.

Sheikh Khalid said "we approved an integrated agenda for our competition, and it starts with the track championship in UAE at the end of February, then the first mountains championship at the end of March and the first road races of the Gulf games.

He said the GCC tour will restore its activity next December, which starts in Bahrain through Saudi Arabia and ends in Kuwait. He said Kuwait will host the women's competition while Saudi Arabia will host the youth and juniors.

He said a doping testing for riders was approved, and hailed the return of the committee meetings after two years, which affected the game technically. He added "I think the time is right to return as activities are on the increase, and the establishment of Kuwait Club."



Dakar Rally searches for green amid sand

RIYADH: The images of cars, motorbikes and trucks careering through the sands of the Saudi desert are wonderfully dramatic but the shadow of climate change is lengthening across the Dakar Rally.

For 42 years this convoy of gas-guzzling vehicles has billowed exhaust fumes across the sands of Africa, South America and now Saudi Arabia, incurring the wrath of the environmentalists.

In response, the rally is taking its first baby steps towards a more climate friendly race. For Anne Lassman-Trappier, mobility manager of the France nature environment association (FNE), the Dakar is "way off beam".

"It still interests some people but it's no longer in step with history," she says. The penny appears to have dropped with the rally organisers who are displaying their desire to go green.

"When you have a motor sport, you know very well that you are not in tune with the times," admits David Castera, the new boss of the Dakar. "We have 350 vehicles that drive every day which obviously says something but we are working on it," he said.

ELECTRIC SUV

For several years, the race has implemented a carbon offset programme in the Amazon. The rally also serves as a laboratory for the development of new vehicles. In 2017, a 100 percent electric car managed to finish the race after two failures in previous years.

The car sponsored by Acciona, the Spanish renewable energy and construction giant, completed the rally in 52nd place, 82 hours 31 minutes 48seconds behind the winner, Stéphane



RIYADH: Kamaz' Russia driver Andrey Karginov, co-driver Andrey Mokeev and Igor Lenonov compete during the Stage 6 of the Dakar 2020 between Ha'il and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. —AFP

Peterhansel. It was not an ideal advertisement for electric racing but it was a good start. This year, a hybrid truck is making its competitive debut. After five stages, the crew of team Riwal were second to last.

Again, it is at least an indication that hybrids can survive the conditions. "The electric system is only charged while driving, so there is no need for a generator or charger," says Dutch driver Gert Huzink.

The vehicle "is simply refuelled by the internal process of the truck". On the sidelines, an electric SUV is also carrying out tests, with experienced nine-time Dakar driver Guerlain Chicherit at the wheel.

"Today, we are facing certain realities and motor sport must evolve," said the Frenchman. "You have to accept that things change and live with the times." With a 60 kWh battery and two electric motors, the Odyssey 21 can reach a top speed of 200kph and go from 0 to 100 in 4.5 seconds with very little noise.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

"It's very surprising," admits Chicherit. "In motorsport, there is a bit of a fantasy around noise. But after driving a week in the desert in a car that makes no noise, I can tell you that it is much better."

The team overseeing the experiment aims to enter competition next year. Their big problem in a race where stages are often 600 kilometres or more is that a battery will only run for 50km before it needs recharging.

"The ambition is to be successful in 2023 or 2024," says Chicherit. "We are realistic. But we have to start by doing it in 2021. We are going to be the guinea pig, I am aware of that and I am ready to do it. It makes the project more exciting." One day the Dakar Rally might have to go 100 per cent electric. "It's going to happen, I am sure of it," says Theophile Cousin, the engineer behind the electric SUV. For Lassman-Trappier, this reshaping of the machines could give new meaning to the race. — AFP

Boxing federation's ability to pay off debts still unclear

LAUSANNE: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Friday that the International Boxing Association's (AIBA) ability to pay off its multi-million dollar debt was still unclear, reducing the chances of a swift end to the federation's Olympic suspension.

The IOC suspended AIBA over issues surrounding its finances and governance in June 2019, officially taking over the boxing competition and qualification for the Tokyo 2020 summer Olympics.

The boxing body has been in turmoil for several years over its finances and governance, with the federation at least \$16 million in debt. It was also split internally by an ongoing bitter battle over the presidency.

"We have been informed of AIBA's willingness to organise new competitions in order to generate revenues," IOC member Nenad Lalovic, who heads a task force to monitor changes to the boxing federation, told the IOC session. "We do not know if there are possibilities for clearing AIBA's debts and we have no knowledge of any financial plan," said the Serbian, who also heads the wrestling federation. The IOC has demanded changes to AIBA's statutes, new leadership and a financial cleanup of the federation before it will lift its suspension.

"We are still awaiting information on which guiding principle the new statutes (of AIBA) will be based upon and how the need for a new leadership team will be taken into account to support the new culture," Lalovic said. He had said in June that AIBA's debts could rise as high as \$29 million.

"As you know, we are dealing with financial problems created by the previous leadership," AIBA said in an emailed statement to Reuters. "Time is needed to put in place adequate solutions, we are actively working on it."

"We also are progressing well with the debtors. (A) proposal to resolve that issue would be presented at the next Executive Committee meeting in February and would have to be ratified by the Executive Committee members."

"The Reform Commission is continuing the work on statutes changes and other aspects of the organisation are also under review for the betterment of the sport and will be part of the agenda of the next EC meeting," AIBA said.

The IOC is racing to organise a series of continental boxing qualifiers this year while also preparing the tournament in Tokyo. It is also going through the process of selecting judges and referees following background checks.

AIBA has essentially depended for decades on Olympic revenues to survive between Games and has had to let staff go in recent months as a result of its Olympic exclusion. The IOC will review AIBA's suspension after Tokyo and will make a decision based on developments and changes to the boxing body's governance. — Reuters

Sports

IOC chief Bach wants 'water-proof' CAS decision on Russian doping

Tokyo Olympics get under way on July 24

LAUSANNE: IOC president Thomas Bach insisted any decision to ban Russia from international sporting events as punishment for doping must be "water-proof" and not pave a way for "total confusion".

With less than 200 days to go before the Tokyo Olympics, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has sent its case for the exclusion of Russia to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

CAS, the world's highest sport court, must decide whether to confirm the four-year ban WADA imposed on Russia last month or consider Moscow's case against the epic sanction.

Bach, speaking at the 135th session of the International Olympic Committee, said CAS has to make a clearcut decision over whether Russia is to be banned from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing as well as the 2022 football World Cup.

"What is important for the IOC and the international federations is that we get a decision which does not leave room for any kind of interpretation," Bach told a news conference. "If there is room for interpretation...this will lead to real, total confusion."

"This decision must be water-proof. This is the key." Sources told AFP the CAS decision would not be made before May. The Tokyo Olympics get under way on July 24. "Unfortunately the speed of the procedure is not in our hands," added the IOC chief.

"We hope for a decision as soon as possible, in order to be able to make all the necessary arrangements. This relates to the athletes but also to all other questions." Newly-elected WADA president Witold Banka said he was satisfied that the case is moving forwards. "We are not yet

at the end of this saga," said the former 400-metre runner from Poland.

"However, I am happy that we have been able to break the impasse with the Russian authorities and move the matter along in a fashion that is proportionate and tough on those responsible, while protecting athletes that can prove they were not involved or impacted."

WADA's announcement of the case being sent to CAS came exactly one month after they decided to impose a four-year ban on Russia over what it considers a state-sponsored doping scheme. The global anti-doping body claims Russia "manipulated" data from an anti-doping laboratory in Moscow in the latest move in a long-running scandal that began with the 2015 revelation of long-term institutional doping involving senior Russian officials, secret agents and trafficked urine vials.

Under the sanctions, Russians would be allowed to compete at the Tokyo Olympics only if they can demonstrate they were not part of the doping network — the same situation they faced at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

Russia's Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) disputed the WADA executive committee ban, setting the stage for WADA to send the case to CAS. Russian athletes have pressured their nation's athletics governing body over its handling of the doping scandal.

Three-time high jump world champion Mariya Lasitskaya was among the Russian track and field figures urging compatriots to challenge sporting authorities, warning she would quit Russia and train elsewhere so as not to miss the Tokyo Olympics after having missed the 2016 Rio Olympics due to the scandal. — AFP



LAUSANNE: Governor of Gangwon Province, Choe Moon-soon, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach and IOC Singaporean member Ng Sor Miang pose with the contract they signed after Gangwon Province in South Korea was elected to host the 4th Winter Youth Olympic 2024 during an Olympic session in Lausanne. — AFP

Steele, Davis share lead at windy Waialae

LOS ANGELES: Brendan Steele birdied his final three holes in an eventful four-under-par 66 on Friday to share the second-round lead in the US PGA Tour Sony Open with Australian Cameron Davis. Three-time tour winner Steele had a total of six birdies, two bogeys an eagle and a double-bogey to hit the halfway point at Waialae Country Club in Honolulu, Hawaii, on six-under 134.

Davis, a 22-year-old seeking his first top-10 finish on the US tour, had five birdies and a bogey in his 66, rolling in a 13-footer at his final hole, the ninth, to join Steele atop the leaderboard early and stay there.

On another windy day — with intermittent showers again dousing a course that absorbed overnight rain — nine players were one shot off the lead on 135. They included Aussie Cameron Smith and Scotland's Russell Knox and Americans Bo Hoag and Rob Oppenheim who all shot 65.

Overnight leader Collin Morikawa, the only player without a bogey on Thursday, joined the group at five-under with an even par 70 capped by back-to-back birdies. South African-born Slovakian Rory Sabbatini eagled his final hole, the ninth, for his share of third place.

Steele teed off on 10 and was two-over through his first eight holes before rolling in a 14-foot eagle putt at the par-five 18th. He added birdies at the fourth and fifth before a wind-driven double-bogey at the sixth — which he followed with his bravura finish that included birdie putts of four feet and 11 feet and a five-footer for birdie at the ninth — where he was in a greenside bunker.

"It was a wild finish," Steele said. "I was really happy with how I bounced back to make those good swings and good putts on the last few holes." A jam-packed leaderboard saw another five players tied on 136 and seven on 137.

The group on four-under 136 included unheralded Michael Gellerman, a 27-year-old who received a sponsor's exemption to play in the tournament that started days after his January 4 wedding. Gellerman reeled off five birdies in a row, starting with a 28-footer at 17, to reach six-under.

He faded with three bogeys in four holes before steady-ing with a birdie at the eighth and closing with a par from a fairway bunker at the ninth for a three-under 67.

The testing conditions in the PGA Tour's first full-



HONOLULU: Cameron Davis of Australia catches a ball tossed by his caddie on the sixth green during the second round of the Sony Open in Hawaii at the Waialae Country Club in Honolulu, Hawaii. — AFP

field event of 2020 saw some well-known names making an early exit. Defending champion Matt Kuchar carded a three-over 73 that put him two-over, missing the cut by one.

Justin Thomas, who won the Tournament of Champions on Sunday at Kapalua, posted a one-over 71 and missed the cut at three-over. "Just didn't execute," Thomas said. "I mean, it's really, really tough out there. But I played fine. I played plenty good enough to be at four- or five-under and right in contention, but I missed about every putt."

Meanwhile, in Johannesburg, Finland's Tapio Pulkkanen carded a bogey-free 66 to take a one-shot advantage at the top of a congested leaderboard following the second round of the European Tour's South African Open on Friday.

Just three shots separate the first 22 players at the halfway point of the championship, with Pulkkanen alone

at the summit on 11 under par after he managed five birdies on a tougher scoring day for the 240-strong field.

At one point there was a seven-way tie at the top of the leaderboard at the Randpark Golf Club. Pulkkanen is seeking a first win on tour, but will have to fight off a sizeable chasing pack if he is to be victorious in Johannesburg.

Englishman Sam Horsfield (68) is one of five players a shot back, in a group that includes home amateur Jayden Trey Schaper (67), and the South African trio of Thriston Lawrence (65), Jaco Ahlers (66) and Trevor Fisher Jnr (67).

Overnight leader Johannes Veerman from the United States could only manage a par 71 on Friday following his superb 62 in his opening round, and is two shots off the pace. Former Open winner and defending champion Louis Oosthuizen (69) is on eight under par for the tournament and part of a big group of players who will hope to make a move on the weekend. — Agencies

Maxwell says has banished demons in head

MELBOURNE: Australia's Glenn Maxwell attributed his red-hot form in the ongoing Big Bash League to the break he took to address his mental health issues and said he has banished his demons. The explosive all-rounder flagged his struggle with mental health in October and spent much of the subsequent seven weeks with friends and family before quietly returning to action.

The Melbourne Stars captain hammered 83 not out off 45 balls to pull off a tricky chase against Melbourne Renegades, sealing the victory with his seventh six at the Marvel Stadium on Friday.

"I think I'm starting to see the benefits now, I've got no demons in my head," Maxwell told Cricket Australia website.

"I've been able to get everything off my chest and been able to deal with things better. I'm still talking to people about managing different parts of my life and making sure I've still got that balance." Maxwell is the second highest run-accumulator at this edition of the tournament, 20 runs behind team mate Marcus Stoinis (331) and has scored 182 runs without being dismissed in his last three innings.

"It's nice to be a bit more relaxed when I'm batting," said the 31-year-old. "I don't have anything going in the back of my mind, I don't have any of these other thoughts. It's been nice and calm out there."

He has been left out of the upcoming one-day series in India after an underwhelming 12 months of 50-overs cricket, including a poor World Cup outing in England. Maxwell doesn't believe his Big Bash purple patch would pave the way back into the Australian one-day squad.

"This is T20 cricket. They're playing one-day cricket." "One-day cricket is completely different. They will probably write that my World Cup wasn't good enough. I'll just try to keep doing as well as I can for the Stars." — Reuters

India ride Thakur brilliance to win against Sri Lanka

MUMBAI: Shardul Thakur produced an all-round display and Navdeep Saini impressed with his pace again as India thumped Sri Lanka by 78 runs in the third and final Twenty20 International to complete a 2-0 series victory in Pune on Friday.

KL Rahul and Shikhar Dhawan both hit fifties to lay the foundation for India's imposing total of 201-6 after being put into bat at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium. Sri Lanka's top order wilted early in their reply and Dhananjaya de Silva's counter-attacking 57 was not enough as they were bundled out for 123 in 15.5 overs.

Saini, who took 2-18 in the second match, led the rout claiming 3-28, while Thakur grabbed two wickets to go with his 22 not out off just eight deliveries. Earlier, Dasun Shanaka dropped Dhawan in the second over and his team paid for the costly mistake as the left-hander went on to forge a 97-run partnership with Rahul.

Left-arm spinner Lakshan Sandakan (3-35) separated them when he dismissed Dhawan for 52 and wickets suddenly started tumbling. Sandakan dismissed Rahul (54) and the in-form Shreyas Iyer in the same over, while Virat Kohli and Washington Sundar departed in successive deliveries.

Manish Pandey (31 not out) and Thakur made sure the collapse did not really matter as they took India past the 200-mark. Sri Lanka



PUNE: India's Shardul Thakur plays a shot during the third T20 cricket match between India and Sri Lanka at the Maharashtra Cricket Association stadium in Pune. — AFP

needed a strong start to stay in the chase but the Indian quicks blew away their top order, reducing them to 26-4 in the sixth over.

The 68-run stand between de Silva and Angelo Mathews (31) was the lone signifi-

cant partnership in the Sri Lankan innings. The series opener in Guwahati was abandoned because of rain and India romped home by seven wickets in the second match in Indore. — Reuters

Big-hitter Finau eyes outside odds at first Hong Kong Open

HONG KONG: President's Cup winner Tony Finau will turn to his nightly journal ahead of the final day of the Hong Kong Open as he eyes an outside victory at his debut appearance at the competition.

The 30-year-old American has been keeping a post-match diary of his game performance and "feelings and things" since he turned pro, and says it is the last thing he does before he goes to sleep. Setting down his thoughts "helps when I'm not playing good and it helps when I am playing well", said Finau, who shot a five-under-par 65 on Saturday — his best round of the tournament, taking him within six shots of leader and course veteran Wade Ormsby.

"It's something I actually tell a lot of juniors. Take notes on how you feel and how you play and I think it will help you move forward." The world number 16 is making his debut at Fanling as the highest-ranked player, and the powerful hitter admits it has taken time to get to grips with the course's short fairways and fast greens.

On Saturday, Finau's putts for birdies on the eighth, ninth and eighteenth came just short, and he will have to persevere and pull something out of the bag to lift himself into contention today. He did just that last month in the President's Cup

when he overturned a four-point deficit against Japan's Hideki Matsuyama for a vital draw that teed Tiger Woods's team up for victory on the fourth day.

And in 2018, he appeared to pop his ankle back into place after dislocating it while celebrating a hole-in-one, returning to play his first round at the Masters a day later. The six-foot-four American, who is of Tongan and Samoan descent, credits calm and perseverance to his "humble" beginnings in Salt Lake City where he practiced by hitting balls against a mattress hung up in a garage to save on club fees.

He later failed to graduate Q-school five times, learning several lessons in perseverance — and filling up more journal space. The struggles paid off and in 2016 he won Puerto Rico Open, and later became the first Polynesian to play in the Ryder Cup, where he provided a rare bright spot as a USA captain's pick in a crushing loss to Europe.

Finau — also a cousin of NBA player Jabari Parker — also has his eyes on playing for his country in the Olympics in Tokyo this year. "I'm back in this thing," he said after his third round at Fanling. "18 holes tomorrow. I'm capable of that on this golf course. Nothing to lose." — AFP

Sports

Nadal to meet Djokovic's Serbia in ATP Cup final

World number two Djokovic leads the head-to-heads 28-26

SYDNEY: Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic will face each other in the final of the inaugural ATP Cup after winning epic three-set matches yesterday to steer Spain and Serbia into the decider. World number one Nadal ground down pumped-up Australian Alex de Minaur to guide the Davis Cup champions through their semi-final while Djokovic battled past Russia's Daniil Medvedev.

Under the format of the innovative team event in Sydney, the top-ranked singles players from each country play each other, ensuring the two legends clash for a 55th time since their first showdown in 2006.

World number two Djokovic leads the head-to-heads 28-26, including beating his arch-rival in the Australian Open final last year. Nadal outlasted De Minaur 4-6, 7-5, 6-1 after unflappable teammate Roberto Bautista Agut tamed Nick Kyrgios 6-1, 6-4. Djokovic had an equally tough time against impressive fifth-ranked Medvedev, coming through a top-draw contest 6-1, 5-7, 6-4 on the back of Dusan Lajovic beating Karen Khachanov 7-5, 7-6 (7/1).

"Alex was playing at a very high level and for me my energy was a little bit lower than usual. But it has been a very emotional evening and a pleasure playing here," said Nadal. "We know it's going to be a super tough final (against Serbia)," he added. "Novak likes a lot to play here, he's had a lot of great results. So let's see. We have a good team too."

De Minaur had a furious start, breaking Nadal in the opening game of the match and then keeping the pressure on, restricting the Spaniard's trademark forehand to take the first set in 46 minutes. Full of energy, his serve was on fire and he was winning the baseline rallies, but Nadal weathered the onslaught and finally won

a break point, converting to take the second set.

De Minaur was deflated and the fight went out of him as the 19-time Grand Slam showed him who was boss, racing through the deciding set. Unassuming world number 10 Bautista Agut was in control and all over the groundstrokes of temperamental Kyrgios, who looked lost as he crashed 6-1 in the first set.

The Australian regained some lustre in the second set. But he was broken in the fifth game, mangling his racquet in frustration, and despite saving two match points with booming aces was outplayed. "My game plan was to put him under pressure to play every point, to make him work. That's what I tried and it went well," said Bautista Agut.

EXCEPTIONAL

Sixteen-time Grand Slam winner Djokovic, who is targeting an eighth Australian Open title this month, had looked on track for a comfortable win against Medvedev after sailing through the opening set and breaking in the first game of the second.

But the dogged Russian, who won their last two encounters, roared back. He broke in the next game and then again for 3-1, with Djokovic smashing his racquet as Medvedev took the set to level the match.

A third set of long, high-quality rallies went with serve until Djokovic got the crucial edge in the fifth game, converting a volley to go 3-2 in front and Medvedev had no answer. "It was an exceptional match. Lots of rallies and very exhausting. Daniil Medvedev is one of the best players in the world and he showed today why," said Djokovic.

"He's difficult to break from the baseline, he's tall and has a good serve. This was the most difficult challenge I



SYDNEY: Rafael Nadal of Spain hits a return against Alex de Minaur of Australia during their men's singles semi-final match at the ATP Cup tennis tournament in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

have had so far this year." Lajovic, who won his first ATP title last year at Umag, took a 2-0 record into his showdown with world number 17 Khachanov and produced a performance that belied his ranking of 34, displaying

composure and a fine array of shots. "It was definitely one of the toughest matches for me in my career, concerning the situation, the tension and the importance of the moment," he said. "But the crowd carried me." — AFP

Serena races into Auckland final against Pegula

AUCKLAND: Serena Williams delivered a masterclass in her semi-final at the WTA Auckland Classic yesterday, needing only 43 minutes to down rising star Amanda Anisimova and set up a showdown against Jessica Pegula. The unsung and unseeded Pegula stunned Caroline Wozniacki in a three-set semi-final 3-6, 6-4, 6-0.

Top-seed Williams, at her imperious best, rapidly eliminated third-seed Anisimova 6-1, 6-1. It highlighted the gulf between the 38-year-old, the women's tennis figurehead for the past two decades, and the next generation of players led by the 18-year-old Anisimova.

The mother of two-year-old Olympia said she had been working hard to juggle tennis and motherhood as she targets a 24th Grand Slam at the Australian Open later in the month. She was all power and precision as she dominated the centre of the court and moved the teenager around, running down Anisimova's drop shots and blunting opportunities for the young player to unleash her telling forehand.

"I was definitely in the zone today. I knew I was playing a really great player and an even better person and I knew I had to come out serious," Williams said. "It feels really good. I've been working hard for a couple of years, my daughter's only two, I tend to be really hard on myself but considering everything, I'm doing pretty good."

Former World number one Wozniacki, who has announced she will retire after the Australian Open, arrived at her penultimate tournament determined to win in Auckland at her seventh attempt to add to her 30 WTA titles.

Instead, it was the 25-year-old Pegula, the world 82nd-ranked player who won her only WTA title at the Washington Open last year, who came out on top. The unseeded Pegula was broken twice when losing the first set before adopting an aggressive approach that fifth-seed Wozniacki had no answer for.

She wore the Dane down in the second set and then won every game in the third. "I knew if I was going to play defensive I was not going to win that battle, she's like the best in the world at that, so I had to step in and take my chances and trust my game," said Pegula, the daughter of NFL Buffalo Bills owner and natural gas magnate Terry Pegula.

"Caroline's had an amazing career and I know she's retiring so I'm glad I got to play her before she retires and I'm happy to get the win and really excited to be in the final." Wozniacki has one chance left to win a title in Auckland when she partners Serena Williams in the doubles final today. — AFP

Xavi on top of Barca wishlist

DOHA: Barcelona have asked former captain Xavi to take over from the under-pressure Ernesto Valverde as head coach, Spanish media reported on Friday. The club's sporting director Eric Abidal has reportedly spoken to the boss of Qatari side Al Sadd about arriving on a two-year-deal, with radio station Cadena Ser claiming the former midfielder could return this season if Valverde is sacked.

Al Sadd's general manager Turki Al-Ali refused to rule out a move back to Barca for Xavi. "The issue of Xavi going to Barcelona is normal

and expected because he will be at his club and it's his first home and he must return there in the future, but as of today, Xavi is the coach of Al Sadd," Al-Ali said in a statement.

"Xavi and his team are focusing on tomorrow's match against Al-Rayyan, and we know that a club with the size and professionalism of Barcelona will take to official channels to speak of such matters," he added.

World Cup winner Xavi came through the Catalans' academy and played 855 senior games for the Camp Nou side. He joined Al Sadd as a player in 2015 before being appointed coach last July.

Valverde's position is reportedly under threat after the Spanish Super Cup semi-final defeat by Atletico Madrid on Thursday. — AFP

James fills void as Lakers handle Mavs

DALLAS: LeBron James had 35 points, 16 rebounds and seven assists to lead the visiting Los Angeles Lakers to their seventh straight win, a 129-114 decision against the Dallas Mavericks on Friday night. Kyle Kuzma started in place of Anthony Davis and scored a season-high 26 points for the Lakers. Davis, the leading scorer (27.1 points per game) and rebounder (9.4 boards per game) for the Lakers, sat out after taking a hard fall against the visiting New York Knicks on Tuesday night and sustaining a contusion to his gluteus maximus. Dallas forward Luka Doncic, who came in third in the NBA in both scoring (29.6 ppg) and assists (9.0 per game), got off to a slow start before finishing with 25 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists. However, he committed a game-high six turnovers. Tim Hardaway Jr. added 22 points for the Mavericks, who have dropped five of seven, and Seth Curry scored 16 off the bench.

PHOENIX SUNS 98 - ORLANDO MAGIC 94

Devin Booker hit a 3-pointer, stole a pass and buried another trey in a 16.9-second flurry in the final minute, allowing Phoenix to overtake visiting Orlando. Booker drilled a 26-footer to get the Suns within one with 52.9 seconds left. Then, he stole a Markelle Fultz pass and buried another from behind the arc, giving Phoenix a 96-94 lead with just 36 seconds to go. Seeking a third straight win, Orlando had two subsequent chances to tie, but Nikola Vucevic had the ball stolen by Ricky Rubio, and after the Suns guard made it a three-point game by sinking one of two free throws, Evan Fournier misfired on a 3-pointer with nine seconds to go.

MILWAUKEE BUCKS 127 - SACRAMENTO KINGS 106

Khris Middleton recorded 27 points and 11 rebounds to help Milwaukee post a victory over host Sacramento. The Bucks (34-6) achieved the top 40-game start in franchise history, one win better than the 1970-71 team led by Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Eric Bledsoe scored 24 points and Donte DiVincenzo added a career-high 18 for the



DALLAS: Delon Wright #55 of the Dallas Mavericks handles the ball during the game against the Los Angeles Lakers at the American Airlines Center in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

Bucks. Giannis Antetokounmpo had 13 points, 10 rebounds and five assists, and Sterling Brown had 11 points and a season-best 12 rebounds for his first career double-double. De'Aaron Fox registered 19 points, 10 assists and four steals, and Harrison Barnes also scored 19 points for the Kings, who lost to the Bucks for the seventh straight time. Buddy Hield tallied 16 points, Nemanja Bjelica added 12 points and 13 rebounds, Trevor Ariza contributed 11 points and nine rebounds and Harry Giles III had 10 points.

LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS 109 - GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS 100

Kawhi Leonard scored 21 of his 36 points in the second half, leading Los Angeles to a come-from-behind victory over visiting Golden State. The Clippers overcame a 10-point, fourth-quarter deficit despite playing without All-Star Paul George, who sat out after aggravating a left hamstring strain in practice earlier this week. George, who initially sustained the injury against the Detroit Pistons on Jan. 2, is also expected to miss Los Angeles' road game against the Denver Nuggets today. Leonard, who converted 14 of 25 shots from the floor, also had nine rebounds, five assists and three steals. Lou Williams scored 21 points for the Clippers. Omari Spellman and Glenn Robinson III scored 17 apiece for the Warriors, who lost for the seventh consecutive game. Alec Burks added 16 points and a team-high eight rebounds.

MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 134 - SAN ANTONIO SPURS 121

Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 24 points and Dillon Brooks and Ja Morant added 22 each, as surging Memphis played its best basketball in the fourth quarter and defeated visiting San Antonio. Jonas Valanciunas totaled 21 points, Morant also had 14 assists, and De'Anthony Melton and Brandon Clarke scored 13 and 10 points, respectively, for Memphis. The Grizzlies play their next four games at home and eight of their next 11 games are against teams with losing records. DeMar DeRozan scored a season-high 36 points for the Spurs while LaMarcus Aldridge and Bryn Forbes had 21 points each and Rudy Gay added 13 points for San Antonio.

BROOKLYN NETS 117 - MIAMI HEAT 113

Caris LeVert hit two key 3-pointers in the final minutes and Spencer Dinwiddie posted 26 points and a game-high 14 assists as host Brooklyn snapped a seven-game losing streak by rallying to defeat Miami. Miami, which got a game-high 33 points and nine rebounds from Jimmy Butler, led 109-100 with 5:09 left in the fourth quarter before Brooklyn rallied. Heat center Bam Adebayo showed his versatility with 22 points, six rebounds and seven assists. LeVert had missed seven of his first eight 3-pointers before connecting late. This was just his third game back since missing eight weeks due to a thumb injury. His second 3-pointer — with 69 seconds left — gave Brooklyn a 112-111 lead. The Nets did not trail after that. — Reuters

Blades up fifth as McBurnie sinks Hammers

SHEFFIELD: Scotland's Oliver McBurnie fired Sheffield United into fifth place in the Premier League as a calamitous mistake and more VAR drama condemned West Ham to a 1-0 defeat at Bramall Lane on Friday.

McBurnie clinched the points in the second half when the striker took advantage of a blunder from Hammers keeper David Martin, whose errant pass was missed by the equally culpable Fabian Balbuena.

West Ham's Robert Snodgrass thought he had equalised in stoppage-time, but the strike was controversially ruled out on review after VAR spotted a handball by teammate Declan Rice before he provided the assist.

The Blades had gone three league games without a win after successive defeats at Liverpool and Manchester City. But Chris Wilder's side, enjoying a remarkably successful first season back in the top-flight, are now just four points behind Chelsea in fourth.

Wilder tipped David Moyes to ensure West Ham avoid relegation following his arrival to replace the sacked Manuel Pellegrini. But this was a frustrating evening for Moyes, who was beaten for the first time after winning the opening two matches of his second spell with the club.

Moyes has a big task on his hands with West Ham sitting 16th, just two points above the relegation zone. Earlier on Friday, Wilder signed a contract extension that will keep him at his boyhood club until 2024 and he was given a rapturous reception by Blades fans before kick-off.

The upbeat atmosphere nearly got even more boisterous when Oliver Norwood swung in the corner and John Egan headed just over. West Ham suffered a blow when goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski appeared to injure his hip while taking a goal-kick

in the 14th minute.

Fabianski, who looked distraught as he hobbled off, had only just returned from a three-month absence with a hip problem. Martin had deputised for some of Fabianski's time on the sidelines and he was called on to step in again, with disastrous results.

Felipe Anderson should have lifted West Ham when the Brazilian seized on Egan's misdirected header and ran clear on goal, but he shot narrowly wide of the far post. West Ham were making their first visit to Bramall Lane since 2007 and many of their fans turned up in Carlos Tevez masks in reference to the Argentine striker's crucial and controversial role in helping their side avoid relegation at the Blades' expense 13 years ago.

Those travelling Hammers supporters are hoping to avoid another relegation dogfight, but they won't have been encouraged by their team's second half display. The Blades nearly took the lead immediately after the interval when John Fleck's shot smacked into Pablo Zabaleta and the loose ball rebounded to the midfielder, who should have done better than drill wide with an open goal at his mercy.

But Wilder's team only had to wait until the 54th minute to open the scoring. Martin tried to play a quick goal-kick short to Balbuena, but the wayward pass escaped the dozing West Ham defender and Fleck pounced, squaring the ball for McBurnie to drill under the former Millwall keeper for his fourth goal of the season.

Martin had wept tears of joy when he kept a clean-sheet on his West Ham debut in their win at Chelsea earlier this season, but there was only pain etched on his face this time. Blades keeper Dean Henderson made a fine save from Manuel Lanzini's free-kick before denying the Italian again with another good stop in a tense finale.

And when Snodgrass beat Henderson at the near-post in the final seconds, West Ham's celebrations were curtailed in agonising fashion as VAR intervened to chalk it off for Rice's handball. — AFP

Sports

Real Madrid face Atletico as imposters gatecrash Spanish Super Cup final in Saudi

JEDDAH: Lionel Messi has predictably been the star attraction but there will be no Clasico in Saudi Arabia this weekend, as Atletico Madrid's defeat of Barcelona set up a clash with rivals Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final today.

Messi was cheered by fans at the King Abdullah Sport City Stadium from the moment he jogged out to warm up, yet Atletico were the ones celebrating at the end of Thursday's semi-final in the competition that has been expanded and controversially shipped to a different continent, to a country with a long-condemned record on human rights.

Atletico scored two late goals to beat Barca 3-2, with a derby final now to come against Real Madrid. When the Spanish Football Federation signed a three-year contract worth 120 million euros (\$133.4 million) to move the tournament to Saudi, a title showdown between Real and Barcelona would very likely have been top of the organisers' wishlist.

The draw kept the clubs apart in the semis and a new four-team format ensured Real and Atletico were able to participate at all, given they would not have qualified for the traditional two-legged showdown between league champions and winners of the Copa del Rey.

Including the two other highest-placed finishers in La Liga all-but ensures entry for Barcelona and Real Madrid every year but, as this competition has shown, there is no guarantee of progress.

"The Super Cup will be decided by its guests," read Catalan sports daily Mundo Deportivo on Friday. "Second in the league against semi-finalist in the cup." An all-Madrid final in Jeddah offers both Atletico and Real the chance to claim a first trophy of the campaign and perhaps a valuable psychological boost too.

Certainly, Barcelona and Valencia will resume in La Liga with their rhythm jolted and confidence knocked.

GAINING MOMENTUM

After seven games unbeaten, Valencia were outplayed in their 3-1 semi-final defeat by Real while Barca's late collapse against Atletico brings doubts around coach Ernesto Valverde rushing back to the surface.

Already on Friday, reports in the Spanish press were linking the club's former midfielder Xavi Hernandez — who has been coaching in Qatar — with taking his job in the summer. "There is always instability when you lose," admitted Valverde.

Just as defeat to a rival creates instability, victory could prove affirming for Real, who look to convert form into a lead in La Liga's title race, and Atletico, who are trying to close a five-point gap.

Atletico have been gaining momentum in the league and their victory over Barcelona will be a major boost ahead of what promises to be a tough second half of the season. They sit third in the league table with trips to Camp Nou and the Santiago Bernabeu to come while in the Champions League they face Europe's most feared team, Liverpool, next month.

Yet even if they were on the back foot for long spells of their 3-2 win on Thursday, Atletico defied their creative problems with three goals and at least two good chances for more. "It is important for the club, we beat the best attacking team in the world," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said. "You saw our bite, our belief, our desire. It's what this club is all about."

Real Madrid, meanwhile, were a class above Valencia, making it 15 games unbeaten even without their top scorer Karim Benzema, who has a hamstring strain, and Gareth Bale, who has a throat infection.



JEDDAH: Real Madrid's players attend a training session on the eve of the Spanish Super Cup final between Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid yesterday, at the King Abdullah Sport City in the Saudi Arabian port city of Jeddah. —AFP

Bale could yet join up with the squad for the final on Sunday — although it remains unlikely — but there is no doubt Real will start as favourites to claim an 11th Spanish Super Cup and deny Atletico their third.

"I'm happy with the whole performance," said

Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane. "But it is a semi-final, we haven't won anything yet." Real Madrid's progress means they will earn around 10 million euros from the tournament, with Atletico making around six. Success today would cap a highly profitable week. —AFP

Newcastle hang on for point at Wolves

WOLVERHAMPTON: Europe-chasing Wolverhampton Wanderers were held to a 1-1 draw at home by Newcastle United in the Premier League yesterday as visiting goalkeeper Martin Dubravka made a string of fine saves to deny the hosts three points.

Newcastle made a superb start and took the lead when Miguel Almiron smashed home after a flowing move in the seventh minute. Wolves did not have to wait long to draw level though as Belgian international Leander Dendoncker was left completely unmarked to steer in Joao Moutinho's corner.

Dubravka made a great close-range save to keep out Raul Jimenez's header as Wolves asserted their authority before halftime and the Slovak continued to impress.

Wolves huffed and puffed trying to find an opening after the break, often without any success, but when they did create chances Dubravka was on hand to save his side.

As Newcastle hung on, Dubravka did superbly to keep out a far post header by Pedro Neto. Seven of the nine Premier League meetings between the teams have now ended in draws. Wolves moved up one place to seventh with 31 points from 22 games while Newcastle have 26 points.

Meanwhile, Southampton stunned Leicester City with a 2-1 win at the King Power Stadium yesterday, as a late goal from Danny Ings and a fortunate strike from midfielder Stuart Armstrong helped the Saints log a precious away win.

The in-form Ings, who had missed a slew of chances earlier in the match, struck the winner — his 14th league goal of the season — in the 81st minute after collecting a through pass from substitute Che Adams.

The hosts thought that they had levelled the tie at 2-2 in the 90th minute when Jonny Evans nodded in a free kick from James Maddison, but the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) judged the defender to be in an offside position.

Leicester had earlier gone ahead in the 14th minute through midfielder Dennis Praet's first goal for the club, as he tapped the ball in after Jamie



LEICESTER: Southampton's English goalkeeper Alex McCarthy (L) saves a shot from Leicester City's Nigerian striker Kelechi Iheanacho (2nd R) during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Southampton at King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England yesterday. —AFP

Vardy ran on to a lobbed pass and fired a cross into the penalty area.

Southampton levelled five minutes later as Armstrong's curling left-footed shot went in after a deflection off Maddison. Southampton were given a second-half penalty when Caglar Soyuncu brought down Shane Long in the box, but VAR deemed that he was marginally offside in the build-up and also rescinded the yellow card issued to the Leicester defender.

Earlier, Everton striker Richarlison curled a superb first-half shot past Brighton & Hove Albion keeper Mat Ryan to earn a 1-0 win in their Premier League clash at Goodison Park yesterday.

Ryan promised to donate 500 Australian dollars (\$345.05) to the bushfire relief effort in his native country for every save made in the Premier League this weekend and his defenders were also in charitable

mood as they conceded a slew of chances. Everton's Theo Walcott had two penalty appeals turned down in the opening 20 minutes before Richarlison broke the deadlock seven minutes before halftime, making a quick stop and a tight turn in the box before curling in his effort at the far post.

Leandro Trossard hit the woodwork for Brighton early in the second half while Dominic Calvert-Lewin thought he had added a second for Everton but the video assistant referee (VAR) ruled he handled the ball when scoring and the goal was disallowed.

Brighton brought on experienced striker Glenn Murray but despite some decent chances for the 36-year-old, the visitors could not find the net and Everton hung on for the win.

The Merseysiders are 11th with 28 points from 22 games, while Brighton stand 14th with 24, four above the drop zone. —Reuters

Mourinho expects long-term rebuild for Tottenham

LONDON: Jose Mourinho expects to oversee a long-term rebuild with Tottenham because his big-spending days are over. Mourinho took charge at Tottenham in November aware he won't have the spending power he had during his spells with Chelsea, Real Madrid and Manchester United.

Tottenham have been cautious in the transfer market since the development of their expensively rebuilt stadium. That has left Mourinho to inherit a squad lacking depth and even though Harry Kane and Moussa Sissoko have been ruled out until April, the Tottenham manager says they are not going to be "kings of the transfer market".

On the difference between his relatively frugal Tottenham situation compared to the riches he enjoyed at Roman Abramovich's Chelsea, Mourinho said: "Come on! But that was quite simple in the sense of, 'Which one is a central defender that I want? That one, thank you very much'."

"But again we are a different club, we have to do it in a different way. "Balanced transfer windows, you need more time and this is the profile so for me it's about time and time to work, so more transfer windows because we are not going ever to be the transfer window king."

While Mourinho doesn't expect to spend big, that doesn't make the challenge of keeping Tottenham in the top four and winning major tro-



MIDDLESBROUGH: File photo shows Tottenham Hotspur's Portuguese head coach Jose Mourinho (C) shares a joke with Middlesbrough's English manager Jonathan Woodgate (R) on the touchline during the English FA cup. —AFP

phies any less exciting. "Of course, it's a different challenge. I think you should look to it also in a different way," he said.

"For me, it's very enjoyable. Again, I came to the club so happy to come. "One of the reasons I was so happy to come was because everything was crystal clear. "Nothing was promised to me that in this moment, I say, 'Oh, it was not truth, I am very disappointed, we didn't know'. "Everything was honest and clear and I'm giving to the club what I promised

so I don't also mislead, and the only thing that I promised is what I'm giving."

Krzysztof Piatek is one player who could reportedly fit the bill to replace Kane, but Mourinho did not want to get drawn on the potential for a bid for the AC Milan forward.

"Imagine if I speak about Piatek, is he happy that I speak about him?" Mourinho said. "Is AC Milan happy that I speak about him? I don't speak about players from other clubs, I'm sorry." —AFP

Ibrahimovic off the mark as AC Milan get back winning

MILAN: Zlatan Ibrahimovic marked the first start of his return to AC Milan by scoring in a 2-0 league win over Cagliari yesterday. The 38-year-old Swede had come on as a substitute in AC Milan's goalless draw against Sampdoria last weekend, days after his return to Italy.

Ibrahimovic met a cross Theo Hernandez after 64 minutes in Sardinia with a low-first time shot into the far corner. It was his first Milan goal since leaving the club for Paris Saint-Germain eight years ago.

Portuguese forward Leao, 20, had struck the opener just after the break as Milan got their first win in just over a month. AC Milan move up to eighth in the Serie A table, 10 points off the Champions League berths.

It was a disappointing performance for Cagliari as the Sardinians unveiled the new jersey to mark the 100th anniversary of the club this year. Cagliari remain sixth after their fourth consecutive defeat.

Ibrahimovic started up front alongside Leao, who had described the towering Swede "as a big brother" during the week. Cagliari goalkeeper Robin Olsen denied Ibrahimovic's stopped header after half an hour with Milan counterpart Gianluigi Donnarumma avoided an embarrassing goalkeeping blunder before the break.

With the Italy international off his line, Cagliari's Uruguayan midfielder Nahitan Nandez hit a lob but Donnarumma raced back to clear. After the break Leao latched on to a Samuel Castillejo free kick with his shot taking a deflection over Olsen.

Ibrahimovic sealed victory for his first goal in the Milan jersey since May 2012, and 57th for the club. He headed in a second past Olsen with eight minutes to go but the goal was disallowed as offside.

Serie A leaders Inter Milan host Atalanta later looking to keep ahead of champions Juventus who travel to Roma today. Lazio, among the title challengers, three points behind the leaders in third, host struggling Napoli looking to extend their winning league run to ten games. —AFP

Live Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Bournemouth FC v Watford	17:00	beIN Sports
Aston Villa v Manchester City	19:30	beIN Sports
SPANISH SUPER CUP		
Real Madrid CF v Atletico de Madrid	21:00	beIN Sports
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Udinese Calcio v US Sassuolo Calcio	14:30	beIN Sports
ACF Fiorentina v spal	17:00	beIN Sports
Torino FC v Bologna FC	17:00	beIN Sports
UC Sampdoria v Brescia	17:00	beIN Sports
Hellas Verona FC v Genoa CFC	20:00	beIN Sports
AS Roma v Juventus FC	22:45	beIN Sports HD 4
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Saint Etienne v FC Nantes	17:00	beIN Sports
Dijon v LOSC Lille	19:00	beIN Sports
Paris Saint-Germain v AS Monaco FC	23:00	beIN Sports HD 6

25 IOC chief Bach wants 'water-proof' CAS decision on Russian doping



26 Nadal to meet Djokovic's Serbia in ATP Cup final



27 Newcastle hang on for point at Wolves



MANCHESTER: Norwich City's Scottish defender Grant Hanley (R) challenges Manchester United's English defender Brandon Williams (L) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Norwich City at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, yesterday. —AFP

Man United, Chelsea cruise

Hudson-Odoi gets first Premier League goal

MANCHESTER: Manchester United kept alive their hopes of finishing in the Premier League's top four, with two goals from Marcus Rashford and one each from Anthony Martial and Mason Greenwood giving them a 4-0 home win over Norwich City yesterday.

The result left United fifth in the standings on 34 points from 22 games, five behind fourth-placed Chelsea, while Norwich stayed rooted to the bottom with 14 points. Midfielder Juan Mata enjoyed a rare league start for United and made the most of it as he contributed with two assists, the first when Rashford met the Spaniard's inswinging cross at the far post and side-footed it home in the 27th minute.

Rashford made it 2-0 with a 52nd-minute penalty as he drove his spot-kick low past goalkeeper Tim Krul, who had needlessly hauled down United's left back Brandon Williams with a mistimed tackle.

The lively Mata was at it again two minutes later when he delivered an inch-perfect cross from the right for Martial to head home emphatically into the bottom

corner from close range.

Second-half substitute Greenwood put the icing on the cake for the home side with a crisp low shot from 18 metres shortly after he came on for Andreas Pereira.

Earlier, Chelsea showed the killer instinct Frank Lampard has demanded as Callum Hudson-Odoi scored his first Premier League goal and Tammy Abraham was back on target in yesterday's 3-0 win against Burnley.

Lampard's side have taken more points on their travels than they have in west London this season after a series of frustrating performances at Stamford Bridge. The Blues boss has questioned whether his young Chelsea team have the "balls" to cope with the stress of breaking down defensive opponents after surprise home defeats against West Ham, Bournemouth and Southampton this season.

But Chelsea proved they have the nous required to turn possession into tangible rewards at the Bridge as Jorginho's penalty opened the scoring in the first half

against a Burnley side set up to frustrate.

Abraham's 15th Chelsea goal of his breakthrough season doubled the lead and Hudson-Odoi finished off Burnley soon after half-time. Hudson Odoi's maiden top-flight effort was a welcome boost for the teenager, who has admitted struggling to recapture last season's impressive form due to fears he will suffer a recurrence of April's Achilles injury.

After losing five of their past nine league games, a spell that did include wins at Tottenham and Arsenal, Chelsea look back on track. They consolidated fourth place and sit five points ahead of fifth placed Manchester United in the race to qualify for the Champions League.

There was also just a second clean-sheet in 10 league matches to give Lampard further encouragement, albeit against a Burnley side who have lost seven of their last nine league games. Lampard had made three changes, with Ross Barkley in for France midfielder N'Golo Kante, who was sidelined with a hamstring

injury suffered in training on Friday.

Often lacking inspiration at home, Chelsea started with a sustained spell of pressure that kept Burnley camped in their own half. Willian's long-range effort deflected wide off Ben Mee before Reece James just cleared the bar with a powerful drive.

Burnley thought they had snatched the lead against the run of play when Mee headed towards Jeff Hendrick and he nodded home at the far post. But the flag went up and a VAR review showed Mee had strayed offside by the narrowest of margins. It was the turning point as Chelsea took the lead in the 27th minute. James spread the ball wide to Willian and he accelerated past Matt Lowton with real purpose, provoking the Burnley defender into a rash sliding tackle that sent the Brazilian crashing to the turf.

Referee Kevin Friend pointed to the spot and Italy midfielder Jorginho stepped up to send Nick Pope the wrong way for his sixth club goal of the season. —Agencies

Arsenal pegged back by Palace after Aubameyang red card

LONDON: Arsenal captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang opened the scoring at Crystal Palace yesterday but was later sent off as the hosts fought back to draw 1-1 at Selhurst Park. New Gunners boss Mikel Arteta was on course for a third straight win when his skip-

per made the breakthrough in the first half, but a deflected effort by Jordan Ayew cancelled it out early in the second period.

When Aubameyang received a red card with 23 minutes left, the experienced Roy Hodgson would have fancied his chances of gaining three points against the youngest manager in the league and but had to settle for a share of the spoils.

Arsenal's difficulties this season were highlighted by the fact this was the first time Palace were facing the Gunners after Christmas in a top-flight match with the Eagles higher in the table. Hodgson was boosted by the return of Wilfried Zaha after he missed the defeat to Derby with a knock but new loan signing Cenk Tosun was only

named on the bench.

Captain Aubameyang was recalled by Arteta after sitting out the FA Cup win over Leeds and opened the scoring at Selhurst Park in the 12th minute. Mesut Ozil's licence to roam had already caused the hosts problems and he moved inside to combine with Alexandre Lacazette, who played in his fellow forward to curl into the bottom corner for his 16th goal of the season.

It was a breathtaking Arsenal move, which started with a brave through ball between the lines by David Luiz, and Palace struggled to gain possession during the opening 30 minutes. Zaha cut a frustrated figure and this was highlighted when he shoved Nicolas Pepe into Lucas Torreira, with the visiting pair

needing treatment.

The Eagles slowly settled into the London derby and Cheikhou Kouyate had their first effort of note shortly before half-time, which Bernd Leno unconvincingly parried. Arteta introduced Matteo Guendouzi at half-time, with Torreira not returning but Palace continued to win free kicks in dangerous positions after the break.

Eventually they made one count, when Jairo Riedewald found Max Meyer in space down the right. His cross was poor, but Kouyate was first to it and set up Ayew, who saw his strike take a big deflection off Luiz and loop over Leno in the 54th minute.

Arsenal's problems deepened when Aubameyang caught Meyer high on the ankle

with a poor challenge by the touchline. Referee Paul Tierney showed a yellow card but VAR had a look and after a two-and-a-half minute delay, the caution was upgraded to a sending off.

Aubameyang was distraught as he left the pitch in the 67th minute and Meyer had to follow him down the tunnel after failing to recover from the tackle. That allowed Hodgson to introduce Tosun for his debut, while Arteta withdrew Ozil for Brazilian forward Gabriel Martinelli.

James Tomkins almost produced a winner 12 minutes from time, but his header was cleared off the line by Sokratis Papastathopoulos and Arsenal then almost stole it. —AFP