

5 Filipinos in Kuwait want full domestic helper ban



7 Japan's Abe begins Gulf tour in Saudi Arabia amid tensions



9 Indian police battle anti-Modi protesters over disputed law



25 Dakar Rally in mourning after rider Goncalves dies in crash



Qatar, Iran agree de-escalation 'only solution' to resolve crisis

Trump warns Iran not to kill protesters • UK envoy summoned after brief detention



TEHRAN: Qatar and Iran agree that de-escalation is the "only solution" to regional tensions, Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said yesterday after meeting Iran's President Hassan Rouhani in Tehran. "This visit comes at a critical time in the region, and we agreed with the brothers and with His Excellency the president that the only solution to these crises is de-escalation from everyone and dialogue," he told a news conference. "Dialogue is the only solution" to resolve the crises, he said at a time of heightened US-Iranian tensions following the US killing of an Iranian commander and retaliatory strikes.

largest gas field. Sheikh Tamim arrived in the Iranian capital around midday, semi-official news agency ISNA said. Qatar's Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani reportedly called for a peaceful solution that would lead to de-escalation during a visit to Tehran in the immediate aftermath of the US strike on Jan 3.



TEHRAN: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (left) welcomes Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani upon his arrival yesterday. — AFP

MUSCAT: HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah offers condolences to Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tariq at Al-Alam Palace yesterday on the passing away of Sultan Qaboos. — AFP (See Page 2)

Qatar is close to the US and hosts Washington's largest military base in the region, but it also enjoys strong ties with Tehran, with which it shares the world's

Sheikh Tamim left Doha for Muscat yesterday morning "to offer condolences on the death of Sultan Qaboos", the state-run Qatar News Agency reported. His visit - believed to be his first official visit to the Islamic republic - follows the US killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in a US drone strike near Baghdad's airport, and Iran's admission it accidentally shot down an airliner near Tehran on Wednesday.

Iran retaliated against the US for Soleimani's death by firing missiles at American troops in Iraq, which US President Donald Trump said caused no casualties. Qatar's relationship with

Iran, seen as the major regional rival to Saudi Arabia, is one of the major factors underpinning a crisis between Qatar and its former allies. Continued on Page 24

Fragile truce agreed in Libya after nine months of fighting

TRIPOLI: Both sides in Libya's conflict agreed to a ceasefire from yesterday to end nine months of fighting, following weeks of international diplomacy and calls for a truce by power-brokers Russia and Turkey. The oil-rich North African country has been wracked by bloody turmoil since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising killed long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi, with multiple foreign powers now involved.



ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) meets the head of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) Fayeze Al-Sarraj yesterday. — AFP

The UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli had been under attack since last April from forces loyal to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar, which on Jan 6 captured the strategic coastal city of Sirte. Late on Saturday, Haftar's forces announced a ceasefire starting at midnight in line with a joint call by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. GNA head Fayeze Al-Sarraj, who met Erdogan in Istanbul yesterday, confirmed the ceasefire had taken effect.

The UN mission in Libya welcomed the announcements and called on all parties "to respect the ceasefire" and support efforts to launch an inter-Libyan dialogue. Likewise, the Arab League urged Libya's factions to "commit to stop the fighting, work on alleviating all forms of escalations and engage in good faith aimed at reaching permanent arrangements for a ceasefire".

Neighboring Algeria, at the center of a flurry of diplomatic activity on Libya, called for a "swift return to the process of national dialogue to reach a political solution". Putin held talks on the telephone yesterday with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and French President Emmanuel Macron, who both voiced support for a planned international conference on Libya to be held in Berlin, the Kremlin said. Since the start of the offensive against Tripoli, more than 280 civilians and about 2,000 fighters have been killed and 146,000 Libyans displaced, according to the United Nations.

Continued on Page 24

Philippine volcano halts Manila flights, forces evacuations

MANILA: Philippine authorities warned yesterday an "explosive eruption" of a volcano south of Manila could be imminent, hours after it sent a massive column of ash skyward that forced officials to halt flights at the capital's main airport until further notice. Thousands of people living near Taal volcano, a popular tourist attraction set in the center of a picturesque lake, were evacuated from their homes as it spewed ash, rumbled with earthquakes and lightning exploded above its crest.



TAGAYTAY, Philippines: People take photos of a phreatic explosion from the Taal volcano as seen from this town in Cavite province yesterday. — AFP

A "hazardous explosive eruption is possible within hours to days", the nation's seismological agency warned, as locals weighed whether or not to flee the area. "I'm afraid that it might erupt... but I'll leave it to fate. I just have to pray," Eduardo Carino, who works in a hotel near the volcano, told AFP. After the ash cloud reached 15,000 m into the atmosphere, aviation officials ordered a suspension of flights to and from the capital's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

Authorities initially halted operations at NAIA for a few hours, but later yesterday announced that flights would be suspended "until further notice". Transport secretary Arthur Tugade had instructed aviation officials to "do whatever is necessary in the interest of public safety", said a joint statement from air and transport authorities. They said they planned to reassess the situation today morning. Government seismologists recorded magma moving towards the crater of Taal, one of the country's most active volcanoes located 65 km south of Manila. Taal's last eruption was in 1977, Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology chief Renato Solidum told AFP.

Continued on Page 24

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Amir returns to Kuwait after offering condolences for late Omani Sultan

Sheikh Sabah led official delegation in offering condolences to Sultan Haitham



MUSCAT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Sultan Haitham bin Tareq Al-Said to offer condolences over the death of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah upon his return to Kuwait.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah offers condolences to Sultan Haitham bin Tareq Al-Said.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah offers condolences to Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Said.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen off upon his departure from Oman.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem upon his return to Kuwait.

KUWAIT/MUSCAT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and a delegation accompanying him returned to Kuwait yesterday from the Sultanate of Oman after he offered his condolences over the death of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said. His Highness the Amir was received at the airport by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and senior state officials.

His Highness was accompanied by an official delegation that included Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Sheikh Faisal Al-Saud Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Sheikh Dr Ali Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan

Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan and Director of the Office of His Highness the Amir Ahmad Fahad Al-Fahad, Head of Amiri Protocols Sheikh Khaled Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah and Head of Information and Cultural Affairs at the Amiri Diwan Yousef Hamad Al-Roumi. His Highness the Amir and his delegation had offered condolences at Al-Alam Palace yesterday to Sultan Haitham bin Taimur Al-Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Said and Shehab bin Tareq Al-Said on the sad demise of Sultan Qaboos Bin Said. Afterwards, His Highness the Amir and his delegation were seen off at the airport by Oman's Minister of Interior Humoud Bin Faisal Al-Busaidi, and Kuwait's Ambassador to Oman Sulaiman Abdullah Al-Harbi. — KUNA



Crown Prince receives Amir at airport



Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah offers condolences to Sultan Haitham bin Tareq Al-Said.



Sheikh Faisal Al-Saud Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah offers condolences.



Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah offers condolences.



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah offers condolences.



His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah offers condolences.



Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah offers condolences.



Sheikh Dr Ali Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah offers condolences.



Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah offers condolences.

Local

Kuwaiti team conducts surgeries on Syrian refugees in Hatay

Featuring female doctors for the first time



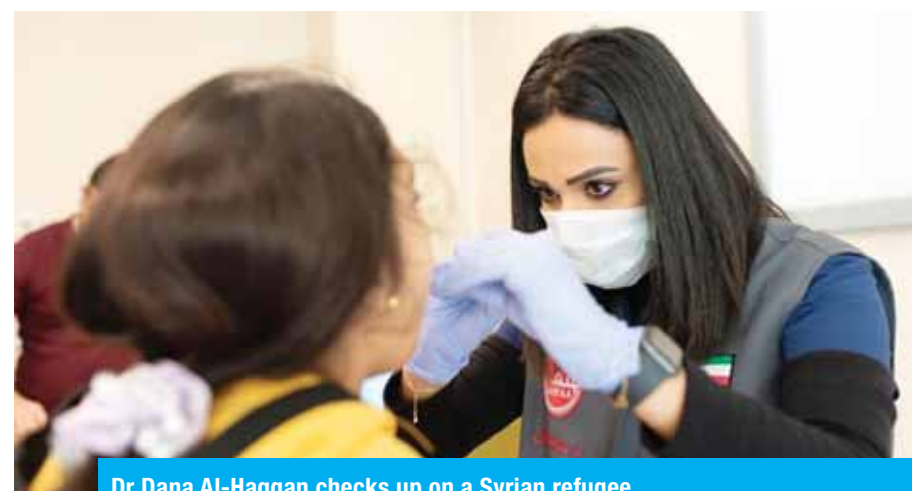
ANKARA: Al-Shifaa medical team in a group photo. — KUNA photos

ANKARA: Kuwait's Al-Shifaa medical team conducted checkups and surgeries on Syrian refugees in Sevgi hospital in Reyhanli town in Hatay city, south Turkey, yesterday. The doctors conducted surgeries to treat orthopedic injuries, paralysis, burns, urology diseases and tumors, team member Dr Ali Al-Alanda said. He noted that female doctors took part in the team's operations for the first time, including Dr Muneera Al-Asfour and Dr Dana Al-Haqqan. The team also included psychiatrist at Amiri Hospital Dr

Abdullah Al-Azeeri for the first time, who provided mental health assistance for refugees who tried to commit suicide, due to severe conditions in their war-torn country, Alanda said.

This year's medical campaign is titled "don't turn your back to them," said Alanda, adding that the team organized a donation campaign that collected \$300,000 to afford the treatment and buy medicine for the refugees. He noted that they are also working on extending the donation period to col-

lect another \$150,000. The campaign also includes preparing medical units in Turkey to send them to Syria for treating about 3,000 patients every month, he said. This is the team's 18th trip to Syria neighboring countries and the sixth to Turkey. The trips were made in November 2015, two in February and December 2017, one in February 2018 and the last was in May 2019. Hatay is located at the borders with Syria and hosts 457,000 Syrian refugees, with 130,000 of them living in Reyhanli. — KUNA



Dr Dana Al-Haqqan checks up on a Syrian refugee.



Dr Muneera Al-Asfour performs a surgery on a Syrian refugee.



Gold reaches \$1,559 as market observes tensions

KUWAIT: The price of gold surged to \$1,559 per ounce, rising as much as 16 percent in the wake of rising tensions between Iran and the United States. The price of an ounce of gold is fluctuating between \$1,611 to 1,559, according to a report issued by 'Kuwait Sabaek Company,' citing predictions over a dip in gold prices as a result of geopolitical

and economic drivers. The report mentioned the US' continued streak of jobs growth in July, adding 164,000 new jobs as the unemployment rate remained steady at 3.5 percent. Silver hit \$18.1 per ounce, after earlier hitting its highest since early September at \$18.85, while platinum rose to \$2,152 per ounce, it added. — KUNA




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Sultan Qaboos' passing loss for Arabs: Governor

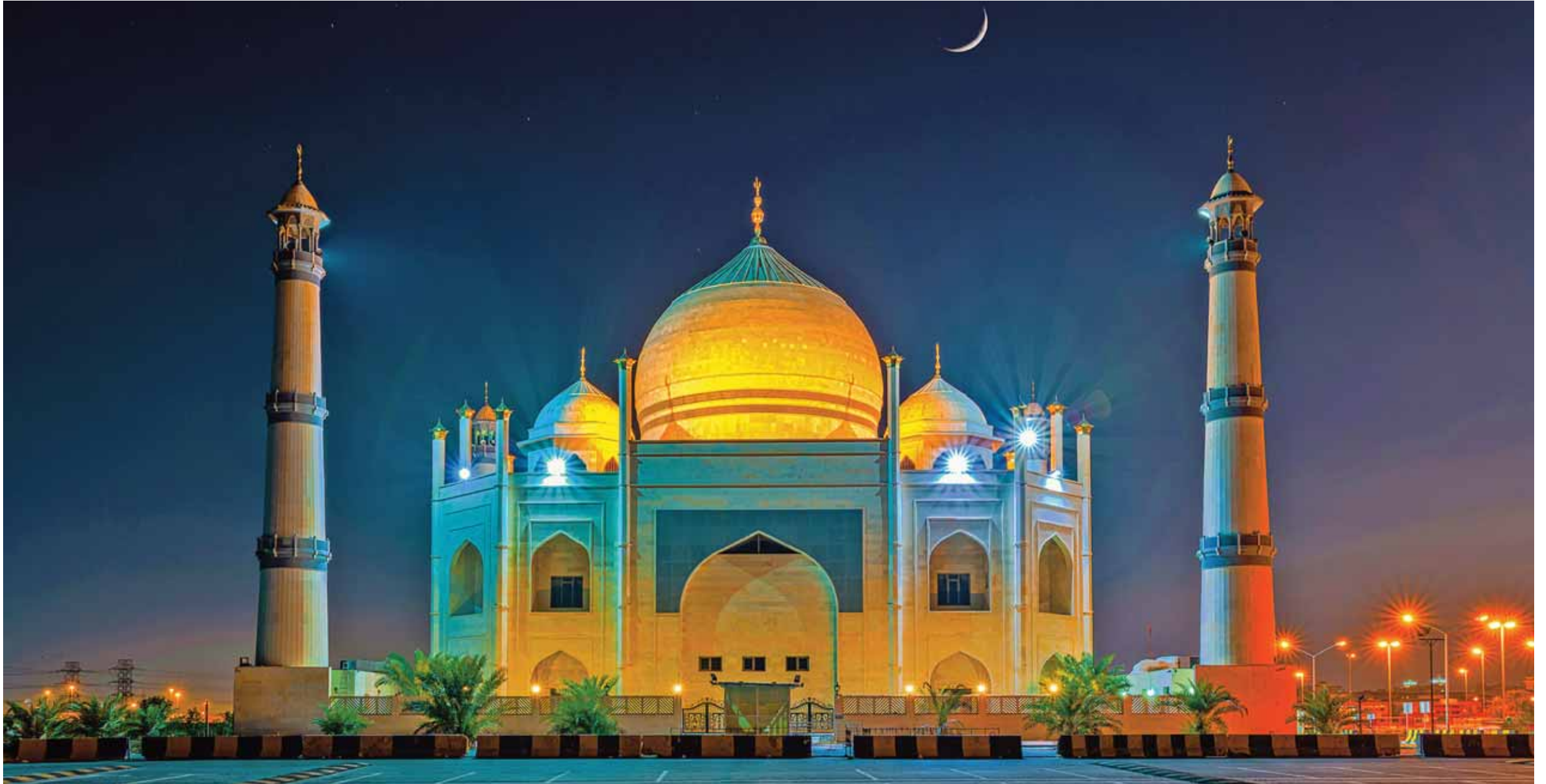
KUWAIT: Kuwait's Al-Asimah (Capital) Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah expressed his sincere condolences over the death of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, stressing that the demise is a loss for the Arab nation. In a press statement on Saturday, Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah said the Arab nation lost a sincere Arab leader who devoted his life for his country and nation. "The late Sultan has a great position in our hearts," the governor said, voicing his full solidarity with the Sultanate of Oman, its government and people. The Arab world lost one of the wise leaders who had outstanding roles in the history of the Arab world and in reviving the Sultanate as well as promoting the friendly ties between Oman, and all Arab and foreign countries, he noted. The governor offered his condolences to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as well as the Omani people. He prayed to Allah Almighty to bless the soul of Sultan Qaboos with mercy in Paradise and bring solace to the Sultanate.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Secretary General Yousef Al-Othaimeen also expressed his condolences over the passing of Sultan Qaboos to the Omani royal family and

the Arab and Islamic worlds. The OIC chief prayed that Allah Almighty may grant them solace and maintain the security and stability of Oman. In a separate statement, he congratulated Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on being named successor, wishing him the best of luck in his new role to sustain Oman's development.

In the meantime, the Arab League announced that its flag would fly at half-mast for three days on the demise of late Sultan Qaboos. In a statement, the Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit expressed sorrow over the demise of the late Sultan, describing him as a "rare ruler." He stressed that the late Sultan has always played positive roles in Arab diplomacy, adding that he received great respect and appreciation on a global level. Meanwhile, Arab Parliament Speaker Meshaal Al-Salami mourned Sultan Qaboos, stressing that the Arab nation has lost a historic leader who had a prominent role in building and reviving the Sultanate of Oman. Salami pointed out that Sultan Qaboos has led a lofty renaissance, which he has established in 50 years since he assumed the reign of power. The Omani Royal Court announced on Saturday the passing away of Sultan Qaboos after a long and illustrious career and life. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Crescent moon hangs over the Fatima Al-Zahra mosque in Abdullah Al-Mubarak. — Photo by Mohammad Subhi (KUNA)

Several activities held as part of 26th Al-Qurain cultural festival

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) is holding the 26th edition of Al-Qurain cultural festival from January 8 - 25, 2020. The festival includes various activities in different fields, which are open for the public free of charge.

Today, people can attend a workshop on 'writing a scrip for a short feature movie' held at 5:00 pm at the Kuwait National Library. Another workshop is held on 'theatrical design' at 6:00 pm at the Shamiya Theatre.

Art exhibition in cooperation with the British Embassy in Kuwait is being held for one month period at the Dixon Cultural Center. Another fine art exhibition for artist Khazal Al-Qafaas is held at the Funoon and Adwani Hall in Abdullah Al-Salaem, and lasts until Thursday.

A symposium titled 'literature in Kuwait, reality and challenges' is held on two period: morning at 10:00 am, and evening at 5:00 pm at the Kuwait Writers Association in Adailiya. Meanwhile, a discussion panel on the 'Kuwait in 400 years' book by Sheikha Intisar Al-Sabah is held from 10:00 am - 11:30 am at the Kuwait National Library.

A porcelain handicraft workshop titled 'the murals of Failaka old houses' is held from 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm at the porcelain house (Bait Ghaith) in Sharq area. A seminar titled 'Khalti Qmasha' discussing the social developing of



Kuwait after the oil discovery is held at the Kuwait National Library from 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm.

A lecture and photo exhibition titled 'Kadhma on the world Islamic heritage list' is held at 7:00 pm at the Kuwait National Library. In the meantime, a lecture in English titled 'the name of Prophet Mohammad in architectural inscriptions' is held at the Yarmouk Cultural Center from 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm.

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KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education inaugurated the 73rd annual boy scouts' camp, featuring 1,600 students from various schools in Kuwait, as well as participating scouts from GCC countries, Egypt, Sudan and Jordan. The camp opened on Saturday and lasts until Thursday. — KUNA

Local

Filipinos in Kuwait want full domestic helper ban

Survey respondents call for long ban similar to Indonesia

By Ben Garcia and Agencies

KUWAIT: Filipino expats living and working in Kuwait want the partial ban on Pinoy domestic helpers to be in force for a longer period, according to a survey by Kuwait Times. "Since I started working here in Kuwait in 2007, I have heard so many stories about them. This is enough! It's too rampant - these are no longer isolated cases, and the government of the Philippines must work on the ban to be implemented for a longer period. Shame on us that we cannot prevent these abuses from happening. They think we are mere objects subject to any form of abuse by anyone who wants to harm us. We are human beings - if they have feelings, we have them too," said an overseas Filipino worker (OFW) in response to the survey via Facebook.

"Be firm once and for all. We want this partial ban on domestic helpers to be implemented a bit longer, just like the ban imposed by Indonesia. If they can, why can't we?" demanded another 40-year-old Filipino working in Kuwait. All names have been withheld to protect respondents who might face a backlash from their employers in Kuwait.

Last Friday, Philippine Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said the government might declare a total ban on the deployment of OFWs to Kuwait in the wake of a "questionable" autopsy report released by the Kuwaiti government on the death late last month of domestic helper Jeanelyn Villavende. Bello deplored the results of the initial autopsy in Kuwait, noting that it highly contradicted the autopsy conducted by the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) at a funeral parlor in Purok Guimbal, Barangay Tinago, the native place of Villavende.

Bello did not disclose the details of the re-autopsy pending the release of the official report, but when pressed by reporters for details, he said they "did wicker things to the victim and oppressed her too much". The autopsy report earlier released by Kuwaiti authorities said the 26-year-old Villavende died of acute heart and respiratory failure as a result of shock and multiple injuries to the vascular system. Villavende was brought dead to a hospital in Kuwait on Dec 28 after reportedly being beaten by her female employer. Her family was informed of her death on Dec 30.

Bello, who last week declared a partial ban on the

total deployment ban on OFWs to Kuwait. "That will not be lifted until we get proper justice (for Villavende)," Bello said.

As to the suspects in the killing, he said the Kuwaiti couple that had employed the victim has been detained, as confirmed by the labor attache of the Philippine Embassy in Kuwait. He said Kuwaiti Ambassador to Manila Musaed Saleh Ahmad Al-Thuwaikh informed him in a meeting last week that the suspects have been charged. But Bello noted that Thuwaikh has failed on his promise to deliver a copy of the charge sheet last Monday.

Abuse of domestic helpers in the Gulf region including Kuwait is all too common. In Feb 2018, the Philippine government also briefly declared a total ban on all Filipino workers bound to Kuwait after the body of Joanna Demafelis, a 29-year-old Filipino maid, was found in the freezer of her employers' house in Hawally. The ban was only lifted after the two countries finally agreed to sign bilateral agreements on domestic help concerns.

A further, albeit temporary diplomatic standoff occurred when Kuwait discovered that Philippine embassy personnel were helping housemaids escape from their sponsors. Then Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait Renato Villa was declared persona non grata and was asked to leave Kuwait. Till now, no new ambassador has been appointed and Charge d'Affaires Noordin Pendsosina Lomondot has not yet received confirmation in the Philippine Senate.

"If I were the decision maker, I want a total ban and make it sure it will be implemented. Hopefully, this government will learn a lesson from the past. I don't want to hear today about the ban and then tomorrow it's

over," said Marissa, who hails from Davao, the native place of President Rodrigo Duterte.

Another Filipino working in Kuwait noted she would like to see a total ban on domestic helpers, but not for high-skilled and unskilled laborers. "Things will never be okay for those working in private homes. If our government tolerates this again, I'm sure a lot of Filipinas will be killed and mistreated once again, so for me, enough is enough," she said.

Other respondents said that in order to fully implement the ban, the Philippine government must create better working conditions for its workers and more jobs for people in the provinces, so they are not lured by high-paying jobs abroad. There are more than 250,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, the Philippine foreign ministry estimates, with 65 percent working as domestic helpers.

The killing of Villavende is the latest in a series of abuses faced by Filipino workers in the Middle East, the main destination for about 3,000 Filipinos who leave the country daily on temporary foreign work permits. The women tend to work as domestic workers while men are mostly employed in construction and other sectors. Around 10 million Filipinos are migrant workers overseas and their remittances account for more than 10 percent of the country's GDP.



Philippine Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III



Philippine labor minister mulls total ban

deployment of OFWs to Kuwait, said he doubted the "one-sentence" autopsy findings released by the Kuwaiti authorities, as the cause of the victim's death was unclear. He said he immediately requested the NBI to conduct a re-autopsy on Villavende after the repatriation of her remains. Once he receives the official report on the NBI's re-autopsy, Bello said he will convene the governing board of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and may recommend a

depending on one country in supplying domestic helpers despite the union's repeated calls to bringing them from more countries," he elaborated.

Responding to a question about current fees, Dakhan said that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry had recently issued a decision fixing the maximum fees at KD 990, which he believes will hinder developing the sector as many exporting countries have been increasing the recruitment rates of well-trained helpers.

Private hospitals

Kuwait Municipality rejected the Ministry of Health's (MoH) request to allocate over 15 sites to build private hospitals, said informed sources, noting that MoH requested holding a meeting with Municipality Minister Waleed Al-Jassem and head of the Municipal Council Osama Al-Otaibi to discuss the reasons for the rejection. "Many investors have applied to build private hospitals and have been officially licensed by MoH to help develop healthcare services on the one hand and ease the burden on public hospitals on the other," the sources explained.

Further, the sources said the matter might be referred to the Cabinet unless the municipality provides the needed sites within three months. Notably, MoH had earlier asked the municipality to list the plots allocated for building private hospitals and those allocated for MoH so that it could distribute them to private hospitals.

727,000 registered domestic helpers

KUWAIT: The total number of registered domestic helpers in Kuwait is estimated at 727,000, according to recent statistics released by the Public Authority for Manpower, based on Interior Ministry figures. A department at the authority which handles the recruitment of domestic helpers said meanwhile that it turned down requests to issue licenses for 209 new domestic help offices

because they failed to comply with rules and conditions. There are 473 registered officers in Kuwait according to statistics, of which only 326 have the right to bring in domestic helpers. The department issued 63 new licenses from April 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019, while these offices brought in 1,556 domestic helpers during that time period. — Al-Jarida

Kuwait recruitment agencies suffering after Philippines ban

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Kuwaiti Domestic Helper Agencies Union Khaled Al-Dakhan said 85 percent of agencies have no applications because they mainly rely on recruiting domestic helpers from the Philippines, which is currently suspended in the aftermath of the killing of a Filipina maid by her sponsor. "The agencies are currently in a crisis that may lead to closing most of them if the suspension continues for over two months," he warned.

Dakhan added that most agencies are completely empty except for a few with Sri Lankan helpers aged over 40, which is dissatisfactory to some citizens, who prefer younger maids. "The reason behind the aged Sri Lankan helpers is that most neighboring countries pay higher commissions to domestic helper agencies in Sri Lanka, and thus they send them all the younger ones," he underlined.

Dakhan urged the foreign ministry to immediately act and resolve the problem with relevant authorities in the Philippines. "This crisis is the result of mainly

Suicide suspected in Farwaniya man's death

By Meshal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: A man was found dead in the stairwell of a Farwaniya building with marks of a rope around his neck, said security sources, noting that on receiving the report, an ambulance was immediately dispatched to the scene, but the man was already dead upon their arrival. Initial investigations showed that the man was an Indian national who might have committed suicide. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Diabetes unit

Endocrinologist and diabetes consultant at Sabah Hospital Dr Adel Redha said there was a remarkable increase in patients received by the unit in 2019. "We received over 27,000 patients and provided medical consultation to patients in 17 other hospitals and medical centers within Sabah medical zone," he added. On another concern, Dr Redha warned of using thyroid hormones to lose weight, which had increased the number of arrhythmia cases. "This hormone is only prescribed to patients with hypothyroidism or lack of normal hormone production," Redha stressed, noting that using the hormone without medical supervision leads to dangerous complications such as psychological disorders, trembling hands, arrhythmia, eye deformations and menstrual disorders for women.

Interior Ministry concludes sign language course

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Under the patronage and attendance of Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Salem Al-Nahham, the conclusion of a sign language course was held at the ministry's specialized training center in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. Thirty Interior Ministry employees participated in the course which took place from December 12, 2019 to January 8, 2020. Lt Gen

Nahham delivered a speech in which he conveyed greetings from Deputy Premier, Interior Minister, State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. He then pointed out the importance of organizing specialized courses, and urged graduates to apply what they learned in their daily activities. Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic Affairs and Operations Major General Jamal Al-Sayegh along with other ministry officials attended the event.





Morrison proposes high-powered inquiry into bushfires response

Malta gets new premier after outrage over blogger's murder

Page 8

Page 9



MUSCAT: A handout picture released by the Omani News Agency shows Oman's newly sworn-in Sultan Haitham bin Tariq receiving Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa in the capital Muscat yesterday. Tariq received world leaders and officials who presented their condolences after the death of Sultan Qaboos of Oman, on January 10, at the age of 79. —AFP Photos

World leaders in Oman to mourn Sultan's death

Ceremony at Alam Palace draws figures from across political divides in Mideast

MUSCAT: Britain's Prince Charles and Prime Minister Boris Johnson joined regional leaders in Oman yesterday to offer their condolences to the royal family after the death of long-reigning Sultan Qaboos. A ceremony at Muscat's Alam Palace drew figures from across political divides in the Middle East, including Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani.

Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was among those who met the new sultan, along with Tunisian President Kais Saied, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi. Former French leader Nicolas Sarkozy was also in attendance at the ceremony, which took place a day after the new royal ruler Haitham bin Tariq was selected and sworn in. Haitham is a cousin of Qaboos, who never married and died Friday at the age

of 79 without an heir apparent. It was Sultan Qaboos' policy of neutrality and non-interference that elevated Oman's standing as a "Switzerland of the Middle East" and won it respect in the region and beyond. It maintains healthy relations with the United States as well as with regional powers Iran and Saudi Arabia, in what many diplomatic observers see as a model of balance.

Sultan Qaboos, who ruled for half a century, came to power in 1970 when he overthrew his father in a coup with British support. As a young man, he attended Britain's elite Sandhurst Royal Military Academy, after which he joined a British infantry battalion in Germany.

British premier Johnson is to meet with the new sultan and senior Omani officials during his visit, his office said in a statement. "The UK and Oman have a broad and long-standing bilateral relationship that

goes back over 200 years," it said. "Our countries have deep economic ties and shared defence and security interests."

As ruler, Qaboos modernized his country but also forged a broader role as a go-between in regional and international crises. Under his reign, Oman refrained from taking sides in the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar as well as a military intervention in Yemen led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The sultan's death comes amid increased tensions between Tehran and Washington, following the US killing of a top Iranian commander in Iraq that raised fears the region was sliding into war.

The late sultan's standing has been recognized with warm tributes from across the world, including from US President Donald Trump who said Qaboos was a "true partner and friend to the United States".

Oman's new sultan, Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, promised after

assuming power on Saturday to uphold the foreign policy of his Western-backed predecessor under which Muscat balanced ties between larger neighbors Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as the United States.

"His challenge going forward will be to quickly develop his personal relationships with foreign partners and make clear his likely stance to stay-the-course with Oman's foreign policy," said Elana DeLozier, a research fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy think tank.

Qaboos managed to maintain Oman's neutrality, not taking sides in the Gulf dispute with Qatar, and helped to mediate secret US-Iran talks in 2013 that led to an international nuclear pact two years later which Washington then quit in 2018. Haitham assumes power at a time of heightened tensions between Iran and the United States that could destabilize a region vital to global oil supplies —Agencies



MUSCAT: Tunisian President Kais Saied (left) meeting with Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.



MUSCAT: Sultan Haitham bin Tariq receiving Britain's Prince Charles



Sultan Haitham bin Tariq (right) receiving Britain's Chief of the Defence Staff General Nicholas Carter.



MUSCAT: Sultan Haitham bin Tariq (right) receiving former French president Nicolas Sarkozy.

International

Top Iran Guard briefs parliament over downed jet after protest

Newspapers call for resignations and sackings over handling of disaster

TEHRAN: Iran's top Guards commander briefed parliament yesterday, a day after the armed forces said a Ukrainian airliner was shot down in error in an admission that sparked an angry demonstration. His closed-session testimony comes after the temporary arrest Saturday of Britain's ambassador to Tehran, Rob Macaire, shortly after he left a vigil for the air disaster victims that turned into a protest. On the day after the rally at Tehran's Amir Kabir University, tensions appeared to be mounting again on the streets of the capital, with a heavy police presence notably around the iconic Azadi Square south of the center.

Riot police armed with water cannon and batons were seen at Amir Kabir, Sharif and Tehran universities as well as Enqelab Square. Around 50 Basij militiamen brandishing paintball guns, potentially to mark protesters to authorities, were also seen near Amir Kabir. The military acknowledged Saturday that the Ukraine International Airlines plane was mistakenly shot down Wednesday, killing all 176 people aboard, after denying for days Western claims it was downed by a missile.

The majority of those on the Boeing 737, which slammed into a field shortly after take-off from Tehran, were Iranians and Canadians, and many were students. World leaders welcomed Iran's admission, but Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and others have also called for a full and transparent investigation. The Kiev-bound plane was shot down at a time when Iran's armed forces were on a heightened state of alert after launching a volley of missiles at US troops stationed in Iraqi military bases. Iran had vowed to exact "severe revenge" for the January 3 US drone strike that killed Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm.

Student protest

The Guards' top commander, Major General Hossein Salami, briefed parliament about the general's killing, Iran's retaliation and the downing of the airliner, semi-official news agency ISNA said. At the end of the session, speaker Ali Larijani asked the Majles' security and foreign policy commission to examine the air disaster and how to prevent such incidents from occurring again, ISNA said. On

Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani said a military probe into the tragedy had found "missiles fired due to human error" brought down the Boeing 737.

The Guards' aerospace commander General Amirali Hajizadeh accepted full responsibility. In the evening, a memorial at Tehran's Amir Kabir University in honor of those killed turned into a demonstration that, AFP correspondents said, was attended by hundreds of students. They shouted "death to liars" and demanded the resignation and prosecution of those responsible for downing the plane and allegedly covering up the accidental action.

Fars news agency said police "dispersed" them as they left the university and blocked streets, causing a traffic jam. US President Donald Trump warned Iran against cracking down. "There cannot be another massacre of peaceful protesters, nor an internet shutdown. The world is watching," he tweeted. "We are following your protests closely, and are inspired by your courage," Trump said in a comment directed at protesters.

The latest demonstrations follow a crackdown on street violence that erupted across Iran over fuel price hikes in November. Amnesty International has said more than 300 were killed.

Calls for sackings

Newspapers called for resignations and sackings over the handling of the air disaster. Sazandegi, a moderate conservative publication, also apologized to its readers for having trusted official sources on the matter. "Apologize, resign," said the main headline of the reformist Etemad daily. "Unforgivable," said government newspaper Iran, which published all the names of those who died in the air disaster on the image of black plane tail. Kayhan, a hard-line daily, led on the supreme leader's "strict orders" to follow up on the "painful incident of the plane crash".

As public anger grew, state television aired interviews with people who it said "have not forgotten everything the Guards have done for the country".

Britain's ambassador to Tehran meanwhile took to Twitter to deny he had attended the demonstration before being arrested. "Can confirm I wasn't taking part in any



TEHRAN: Iranian demonstrators hold placards bearing the images of slain military commander Qasem Soleimani and Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in front of the British embassy in the capital Tehran yesterday following the British ambassador's arrest for allegedly attending an illegal demonstration. — AFP

demonstrations! Went to an event advertised as a vigil for victims of #PS752 tragedy," Macaire said, adding he had been detained half an hour after leaving the area.

"Normal to want to pay respects—some of victims were British. I left after 5 mins, when some started chanting," he tweeted. The arrest triggered diplomatic protests, with London calling it a violation of international law and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell added his

voice to the chorus of condemnation. "Very concerned about the temporary detention of the UK Ambassador @HMATehran in Iran. Full respect of the Vienna convention is a must. The EU calls for de-escalation and space for diplomacy," Borrell tweeted. Iran's Mehr news agency said Macaire was arrested for his alleged "involvement in provoking suspicious acts" at the gathering in front of the university. —AFP

Abe begins Gulf tour in Saudi amid tensions

RIYADH: Japan's premier arrived Saturday in Saudi Arabia at the start of a Gulf tour during which he hopes to ease tensions after the US killed a top Iranian general. The official Saudi news agency SPA said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his delegation were received by senior officials including Economy Minister Mohammed Al-Tuwajri.

During his five-day tour, Abe will also visit the United Arab Emirates and Oman, where a new ruler was sworn in on Saturday following the death of modern day Oman's founding father Sultan Qaboos. Abe's Gulf trip had initially been thrown into doubt after Tehran responded to the US' January 3 killing of Qasem Soleimani by launching a barrage of missiles at bases hosting American troops in Iraq.

The escalation prompted fears of an all-out war. Those fears have subsided however after US President Donald Trump said Iran appeared to be standing down after targeting the US bases in Iraq.

"To avoid further escalation of the tense situation in the Middle East, (Abe) will exchange opinions with the three countries" he is visiting, Japanese gov-

ernment spokesman Yoshihide Suga said ahead of the visit. "In each of the countries, we plan to ask for cooperation in ensuring a stable energy supply and the safety of vessels," he added.

Military vessel

Japan last month announced it would deploy a military vessel and two patrol planes to the region to protect its shipping interests. Abe has in recent months tried to carve out a role as mediator between Japan's ally Washington and Tehran, with which Tokyo has longstanding ties. In December Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visited Abe in Tokyo after a visit by the Japanese prime minister to Tehran in June. That visit came amid tensions in the Gulf following a spate of attacks on oil tankers which Washington blamed on Iran, despite denials from Tehran.

"I'm deeply concerned about the tensions in the Middle East," Abe said earlier this week according to Japan's public broadcaster NHK as he announced details of his Gulf trip. "I hope to contribute to peace and stability in the region through diplomatic efforts to ease tensions," he added. Japan was formerly a major buyer of Iranian crude but stopped purchases to comply with US sanctions imposed after Washington in May 2018 unilaterally quit the landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

Opposition politicians in Japan had criticized the trip's reported cancellation given there was no change in plans to send



RIYADH: A handout picture provided by the Saudi Royal Palace yesterday shows Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz receiving Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (left) in the capital Riyadh. — AFP

Japanese Self Defense Forces there, a move they oppose due to the increasingly fraught situation. The cabinet approved the deployment last month and Defense Minister Taro Kono issued an order on Friday for the warship and two P-3C patrol planes to head to the Middle East to protect ships bringing goods to Japan.

In May and June 2019, several attacks

took place on international merchant vessels in the region, including the Japanese-owned tanker Kokuka Courageous, which the United States blamed on Iran. Tehran denies the allegations. The operation is set to cover high seas in the Gulf of Oman, the northern Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and Suga said Abe would be explaining the mission to leaders in the countries he visits. — Agencies

Ethiopian PM Abiy expects election in May or June

CAPE TOWN: Ethiopia will hold a parliamentary election in May or June despite security and logistic concerns, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said yesterday.

The election will be the first under Nobel Peace Laureate Abiy, who took office in April 2018 and launched political and economic reforms. His reform agenda has also stoked violence and highlighted ethnic divisions in the country of about 105 million people, and the election board said last June that the security situation could delay the 2020 election. "On the schedule, I am not sure whether it is May or June, because the schedule will be declared by the election board but I think

we will conduct an election this year because it is a constitutional mandate," Abiy said in response to a question at a media briefing with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. "There might be lots of challenges, not only logistics but also peace and security... It is better for Ethiopians and for Ethiopian parties to conduct the election on time in a very peaceful and democratic manner," he said. Ahmed is on an official state visit to South Africa. The two governments signed agreements to enhance cooperation, including on tourism and health.

Ethiopia has regularly held elections since 1995 but, with the exception of the 2005 election, no election has been competitive. In the 2005 election, riots erupted after the opposition cried foul, security forces killed nearly 200 protesters, and the government jailed many opposition politicians. Opposition politicians have warned against any delay in the election, and critics have said that postponing the vote could cause an adverse social reaction, fuel regional conflicts and damage Abiy's democratic credentials. — Reuters



In this file photo released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) shows American Red Cross personnel on site after a shooting incident at a naval base in Pensacola, Florida on December 6, 2019. — AFP

US to expel a dozen Saudi trainees after base attack probe

WASHINGTON: The United States will expel at least a dozen Saudi military students accused of extremist links and child pornography, after an investigation into a shooting rampage by a Saudi officer in Florida, media reported Saturday. In December, Mohammed Alshamrani, who was in the United States as part of a Saudi military training program, opened fire in a classroom at the Pensacola Naval Air Station, killing three sailors and wounding eight other people before being shot dead by police.

While the dozen or more trainees are not accused of aiding Alshamrani, some were found to have connections to extrem-

ist movements or be in possession of child pornography, CNN reported. The probe, which was carried out by the FBI, also found that several had not reported the assailant's disturbing behavior before the attack, according to The Washington Post.

In mid-December the Pentagon said it had conducted background checks on all Saudi military personnel currently training in the United States and found no "immediate threat scenario."

Defense Department officials halted operational training for Saudi Arabian military students in the United States following the attack, though classroom instruction continued. The 21-year-old gunman, a lieutenant in the Saudi Royal Air Force, was armed with a lawfully purchased Glock 9mm handgun, and is reported to have posted a manifesto on Twitter before the shooting denouncing America as "a nation of evil." According to the Washington Post, the FBI asked Apple to help access Alshamrani's two iPhones, but the company is resisting governmental requests to alter encryption. — AFP

Britain must limit military reliance on US: Minister

LONDON: Britain must invest in military hardware to become less reliant on US air cover and spy planes in future conflicts, Defense Secretary Ben Wallace was quoted as saying in an interview with the Sunday

Times newspaper. A steadfast ally of the United States that places its "special relationship" with Washington at the heart of its foreign policy, Britain has also traditionally been a pillar and strong advocate of NATO.

But in unusually frank comments, Wallace said fears that the United States under President Donald Trump would pursue increasingly isolationist policies kept him awake at night, according to the Sunday Times. "I worry if the United States withdraws from its leadership around the world, that would be bad for the world and bad for us. We plan for the worst and hope for the best," Wallace was quoted as saying.

"Over the last year we've had the US pull

out from Syria, the statement by Donald Trump on Iraq where he said NATO should take over and do more in the Middle East."

He said the assumption that Britain would always be part of a US coalition was no longer valid and the government should plan accordingly. "We are very dependent on American air cover and American intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets. We need to diversify our assets," Wallace said.

As it prepares to leave the European Union on Jan. 31, the British government has made clear that relations with Washington are of paramount importance, with trade talks at the top of the agenda. — Reuters

EU calls for 'de-escalation' after Iran holds UK envoy

BRUSSELS: The EU's diplomatic chief criticized Iran yesterday for briefly detaining the British ambassador to Tehran, calling for "de-escalation". Iranian authorities held ambassador Rob Macaire at a student protest to pay tribute to those killed when a Ukrainian airliner was shot down outside Tehran, killing 176 people including Britons.

The move triggered diplomatic protests from around the world, with London calling it a violation of international law and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell added his voice to the chorus of condemnation. "Very concerned about the temporary detention of the UK Ambassador @HMATehran in Iran. Full respect of the Vienna convention is a must. The EU calls for de-escalation and space for diplomacy," Josep Borrell tweeted. Macaire denied Iranian claims he was taking part in demonstrations, saying he went to an event to pay his respects to those killed in the crash and left after five minutes when chanting started.

Protests erupted in Iran on Saturday, with some students reportedly chanting "anti-regime" slogans amid concern about the authorities' handling of the disaster. Iran's armed forces admitted on Saturday that the Ukraine International Airlines Boeing 737 was shot down, after denying for days Western claims it was brought down by a missile.

The EU's air safety agency on Saturday advised airlines to avoid flying over Iran, after Tehran admitted mistakenly shooting down a passenger jet, killing 176 people. The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) said it had re-evaluated the dangers to commercial airline operations in light of Tehran's admission. "On the basis of all available information, the recommendation in the current security climate is that overflight of Iran at all altitudes should be avoided until further notice, as a precautionary measure," EASA said in a statement.

The existing advice not to fly over Iraq remains unchanged, EASA said. "This is a very dynamic situation and a new assessment will be made with the EU Commission and European Union member states early next week," the statement added. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has ordered his armed forces to address "shortcomings" so that such a disaster does not happen again. There have been international calls for Iran to carry out a full, independent and transparent investigation into the crash. —AFP

International

Malta gets new premier after outrage over blogger's murder

Muscat quits after killing casts stain on his administration

VALETA, Malta: Outsider Robert Abela was set to become Malta's new premier yesterday after Prime Minister Joseph Muscat's downfall over the murder of an investigative journalist.

Abela, who is seen as representing continuity, was elected leader of the Labour Party, meaning he automatically takes the role of prime minister. In the election run-up, Abela did not criticize Muscat, who announced in December he would quit following widespread anger over his perceived efforts to protect friends and allies from a probe into the 2017 slaying of blogger Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Muscat, 45, was set to resign yesterday. Prior to the election result, activist groups cast doubt on whether his successor would bring about real change in the Mediterranean country, which they say has been taken over by "criminals".

Dubbed the "one woman WikiLeaks", Caruana Galizia exposed corruption at the highest levels. She was killed by a car bomb on October 16, 2017 in an attack that made world headlines.

Less than an hour before her death, she wrote on her blog: "There are crooks everywhere you look. The situation is desperate." It was expected that some 17,500 Labour voters would vote for the party's first mid-term prime minister in history. Two candidates were vying to take over as Labour leader and prime minister: deputy prime minister and health minister Chris Fenech, a 56-year-old surgeon, and 42-year-old lawyer Abela.

Fenech had the backing of most cabinet members but Abela had been closing the gap in the polls in the final week of the campaign, the Times of Malta said. Neither referred to the Galizia killing in the run-up to the election. Both have insisted they represent continuity, highlighting their determination to keep the economy on its stellar trajectory.

'Reputation as pirates'

"We have the reputation (in Malta) of being pirates. The reason is that a group of criminals have taken over our government," Manuel Delia, a member of the activist group Repubblika, told AFP.

"We need change," Martina Darmanin, a 24-year-old academic, said the reporter's killing had been "a shock", and she had taken part in the regular demonstrations denouncing "the mafia in power".

"As a member of the EU we want and we deserve better than this: good governance, rule of law," she said, adding that she was "fed up of hearing that I'm from a tax haven country".

Repubblika plans to deliver a manifesto to the new prime minister calling for a cleanup of politics and the economy as well as a revamp of the constitution to guarantee a genuine separation of powers.

In an emotional farewell address Friday, Muscat said he was "sorry" about the killing, the investigation into which he has been accused of hampering. "I paid the highest price for this case to be solved under my watch," he said. The opposition Nationalist Party slammed Muscat's "surreal" speech, pointing out that it was Caruana Galizia who had paid that price.

'Indelible stain'

Muscat's fall from power followed daily protests led by supporters of the Caruana Galizia family, who accuse him among other things of shielding his chief of staff and childhood friend Keith Schembri, who has been implicated in the murder. The journalist's family had called for Muscat to step down immediately, but support from his party and his own popularity-linked to Malta's booming economy-bought him time until the party election. Three men are on trial for allegedly detonating the bomb that killed Caruana Galizia, while a



Labour party leader Robert Abela waves to the crowd moments before Malta's outgoing Prime Minister and Labour party leader delivered his final speech as PM in Paola, Malta before standing down over a slain reporter scandal. —AFP

fourth-powerful businessman Jorgen Fenech was charged as an accomplice after being detained as he tried to leave the country on his yacht. Fenech's arrest in November sparked the resignation of tourism

minister Konrad Mizzi, who formerly served as energy minister, and Schembri. The murder and probe, Malta Today wrote on Saturday, "cast an indelible stain on Muscat and his administration". —AFP

Five killed by jihadists in Nigeria

KANO, Nigeria: Jihadists linked with the Islamic State militant group killed five members of a militia in an offensive in Nigeria's northeastern Borno state, militia sources told AFP.

Fighters from Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) — travelling in pickup trucks fitted with machine guns—attacked Gajiram town, 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the state capital Maiduguri, on Friday. They targeted hunters and vigilantes who were guarding the town against attacks, resident Mele Butari said. "We lost five men in the attack," militia leader Babakura Kolo said on Saturday.

The five men were buried in Maiduguri on Saturday, another militia member Ibrahim Liman said. Nganzai district, where Gajiram is located, has been repeatedly attacked by jihadists in recent months, with troops and residents targeted. In the past two months, the number of ambushes against troops and civilian abductions at fake highway checkpoints by ISWAP—which split from the Boko Haram militant group in 2016 — has increased. The spike in attacks followed the creation of "super camps" by the Nigerian military in the northeast to stave off repeated jihadist raids.

Authorities in the state recruited hundreds of hunters and vigilantes to fill the void left by the withdrawal of troops from small camps, but they have been exposed to incessant jihadist attacks.

The decade-long conflict has killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes in northeast Nigeria. The violence has spread to neighboring Niger, Chad and Cameroon, prompting a regional military coalition to fight the insurgents. —AFP

US winter storms cause 10 deaths, power outages

NEW YORK: At least 10 people died, more than 1,000 flights were canceled and hundreds of thousands were without power in five states on Saturday as a massive winter storm system dumped snow, freezing rain and hail from Texas to Michigan. Hurricane-force wind gusts, golf-ball-sized hail and 2 to 5 inches (5-13 cm) of snow fell on Friday night and early Saturday as storms pushed from Texas through the Southeast and Great Lakes into Maine, the National Weather Service (NWS) said.

More snow with accumulations between 6 to 12 inches was expected through Sunday in parts of Illinois, Michigan, northern New York and New England.

"The real danger comes from the wind and ice accumulation," said NWS forecaster Bob Oravec in College Park Maryland. More than half an inch of ice was predicted to clog highways and roads across the South and Northeast from Saturday night to Sunday morning, he said.

"The ice and wind will make driving treacherous, and trees can snap and knock out power and do other damage," he said. Two people were killed when the storm destroyed a trailer home in northwestern Louisiana late Friday, according to the Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office. Local media reported that a third person died after a tree fell on a home in that state. —Reuters

Bloomberg: If my fortune can help beat Trump, why not spend more?

SAN ANTONIO: US presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg told Reuters he is ready to spend much of his vast fortune to oust Republican President Donald Trump from the White House in 2020, rejecting criticism from rivals for the Democratic nomination that the billionaire is trying to buy the US election.

Ranked by Forbes as the eighth-richest American, Bloomberg has flooded US airwaves and social media feeds with messages that he stands the best chance to beat Trump, spending more on campaign ads since he launched his campaign in November than his main Democratic rivals have over the last year.

"Number one priority is to get rid of Donald Trump. I'm spending all my money to get rid of Trump," Bloomberg told Reuters aboard his campaign bus on Saturday, during a nearly 300-mile (483-km) drive across Texas, one of the 14 states that will vote on Super Tuesday on March 3.

"Do you want me to spend more or less? End of story."

Decade after Haiti quake, president says aid system needs overhaul

PORT-AU-PRINCE: The international aid system is deeply flawed and needs an overhaul, Haitian President Jovenel Moise said on Saturday, almost 10 years since the impoverished Caribbean island nation was struck by one of the deadliest earthquakes in history.

International organizations pledged billions of dollars in aid after the earthquake on Jan. 12, 2010, though its use has since come under intense scrutiny from experts: only a fraction of it went directly to the Haitian government. Experts blame bad governance, excessive bureaucracy, waste and inflated contracts that were given mostly to foreign companies for the lack of progress, which was hampered further by corruption and political power struggles.

"There is a serious problem with the methodology," Moise told Reuters in an inter-

view at the National Palace, during which he repeatedly criticized how donors handled aid to Haiti. Moise, a former banana exporter who took office in 2017, said recipient countries know their needs best and should have a greater say in how aid is spent. "There has been no credible, long-term policy as to what to do with this money," Moise said, faulting donors and Haiti's weak institutions.

"It's a lot of money, and I don't know what has been done with it," Moise said, adding that the government had little say over how the money would be spent. Moise said some improvements have been made but that more needs to be done. The 7.0 magnitude quake killed tens of thousands of people and left many more homeless; estimates of the number of dead vary widely, from below 100,000 to as high as 316,000, the official government figure. While there is also no consensus as to how much aid Haiti received from international organizations in recent years - or what really constituted aid - most estimates put the number at above \$10 billion.

The damage from the earthquake is still clearly visible across the capital and even the walls and structures at the entrance of the National Palace, whose classical cupola sank. Since taking office, Moise said his admin-

istration has been working to improve collaboration not only among Haitian institutions but also international bodies to ensure that money would be more effectively spent in the future. Moise, who himself is under pressure

to resign almost three years into his five-year term, or to hold early elections, recognized that Haiti's most pressing problem were its weak institutions. Haiti has had 15 presidents in the past 33 years. —Reuters

Trudeau tells Iran Canada wants 'full clarity' on shutdown

OTTAWA: A "furious" Prime Minister Justin Trudeau demanded Saturday that Iran provide Canada with "full clarity" on the shutdown near Tehran of a Ukrainian airliner that killed all 176 aboard, including dozens of Canadian

citizens. Trudeau said he made the demand in a call with Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, who admitted earlier Saturday that the airliner was mistakenly shot down by Iranian missiles. At a televised press conference, Trudeau said he told Rouhani the admission was "an important step" but "many more steps must be taken." "A full and complete investigation must be conducted," he said. "We need full clarity on how such a horrific tragedy could have occurred." "Iran must take full responsibility," Trudeau said.

The prime minister said he insisted to Rouhani that Canada be allowed to participate in the investigation.

Three members of a Canadian rapid deployment team were on their way to Iran and should be on the ground within hours to support families of the Canadian victims, Trudeau said. Additional team members—two transportation

investigators and 10 consular representatives who will help with the victims' identification and repatriation—will follow, he said, adding that the Iranians were working on granting visas. The two countries have not had diplomatic relations since 2012, complicating their current contacts.

By Ottawa's count, 57 Canadian citizens, many of them dual Iranian nationals, were aboard the Ukraine International Airlines flight when it crashed January 8 shortly after takeoff from Tehran's airport.

In addition to Iranians and Canadians, there were victims from Ukraine, Sweden, Afghanistan and Britain. After days of delay and amid mounting international pressure, Iran's Revolutionary Guards admitted the plane was mistaken for a cruise missile and was shot down with a short-range missile. —AFP



DALLAS: Democratic presidential candidate Mike Bloomberg meets with supporters at the Happiest Hour restaurant in Dallas, Texas on Saturday. —AFP

nation contests in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina all due to take place in February. Instead, Bloomberg is waging a nationwide campaign to capture delegates in later contests such as Texas, which will be the second largest prize among the 14 Super Tuesday states.

At campaign events in San Antonio, Austin and Dallas in Texas on Saturday, Bloomberg said his bipartisan nature

made it more likely he could deliver on his pledges to expand health insurance coverage, fight climate change and reduce gun violence. While his speeches drew modest crowds of no more than a few hundred in Austin and fewer still in San Antonio, many who attended said they were independents or former Trump supporters who had learned about Bloomberg through his massive advertising campaign. —Reuters



PORT-AU-PRINCE: St Fleur Voguel, 38, poses at his home in Croix des Bouquets, 12.9km (8 miles) to the northeast of Port-au-Prince. Voguel lost his leg during the January 12, 2010, earthquake. —AFP

International

Morrison proposes high-powered inquiry into bushfires response

Australia blaze claims another fire-fighter's life

MELBOURNE: After weeks of criticism over the handling of the bushfires scorching Australia, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said yesterday he will propose a national review into the response to the disaster, as the fires claimed another firefighter's life.

The Australian bush has been burning for nearly three months and the fires have killed 28 people, claimed 2,000 homes and consumed millions of acres of land and wildlife. The crisis is becoming increasingly political as the country looks at the causes and the government's response.

"There is obviously a need for a national review of the response," Morrison said in an interview with ABC television. Asked whether it should be a Royal Commission, a powerful judicial inquiry, Morrison said, "I think that is what would be necessary and I will be taking a proposal through the cabinet to that end, but it must be done with consultations with the states and territories."

Morrison said that the inquiry would examine the response to the crisis, including the deployment of emergency services to battle the fires at a state and local level, the role of the federal government, and the impact of climate change. Bushfires are common during Australia's summer months, but this fire season started unusually early, often moving quickly and unpredictably, and leaving swaths of the drought-stricken land a scorched earth.

Cooler weather conditions over the weekend have brought a temporary respite, but a firefighter died on duty in Victoria, where new flames sparked. Authorities said the risk was far from over and more hot weather is expected.

Smoke again sheathed Sydney yesterday, almost a new normal for the country's biggest city, moving the air quality into hazardous territory, according to the NSW Department of

Primary Industry index. Facing increasing pressure to do more to tackle climate change, Morrison, who has so far been defiant in rejecting any links between his government's conservative climate policies and the bushfires, said his government will look into improving its performance on curbing emissions.

"We want to reduce emissions and do the best job we possibly can and get better and better and better at it," he said. "I want to do that with a balanced policy which recognizes Australia's broader national economic interests and social interest." Morrison rejected criticism that his government had not done enough before the bushfire season started, but he admitted that once the fires started, some responses could have been different.

"There are things I could have handled on the ground much better," he said. "These are sensitive environments, there are very emotional environments; prime ministers are flesh and blood too in how they engage with people." Opposition leader Anthony Albanese said on Sunday that the federal government should have acted earlier to address the disaster.

"The fact is that bushfires don't recognize state and territory boundaries," Albanese told reporters, according to a transcript provided by his media office. "And nor should the need for national leadership." Here are key events in the crisis:

Since October, thousands of Australians have been subjected to repeat evacuations as huge and unpredictable fires scorched more than 10.3 million hectares (25.5 million acres), an area roughly the size of South Korea. Across New South Wales, 111 fires were still burning yesterday, 40 of them not yet contained, but none at emergency level. More than 2,000 homes have been destroyed in the state.

A number of fires burning in the Snowy

Mountains region in New South Wales and across into Victoria have merged across more than 600,000 hectares (1.5 million acres) of land. They do not pose a threat, authorities say, despite being in an area hard to reach.

The government said yesterday more mental health support services will be provided to firefighters, emergency personnel, individuals and communities. The government is providing A\$76 million (\$52 million) in areas including counselling and healthcare consultations.

● Western Australia Department of Fire and Emergency Services said yesterday an out of control and unpredictable fire that is moving slowly in the state's south, poses a possible threat to lives and homes in the area.

● South Australia said yesterday that more than 32,000 livestock animals, mostly sheep, have died in recent fires on Kangaroo Island, while fire services are working to strengthen containment lines ahead of expected worsening weather conditions today.

● Thousands of Australians took to the streets on Friday to protest against government inaction on climate change, and were supported by protesters in London.

● Australia's wildfires have dwarfed other recent catastrophic blazes, with its burnt terrain more than twice the extent of that ravaged by 2019 fires in Brazil, California and Indonesia combined.

● Westpac estimated total bushfire losses to date at about A\$5 billion, higher than the 2009 bushfires in Victoria but smaller than the Queensland floods in 2010/11. It forecast a hit of 0.2 percent to 0.5 percent on gross domestic product.

● Australia's alpine resorts have dusted off winter snowmaking machines to blast ice-cold water onto dry ski slopes.

● The Insurance Council of Australia



This picture taken on December 31, 2019 shows a firefighter hosing down trees and flying embers in an effort to secure nearby houses from bushfires near the town of Nowra in the Australian state of New South Wales. Fire-ravaged Australia has launched a major operation to reach thousands of people stranded in seaside towns after deadly bushfires ripped through popular tourist areas on New Year's Eve.

increased to more than A\$900 million its estimate of damage claims from the fires, and they are expected to jump further.

● Morrison has pledged A\$2 billion to a newly created National Bushfire Recovery Agency.

● About 100 firefighters from the United States and Canada are helping, with another 140 expected in coming weeks.

● The New Zealand Defense Force said on Friday it was sending more health per-

sonnel, boosting its support for Australia, which had already included helicopters, aircraft and crew.

● The fires have emitted 400 megatons of carbon dioxide and produced harmful pollutants, the European Union's Copernicus monitoring program said.

● Smoke has drifted across the Pacific, affecting cities in South America, and may have reached the Antarctic, the UN's World Meteorological Organization said. — Reuters

Indian police battle anti-Modi protesters over disputed law

KOLKATA: Indian police baton-charged protesters yesterday to stop them reaching Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cavalcade as nationwide protests against a bitterly disputed citizenship law entered a second month. Tens of thousands staged protests through the night in the eastern city of Kolkata to denounce Modi's weekend visit to the capital of West Bengal state, whose local rulers have strongly opposed the legislation.

Police said they were forced to act after protesters tried to storm past barricades to stop Modi's vehicle outside a stadium, where the leader again defended the law and insisted the demonstrators were "misguided". Nearly 2,000 protesters gathered outside chanting "Fascist Modi, Go Back" before the showdown between demonstrators and police. More



KOLKATA: Demonstrators hold black balloons and flags to protest against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during a demonstration in Kolkata yesterday. — AFP

than 100 protesters were detained, a police official said.

Protesters have burned effigies of the prime minister during his visit and brandished black flags, which is considered an insulting gesture in Indian society. "The

government can't suppress our voice. We are not afraid. We are determined to fight for our rights," Samit Nandi, one of the protesters, told AFP. "We will continue our protests until Modi leaves our city."

West Bengal has become a political

battlefield between Modi's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and regional powerhouse Mamata Banerjee, whose Trinamool Congress party leads the state.

Banerjee is among state leaders nationwide who have said they will not implement the Citizenship Amendment Act, which excludes Muslims from a list of ethnic minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who are allowed to seek Indian nationality. Opponents say the government has created a religious test for citizenship in the secular country.

Many among India's 200 million Muslims fear the law is a precursor to a national register of citizens that could leave them stateless in the country of 1.3 billion. Many poor Indians do not have documents to prove their nationality. "CAA is not about taking away citizenship, it is about giving citizenship," Modi told supporters. He has accused political opponents of "misleading" and "inciting" people against his government.

Widespread demonstrations have rocked the Hindu-majority nation since the law was approved by parliament last month. At least 27 people, mostly Muslims, have been killed with police accused of using disproportionate force in several states. — AFP

ready nor able to do so," he said. The abbreviation DPRK refers to the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Saturday's comments show how ties between leaders are sometimes only marginally useful for diplomacy, said Mason Richey, a professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul.

"At least one member of the US-North Korea diplomatic 'bromance' is mature enough to admit that personal feelings are just that," Richey added. "Kim Kye Gwan's statement doesn't close the door on diplomacy any more than it already was, but he underlined how the US and North Korea have fundamentally different strategic interests with almost no meaningful overlap."

Warning to South

The North Korean adviser also cautioned South Korea to steer clear of ties between the North and the United States, saying it should not seek "to play a mediator role". On Friday, a South Korean official said Trump had asked the South Koreans to pass on birthday greetings to North Korea.

For South Korea to meddle in personal relations between Kim and Trump was "presumptuous", the North Korean adviser said, adding that the North had already directly received from Trump a letter with the greetings. "But they seem not to know that there is a special liaison channel between the top leaders of the DPRK and the United States."

South Korea's presidential Blue House declined to comment. The North's comments come after South Korean President Moon Jae-in's administration signalled it wanted to renew "independent" economic engagement with the North, Richey added. "This is another slap in the face, which Moon seems determined to accept ad infinitum." — Reuters

Afghan saffron production increases by 22% in 2019

KABUL: Afghan farmers had harvested 22 percent more saffron last year than in 2018, hoping the golden spice will become a legitimate replacement to poppy opium in the war-affected country.

According to Afghanistan Saffron Planters National Union, statistics show that farmers collected 19,469 kilograms of saffron in 2019, a 22 percent increase from over 37,500 hectares of cultivated lands in different provinces of the

country. It is highly expected to earn up to 27 million US dollar this year.

China, India and the United Arab Emirates are the main importers of saffron from Afghanistan. SOUNDBITE 1 (Dari): HAJI SHAKOR RAHIMI, Head of a processing company "We are still facing serious problems in standard packing and processing saffron and we need standard machineries and devices to dry up saffron."

Balkh and Sar-e-Pul in the country's north, Kandahar and Uruzgan in the south and Dykundi in the central part have most saffron farmlands after Herat in the west with up to 92 percent of total saffron production in 2019. Producing quality saffron and selling it at reasonable price at the global markets is local producers' biggest wish. Promotion of the valuable crop has created jobs for thousands of people including women and improved their economic situation in many Afghan provinces. — Reuters

Trump sends birthday wishes to Kim

SEOUL: North Korea has received birthday greetings to its leader Kim Jong Un from US President Donald Trump, but their personal relationship is not enough for a return to talks, according to a statement published on Saturday by state news agency KCNA. The comments come against the backdrop of stalled denuclearization talks following a flurry of diplomacy between the United States and North Korea in 2018 and early 2019.

While Kim could personally like Trump, he would not lead his country on the basis of personal feelings, Kim Kye Gwan, an adviser to the North Korean foreign ministry, said in the statement.

"Although Chairman Kim Jong Un has good personal feelings about President Trump, they are, in the true sense of the word, 'personal'," he said. "We have been deceived by the United States, being caught in the dialogue with it for over one year and a half, and that was the lost time for us."

North Korea will not discuss proposals such as those Trump made at his last summit with Kim Jong Un in Hanoi in February 2019, the foreign ministry adviser said. The North will not give up its nuclear facilities for partial sanctions relief, and will only return to talks when the United States makes concessions, he added.

"The reopening of dialogue between the DPRK and the US may be possible only under the condition of the latter's absolute agreement on the issues raised by the former, but we know well that the U.S. is neither

Muslim devotees attend Bishwa Ijtema in Dhaka

TONGI/DHAKA: Muslim devotees attended Friday prayers in Tongi Township, Dhaka, as part of the annual gathering of Bishwa Ijtema, the second largest congregation of Muslims in the world. A large

number of devotees from all over the world are attending the annual three-day Islamic congregation, from 10 to 12 January, taking place by the banks of the Turag River in Tongi. — Reuters



TONGI, Bangladesh: A Muslim devotee (center) jumps on to another train as he arrives along with others to take part in the Akheri Munajat, or final prayers, during the annual Muslim gathering 'Biswa Ijtema' in Tongi, some 30 km north of Dhaka yesterday. — AFP

Anti-govt fun run draws thousands of defiant Thais

BANGKOK: Around 10,000 Thais joined a "run against dictatorship" yesterday, shouting slogans and wielding three-finger salutes from the Hunger Games films in the largest show of political defiance since the 2014 coup.

The runners massed before dawn in a Bangkok park to take a stand against the government, which is led by former junta leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha and backed by a parliament stacked with MPs loyal to the military. The run was led by Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, the charismatic billionaire leader of a stridently anti-military political party which is facing the threat of dissolution.

Thanathorn has been stripped of his MP status, and is facing a battery of legal charges.

"You can feel the anger of the people and their disappointment over the government," Thanathorn told AFP before the run. "I think this is the first step to general change in Thailand." Before the start, the runners shouted pro-democracy slogans and chanted "Get out, Prayut". They also wielded the three-finger salute made famous by the blockbuster Hunger Games films as a symbol of freedom from authoritarian rule.

"I want a government that takes care of the people and spends money on our well-being and the environment instead of buying tanks and submarines," said runner Gig, dressed as a tank for the run.

Across Thailand from Pattani province in the south to the northern tourist city Chiang Mai, thousands took part in similar runs, with participants flashing the three-fingered salute as they took off from the starting line.

Bitterly divided

Prayut held onto power after elections last year, with support from an army-appointed senate. He now holds a slim parliamentary majority and faces a public increasingly vocal in its discontent with the sluggish economy and rule by elderly former generals. A smaller, rival "Walk to Support Uncle" rally took place in another park at the same time, drawing thousands of mainly elderly supporters of Prayut, whose nickname is "Uncle Tu".

"We love our country, we love a government which can provide security to our country," said Vasuchart, 68, who only gave one name. Famed Thai singer Au Haruethai, who attended the pro-Prayut walk, insisted the coup leader-turned-premier was elected "the democratic way".

"People should not use the word 'dictator'," she said. Thailand remains bitterly divided. The contrasting demographics of the Sunday events reflected some splits in age, class and politics, with many older people leaning towards the army-aligned establishment and younger participants favoring Thanathorn's narrative of change.

The anti-government run comes less than 10 days before Thanathorn's Future Forward Party faces possible dissolution, accused of attempting to overthrow Thailand's constitutional monarchy.

Future Forward stunned Thailand's establishment by becoming the third largest political party after an election last March. Despite his legal woes, Thanathorn retains a rock star-like appeal among his supporters. — AFP

Analysis

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Indian slaves swap life of bondage for seat in boardroom at tea plantation

Slipping tea with bureaucrats at a plantation in southern India earlier this month, Sharda Krishnan's mind wandered from the boardroom to the farm where she was enslaved as a child. Her only payment had been in paddy rice and porridge, autonomy was unimaginable and despair perpetual. Now she co-owns a tea plantation in Kerala. Run by former bonded laborers for nearly 35 years, it is a place where freedom is a given and fear does not exist.

"There will always be work issues, but it will never be like earlier, when I was paid for my hard work with just a little paddy, some porridge and never allowed to quit," said Krishnan, whose family was rescued from forced farm labor in the 1980s. "I am one of the owners now so why should I be scared?" she asked last month, taking a break from picking leaves at the Priyadarshini Tea Environs in Kerala's Wayanad region.

The groundbreaking initiative - which saw the state government give 900 acres of land to survivors of slavery in 1986 - has diversified in recent years, growing pepper and coffee, as well as tea, and opening its doors to eco-tourism. The plantation is seen as a rare success story in a country where about 18 million people are estimated by the government to be trapped in bonded labor, working without pay across fields, brick kilns, factories, brothels or as maids to repay debts.

Once rescued from slavery, workers are sent back to their communities with compensation and the promise of more support. Yet most survivors struggle to access government benefits, from housing and livestock to financial compensation, and end up jobless and burdened by debt, leaving them at risk of falling back into slavery, labor rights campaigners say.

Projects such as the Kerala plantation that bring victims together are increasingly championed by charities as a more sustainable way of improving the lives of former slaves. "Rehabilitation of rescued workers continues to be one of the biggest challenges," Kandasamy Krishnan, head of the National Adivasi Solidarity Council - an organization that works on labor rights issues - told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "The plantation ... should be celebrated and replicated," added Krishnan, who wants other states to follow suit. "Starting a collective and training the rescued workers to run it could be a starting point."

Tea tourism

At Priyadarshini Tea Environs, every packet of its Vishwas Gold tea features a note outlining the slaves-to-owners backstory and a logo of hands breaking free of chains. Its 150 workers produce an average of 40,000 kg of tea each month, most of which is sold at auction in nearby Kochi. An industry downturn led to losses so the plantation teamed with the state's tourism department in 2019 to run tours, lay on camping and hold tastings, to raise funds and awareness.

"We want every visitor to know the struggle of the men and women behind the plantation," said Vikalp Bhardwaj, a civil servant who oversees the daily running of the plantation. "It will also be an opportunity to talk about the issue of bonded labor." The new venture has created jobs for the children of plantation workers, whether training them as tour guides or to work as hospitality managers in the guest rooms.

"When the rehabilitation program reaches out to the next generation as well, it is complete," said Dinesan Chirakkal Kalarikkal, executive director of local human rights charity Joint Voluntary Action for Legal Alternatives (JVLA). "India's rehabilitation program for victims of bonded labor provides survivors with compensation, as well as a plot of land, poultry, and job training to help start afresh."

Yet as of last April, just one survivor had got the full entitlement of 180,000 rupees (\$2,500), data shows. Individual state support has won out over group projects as it seems easier to manage, said Kuralamuthan Thandavarayan of the anti-slavery charity International Justice Mission (IJM). "(But) group models do better because they bring survivors together as a community and help them rebuild together," he said. "They become each other's support system as well."

Each March, the Valliyoor temple festival brings thousands of people to nearby Mananthavady town. A celebration of the culture of indigenous people in the region, the festival was once a centre of slave trading where landowners bought so-called "tribals" to work on their lands. Kanchana Kayama, 40, does not know if her family was bought at the festival but remembers working on a rice field during her childhood for a man her family referred to as their landlord.

"We believed that was the only life we would ever have until we were brought here and shown how to grow tea. I get my dues here and have married three of my daughters with my earnings." — Reuters

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



Oman's newly sworn-in Sultan Haitham bin Tariq receives (clockwise from top left) Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in the capital Muscat yesterday. — AFP

Oman to retain its treasured neutrality

The sultanate of Oman, positioned geographically and diplomatically between the rival powers of Iran and Saudi Arabia, earned outside influence under the long reign of the late Sultan Qaboos. As the health of the royal ruler declined, and speculation turned to who would succeed him in the absence of an heir, there were questions over the future of Oman and its role as a valued mediator in a troubled region.

However, with the passing on Friday of the 79-year-old sultan and the swift appointment of like-minded cousin Haitham bin Tariq as his successor, observers say Oman appears on track to retain its treasured status as a neutral peacemaker. To do so though, the new sultan will need to navigate tricky geopolitical terrain as well as address economic challenges facing his own country.

During his half-century reign, Sultan Qaboos thoroughly modernized his country, but also forged a broader role as a go-between in regional and international crises. In the high-stakes Iran nuclear crisis, Oman played a discreet role in dialogue between Tehran and Washington, leading to the 2015 deal involving Western powers, which three years later was unilaterally abandoned by US President Donald Trump.

In his first speech on Saturday, the new sultan pledged to follow in the footsteps of his influential predecessor. 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." And he said that Oman would continue to "promote peaceful solutions" to regional and global crises.

Smooth succession

Sultan Qaboos was unmarried and had no apparent heir, meaning that the succession was decided in a meeting of the royal family who opted to open a sealed letter Qaboos had prepared, detailing his preference. The speed

of the transition is seen as a sign that 65-year-old Haitham has the backing he will need to steer the country and maintain its diplomatic standing.

"The sultanate of Oman will no doubt continue to follow the same policy, from which it has benefited so much," said Bader Al-Saif, an assistant professor at the University of Kuwait and an associate researcher at the Carnegie Middle East Center. The royal family's prompt announcement is a "message to its citizens and neighbors to say that the situation is under control."

Apart from guiding Oman's foreign policy, Haitham also faces the task of rolling out "Vision 2040", a roadmap for social and economic reforms designed to address high deficits, international debt and youth unemployment. "The best guarantor of Oman's neutrality will be a successful economic restructuring that draws upon its people and avoids too much reliance on any other power," said Kristin Diwan of the Arab States Institute in Washington.

Warring powers

Sultan Qaboos, slight in stature but usually resplendent in sumptuous robes and colorful turbans, was synonymous with Oman's international profile and many of the tributes since his passing have struck a warm and personal note. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who visited Muscat yesterday to pay his respects, recalled a meeting with Qaboos where he was "struck by his commitment to peace and understanding between nations and between faiths".

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Saturday in a tweet - notably written in Arabic - that his death was a "loss for the region". Along with Zarif and Johnson, a ceremony yesterday at Muscat's Alam Palace drew figures from across political divides in the Middle East, including Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin

Hamad Al-Thani. The new sultan also welcomed Britain's Prince Charles, former French leader Nicolas Sarkozy and Tunisian President Kais Saied, among others.

But observers say that despite his personal profile, Oman's diplomatic expertise and its willingness to provide a discreet venue for delicate negotiations, goes well beyond Qaboos. In a region where the push and pull between Iran and Saudi Arabia is constant, analysts say it is also in Oman's own interests to signal the transition does not present an opportunity for one of the powers to pull it to its side.

The new sultan has an "interest to present himself as someone who is going to... continue the legacy of a leader, such as Qaboos, who was considered to be successful," said Sanam Vakil from the London-based Chatham House think tank. "The message of continuity is very important because Oman faces economic vulnerabilities as well as challenges within the (Gulf) with anxieties about the past few years, where we've seen a very assertive Emirati and Saudi foreign policy."

The new sultan takes power at a time when aggressive foreign policy, which has seen Saudi and its ally the United Arab Emirates embroiled in a grinding five-year conflict in Yemen, is showing signs of dialling back. Oman refrained from joining the Saudi-led coalition fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, and leveraged that neutrality to mediate the release of foreign hostages.

It also remained neutral in the damaging blockade against Qatar mounted by Saudi Arabia and allies that saw diplomatic and transport ties cut in June 2017. "There is a strong rationale for balance and neutrality, rooted in its geography looking toward the Arabian Sea and history of independence from Gulf neighbors," Diwan said. "The new leadership will draw strongly upon Sultan Qaboos' authority as it looks to navigate the difficult regional conflicts and economic challenges." — AFP

Iranian-American astronaut reaches for the stars

Jasmin "Jaws" Moghbeli earned her fierce nickname during her time as a decorated helicopter gunship pilot who flew more than 150 missions in Afghanistan. The Marine Corps major, MIT graduate and college basketball player can now add another accomplishment to her burgeoning resume: the first Iranian-American astronaut. Speaking to AFP after graduating in NASA's latest cohort, the 36-year-old immigrant said she hoped her example might help inspire others from similar backgrounds.

"I would love for everyone to be able to be inspired by someone who looks like you or has something in common with you, so I do hope there is that influence," she said. She and her brother were born in Germany to Iranian parents, architecture students who had fled their native country after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

But Moghbeli grew up in Baldwin, New York, which she considers her hometown - and her story after that reads like an immigrant's fairy tale. At 15, she attended an advanced space camp, cementing her ambition to one day reach for the stars. She graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she studied aeronautical engineering. But her parents were concerned to learn she then planned to become a military pilot (a well-trodden path to the astronaut corps).

Moghbeli signed up in 2005 - just four years after the September 11 attacks, and her parents were worried about what their daughter might face as a person of Middle Eastern heritage. "But once I joined, they gave me absolute support," she said, crediting the backing of her family, and later her partner Sam, whom she married three months ago, for her success.

Space diplomacy

Following a brief US-Iranian rapprochement during the Obama years, tensions between the two countries have soared again under the current administration. President Donald Trump tore up the landmark nuclear deal signed by his predecessor and added Iran to a list of mainly Muslim countries whose nationals are banned from entering the US. And last week's killing by US forces of top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani



NASA astronaut Jasmin Moghbeli celebrates during astronaut graduation at Johnson Space Center in Houston on Jan 10, 2020. — AFP

raised the specter of a broader conflict. But Moghbeli said she had personally not faced problems during her time in service. "I haven't in any way felt that changed anything about how I'm treated," she told AFP. She spoke fondly of close friendships forged during her military missions and astronaut training - feelings that are clearly reciprocated.

At her NASA graduation ceremony, classmate Jonny Kim described Moghbeli as "dependable", "resilient" and "fierce," in short, "the perfect crewmate I'd go into the void of space with". Kim is himself a decorated Navy Seal and emergency physician. He and Moghbeli were two of the five people of color in the graduating class of 11, selected from a

record-breaking 18,000 applicants. As an astronaut, Moghbeli will need to draw upon her experiences and the close calls she faced both as a test pilot and later as a combat pilot, to think fast and mitigate the unique risks that come with space flight. So what is it about space that makes it all worthwhile? "One of the reasons I love working in human space exploration is, it's something we generally all agree on and unite on," she said, citing two decades of close US-Russian cooperation on the International Space Station, despite the two countries' otherwise fraught ties. "I think it is an area where we see diplomacy where we don't see it in other areas," she said. "I think it has an impact." — AFP

Business

MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 2020

12 Spanish delivery firm Glovo out to conquer the world**13** Companies in China remain wary despite US trade deal**14** The stunning Lexus LC 500 Convertible

BEIRUT: Lebanese demonstrators march during a demonstration in downtown Beirut on Saturday. Hundreds protested across Lebanon to denounce a crippling economic crisis and the political deadlock that has left the country without a government for over two months. —AFP

Hundreds protest in Lebanon as crisis deepens

Central Bank seeks extra regulatory powers amid capital flight

BEIRUT: Hundreds protested across Lebanon on Saturday to denounce a crippling economic crisis and the political deadlock that has left the country without a government for over two months. Chanting anti-government slogans in the capital Beirut, the northern city of Tripoli and the southern city of Nabatieh, they also denounced a class of political leaders they deem incompetent and corrupt.

In Beirut, hundreds of protesters marched to parliament, making stops at the state-run electricity company and the headquarters of the Association of Banks. "All the reasons that made us take to the streets on October 17 still stand," said protester Riad Issa, referring to the date Lebanon's anti-government protest movement started.

"Nothing has changed and the political establishment is closing its ears... and shutting its eyes." Although protests have declined in size, demonstrations have been ongoing since October, increasingly targeting banks and state institutions blamed for driving the coun-

try towards collapse.

The movement has been fuelled by a crippling economic crisis, the worst since Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war. The World Bank has warned of an impending recession that may see the proportion of people living in poverty climb from a third to half the population.

To make matters worse, a liquidity crunch has pushed Lebanese banks to limit dollar withdrawals and transfers since September. This has forced depositors to deal in the plummeting Lebanese pound, which has lost nearly two thirds of its black market value against the greenback for the first time since it was pegged at 1,500 to the dollar in 1997. "The country is collapsing. We want a government of independents and a rescue plan," read a banner carried by demonstrators in Beirut.

Lebanon has been without a government since former Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned on October 29, bowing to popular pressure. His successor, Hassan Diab, was des-

ignated on December 19 but is yet to form a government in a delay donors say debt-saddled Lebanon can ill afford.

In a statement on Friday, he said he still stands by his pledge to form a government of independent experts to rescue the country from the brink of collapse, a key demand of protesters.

But he said his efforts were being challenged. "The pressures, no matter how large, will not change my conviction," he said on Twitter. "I will not bow to intimidation."

The delay in forming a government has drawn the ire of demonstrators. "We are tired of this skirting of responsibility," said Rolan Younan, a demonstrator. "We need to reshape the political class."

Meanwhile, Lebanon's central bank is seeking extra powers to regulate and standardize controls which commercial banks are imposing on depositors, the governor said yesterday, saying his intention was to ensure "fair relationships" between banks and customers.

Seeking to prevent capital flight, commercial banks have been tightly controlling access to deposits and blocking most transfers abroad since October, when anti-government protests brought a long-brewing Lebanese economic crisis to a head. The Lebanese authorities have not, however, introduced formal capital controls regulating these measures. Central bank governor Riad Salameh, in a text message to Reuters, confirmed sending a letter to Lebanon's finance minister on Jan. 9 seeking "exceptional powers necessary to issue regulations pertaining" to conditions in the sector.

He said no new measures were planned. The letter, reported by Lebanese media late on Saturday, said the measures imposed by commercial banks needed to be regulated and unified "with the aim of implementing them fairly and equally on all depositors and clients".

Lebanon's caretaker government has not issued any statement on Salameh's request, which was set out in a letter to caretaker Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil.

In the letter, Salameh said implementation of the controls by commercial banks had "on several occasions led to prejudicing the rights of some clients, particularly with respect to the unequal approach with other clients". He urged Khalil to work with the government "to take appropriate legal measures ... to entrust (the central bank)" with the necessary extra powers.

In justifying this, he cited the need to "secure the public good, to protect banking and monetary stability ... and to protect the legitimate interests of depositors and clients".

Reflecting a hard currency shortage, commercial banks have gradually reduced the amount of dollars customers can withdraw since October. For most, the cap is now a few hundred dollars a week.

Lebanon is facing the worst economic crisis since its 1975-90 civil war, rooted in decades of state corruption and bad governance that have landed the country with one of the world's heaviest public debt burdens. —Agencies

Jack Ma, Grab eye windfall in Singapore digital banking

SINGAPORE: Singapore is opening up its banking industry to digital lenders in a reform that could shake up the sector across Southeast Asia, with Chinese billionaire Jack Ma and ride-hailer Grab among those seeking licenses.

Traditional banks are being challenged by a new generation of online-only competitors that can offer better savings and borrowing rates, as they don't need to spend money on overheads such as physical branches. The introduction of digital lenders into the Singaporean market heralds the biggest liberalization of the financial hub's banking sector for two decades, and follows similar moves in the United States, Britain, Japan and Hong Kong, among others.

With most adults in the city already having access to financial services, firms awarded licenses are likely to use

the city-state as a gateway to the wider region, where many consumers still lack bank accounts. "It's a total reconfiguration of the terrain—we're talking about radical changes," Lawrence Loh, a professor at the National University of Singapore Business School, told AFP.

"Singapore is the launchpad for Southeast Asia." An eclectic group of 21 applicants are vying for five digital banking licenses, Singapore's central bank and financial regulator said this month. They range from Alibaba founder Ma's online platform Ant Financial, as it ramps up efforts to expand outside China, to a consortium that includes Southeast Asian ride-hailing behemoth Grab and the region's biggest telecom player, Singtel.

Other bidders are Asia's biggest massage chair maker, V3 Group, and an alliance featuring computer gaming firm Razer and a supermarket chain operator.

'Challenging old models'

Two of the licenses will be for full banking operations, allowing holders to take deposits from consumers, while three will be for "wholesale" banking—which limits a lender to mostly dealing with small and medium-sized enterprises. The winners will be announced in June, with operations starting in 2021, the Monetary Authority of Singapore said.

Observers say the overhaul is unlikely to spark immedi-

ate, dramatic changes in Singapore itself—where traditional banks such as DBS and UOB have already introduced digital services. But the future impact could be massive if the new online lenders expand across a region of more than 600 million people, which is home to booming economies and where many are getting access to the internet for the first time via smartphones.

The opportunities appear huge—nearly a third of people in Southeast Asia still do not have bank accounts, according to a report by Google, Singapore investment firm Temasek and business consultancy Bain & Company. Another 98 million individuals own bank accounts but have insufficient access to financial services, while millions of small and medium-size businesses are in need of funding, the report said. And it projected digital lending in the region would rise five-fold to \$110 billion by 2025.

The rollout worldwide of ultra-fast, 5G smartphone infrastructure over the next five years is also expected to accelerate the digital transformation, said Rajiv Biswas, Asia Pacific chief economist at IHS Markit. "This is fundamentally challenging the old business model of retail banks, particularly in competing for the business of younger generations," he told AFP.

There could be difficulties in expanding across a region where some governments have traditionally sought to



SINGAPORE: This illustration photograph shows banking and purchasing apps on a smartphone in Singapore. —AFP

shield domestic banks from foreign rivals. But analysts say regulators have gradually been removing barriers to competition, while Loh from NUS saw a bright future for digital lending, saying: "People are very quick to adapt." "E-commerce, online supermarkets, food delivery—they are all done online." —AFP

Business

Spanish delivery firm Glovo out to conquer the world

Company eyes expansion beyond food deliveries

BARCELONA: With an ambitious 27-year-old boss and a growing army of computer engineers, Spanish start-up Glovo is chasing international growth by expanding beyond food deliveries, despite criticism of the working conditions of its drivers.

Four years ago Oscar Pierre quit his first job at Airbus, Europe's largest aerospace group, in Toulouse in southwestern France after just three months. Now the cofounder and CEO of Glovo, an app-based on demand courier service, manages 1,500 employees in 26 countries, half of them in his hometown Barcelona where the company has its headquarters.

"I was looking for another rhythm," the slim former aeronautical engineer, who comes from a family of entrepreneurs, told AFP, explaining he found the aeronautics industry "a bit slow".

At the entrance to Glovo's headquarters there are several yellow backpacks used by the firm's 50,000 drivers to deliver restaurant meals by bicycle or motorcycle to people's homes in 288 cities around the world as well as diapers, medicine, flowers and other goods. Because unlike its rivals Deliveroo and UberEats, Glovo does not just deliver food. "Order what you want," the app tells its customers.

Glovo is on track to rack up 250 million euros (\$277 million) in sales this year, Pierre said, a 200 percent jump over 2018 when sales already recorded a 350 percent jump over the previous year.

'Much bigger'

Since it was founded in 2015 the company has raised 460 million euros from investors, and it recently achieved the status of a "unicorn"—a start-up valued over \$1 billion. "It makes you dizzy, it's a lot of pressure, but at the same time we make the most of it because we know that it is unique to live this," said Pierre at Glovo's headquarters which features beanbags and table football for employees.

Glovo is already making money in Spain, Italy and Portugal and Pierre expects the company as a whole will be profitable "within 18 months". The company's strategy involves focusing on areas where it faces less competition than in western Europe such as Latin America, Ukraine, Morocco and the Ivory Coast.

It wants to speed up delivery times using algorithms cooked up by hundreds of engineers and to do this Glovo plans to hire 300 new staff for its IT team in 2020. "We have to choose a machine learning model that is able to estimate how long an order is gonna take to prepare and then only tell the courier to arrive at the location as quickly as possible, at the same time as when the order is ready to be picked up," said Mustafa Sezgin, the head of the company's IT division.

Meal deliveries account for three-quarters of Glovo's revenues but "we like to think that food is the start of something much bigger" just like Amazon started by selling books, said Pierre.

Glovo already has seven so-called "dark supermarkets", distribution centres stuffed with products which are not open to the public, where its drivers can pick up items and it plans to open 100 by 2021.

The goal is to ensure deliveries are carried out within 15 minutes. The Glovo app could soon be used to make restaurant reservations, buy movie tickets or hire home repair services.

Fake freelancers?

But these ambitious projects have been overshadowed in Spain by complaints over the working conditions of Glovo's drivers, who have staged several strikes. They complain of pressure to make deliveries quickly and insufficient hours to earn a decent wage. Twenty-one drivers have taken Glovo to court, accusing the company of treating them as "fake freelancers" instead of providing them with formal contracts that would require the firm pay social security contribu-



In this file photo, Glovo's employees work at the headquarters on December 3, 2019 in Barcelona. —AFP

tions on their behalf.

The courts have ruled in favor of riders 11 times, and on the side of Glovo ten times.

Spain's social security system has demanded the Glovo pay it hundreds of thousands of euros in arrears for hundreds of drivers. Pierre argues the question is not whether riders are "employees or freelancers".

"It's a new paradigm" that needs "new regulations", he said. Pierre said 60 percent of Glovo's drivers work part time and enjoy great "flexibility". To increase the drivers' earnings, Glovo is working to improve the app so that they can do three deliveries per hour, compared to two currently, he added.

"With technology it's possible," Pierre said. —AFP

NBK Money Markets Report

Risk sentiment returns to global market

KUWAIT: The US dollar is rebounded at the start of this year as it continues to reverse the sharp sell-off recorded at the end of last year. The US dollar's narrow rally against the other major currencies has been supported in part by evidence of stronger US economic data. Furthermore, the return of risk appetite last week seemed to be solely concentrated in the Japanese yen.

Iran's retaliation on US bases over the assassination of Qasem Soleimani was received well by markets. A US analysis of the attack indicated that the strike avoided human casualties suggesting a de-escalation of the crisis which reignited risk appetites in the market. Oil is back down below levels it started the New Year at, equities are up across the board and the 10-year yield is up nearly 17bps from a 2-month low to around 1.87 percent. Finally the yen has given up all of the gains it has made this New Year so far depreciating around 1.7 percent over the week.

US services and private payrolls impress

The ISM non-manufacturing survey and US trade report for November have revealed more favorable growth momentum at the end of last year. Net trade is expected to provide a significant positive contribution to growth in Q4. A firmer US economy helps to ease downside risks for the US dollar from the Fed's current expansion of their balance sheet. However, the Fed has set a high bar to consider rais-

ing rates which should continue to cap upside potential for US yields and the US dollar from stronger economic data in the near-term.

The release of the private sector ADP non-farm employment survey for December provided the latest positive evidence that the US economy continues to hold up better than feared. The ADP survey estimates that private payrolls increased solidly again by 202k in December. It follows an increase of 254k in non-farm private payrolls in November. It compares to an average monthly increase of 165k for non-farm private payrolls in 2019.

Non-farm payroll edges lower

However, the actual non-farm payrolls for December disappointed market participants with a reading of 145K, lower than the expected 162K. The unemployment rate remained steady at a solid 3.5 percent, yet the average hourly earnings dipped to 0.1 percent when markets were expecting an increase of 0.3 percent. Nevertheless, the labor market is healthy with positive data even if it slowed down gradually as we are at peak employment figures. The US dollar moved slightly lower after the release but maintained its 2-week level highs.

UK & Europe Reduced uncertainty in UK

The pound edged down against the dollar on Friday, holding near two-week lows hit after Bank of England Governor Mark Carney signaled a possible rate cut this year. Carney said on Thursday there could be a "relatively prompt response" from the bank if the current spell of economic weakness persisted. However, the reduced uncertainty and increased busi-

Rates – 12 January, 2019

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month
	Open	High	Low	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.1166	1.1206	1.1083	1.1120	1.0980	1.1240	1.1185
GBP	1.3073	1.3211	1.3011	1.3059	1.2905	1.3280	1.3095
JPY	107.99	109.69	107.63	109.46	107.65	110.60	108.93
CHF	0.9717	0.9762	0.9663	0.9723	0.9630	0.9910	0.9663

ness confidence from a clear British exit from the EU, should aid in a pickup in economic activity dampening expectations for a cut from the BoE.

Indeed, the final release of the UK's services PMI survey was revised notably higher by 1.0 point to 50.0 in December. Survey compilers Markit, noted that "the modest rebound in new work provides another signal that business conditions should begin to improve in the coming months, helped by a boost to business sentiment from greater Brexit clarity and a more predictable political landscape".

Another economic survey, the 'permanent staff placement index,' supported Markit's claims of boosted morale in the UK. The UK Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) revealed that British employers last month increased their number of new permanent staff for the first time in a year, reflecting the modest rise in optimism after December's election. REC's permanent staff placement index rose to 51.9 in December from 48.8 in November, its highest since December 2018 and above the expansionary 50 point mark for

the first time since February.

Finally on the Brexit front, British lawmakers approved legislation on Thursday which will allow Britain to leave the European Union on January 31 with an exit deal, ending more than three years of confusion over the terms of the divorce. The vote however, was considered a non-event for markets compared to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's landslide election win in December.

Optimistic figures in the EU

In the Euro gave way to a stronger dollar last week moving around 0.7 percent lower over the week despite releasing positive economic figures. German retail sales grew 2.1 percent y/y in November, sharply higher than expectations of 1.0 percent, while last month's dismal figures were also revised modestly higher. French PMIs stabilized above the 50 point index and both German Composite and Services PMIs were revised a fair bit higher. Overall this saw a revision higher of the Eurozone PMIs to 52.8 from 52.4 for Services and 50.9 from 50.6 for the

Composite. Finally, Euro area annual inflation is expected to be 1.3 percent in December 2019, up from 1.0 percent in November according to a flash estimate from Eurostat.

Oil prices fall 5%

Oil prices dropped around 5 percent over the week as markets viewed Iran's strike on US bases to be benign and alluding to de-escalation of tensions. This has led to expectations that Middle East oil production will continue with minimal disruption and ample supply reducing prices. Furthermore, a surprise crude inventory build from the US exacerbated the drop in prices. Crude inventories in the United States rose last week by 1.2 million barrels against expectations of a 3.4 million barrel reduction. Benchmark Brent crude start of the week at \$69.35 and closed on Friday at \$64.98.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar at 0.30325
The USDKWD closed at 0.30325 Thursday, January 9th.

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.778
Indian Rupees	4.287
Pakistani Rupees	1.960
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.672
Nepali Rupees	2.676
Singapore Dollar	227.360
Hongkong Dollar	39.160
Bangladesh Taka	3.555
Philippine Peso	6.009
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	341.660
Sterling Pound	401.110
Canadian dollar	235.010
Turkish lira	52.890
Swiss Franc	316.280
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
Bahraini 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

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

Australian 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

Asia	BUY	SELL
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	0.00013

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	0.784745	0.792632
Qatar Riyal	0.082874	0.083706
Saudi Riyal	0.080007	0.081307
Syrian Pound	0.001289	0.001509
Tunisian Dinar	0.104039	0.112039
Turkish Lira	0.045041	0.054886
UAE Dirhams	0.082163	0.082989
Yemeni Riyal	0.000988	0.001068

Business

Companies in China remain wary despite US trade deal

Firms ready contingency plans if tariff war resumes

BEIJING: Washington and Beijing may be ready to sign a preliminary trade agreement, but companies in China are not taking any chances, forging ahead with contingency plans in case the tariff war resumes. As Chinese Vice Premier Liu He travels to Washington from Monday to Wednesday to seal the deal, manufacturers and suppliers told AFP that they fear the agreement could be upended even after it is signed.

Rather than focusing on the agreement, they are planning for the worst — seeking new markets abroad, increasing their presence at home or moving production overseas. The “Phase One” deal signalled a de-escalation in a trade conflict pitting the world’s two most powerful economies against each other for nearly two years. But even as the US held off last month from a further escalation in tariffs, firms continue bearing the brunt of existing levies as well as suffering a lower volume of orders amid simmering trade tensions. Washington maintains 25 percent tariffs on about \$250 billion worth of Chinese imports. “Even if they signed the Phase One deal, we don’t know if things will change at a later stage,” said Alfred Wong, CEO of D&S Products Manufacturing, which is headquartered in Hong Kong and has a factory in the southern trade hub of Shenzhen.

‘China plus one’
Wong’s company, which makes child safety

products and greeting cards, has moved almost a third of its production to Sri Lanka since last September, even though it has not been hit hard by existing tariffs. Wong said that clients were unlikely to give it new deals if it did not adopt a “China plus one” strategy of diversifying operations outside the country.

He added that orders for products had fallen last year, much of it due to uncertainty over potential escalations in tariffs. “Even if President Donald Trump were not in office, the US could still take action against China,” said Wong. “Things are unlikely to return to the way they were before the trade war.”

Jason Lee, CEO of metal parts manufacturer Shanghai EverSkill M&E, said the US market made up about 60 percent of his company’s sales before the trade war, but this has dropped to around 40 percent.

He is now looking for more clients outside the US to make up for some of the shortfall. “In the long run, as a Chinese supplier, we can only improve on our products and ensure they are better compared with those from elsewhere. That is the most fundamental solution,” Lee said. Instead of looking abroad, Silver Star, a robot vacuum-cleaner maker headquartered in Shenzhen, is now seeking to increase its market share within China, particularly via e-commerce.

“Macroeconomic policies are not within the control of small business owners like us,”

said company chief executive Ludwig Ye. Some companies are also doing less research and development for new products.

Kim Ng, managing director of kitchen gadgets producer Ko Fung, said this has had a knock-on effect on business for the rest of the year as the production of new goods typically comes after research and development. Ng added that the potential cut in tariffs in the Phase One deal is only from 15 percent to 7.5 percent on around \$120 billion of Chinese imports. “President Trump is attacking China to boost his popularity, and it is (a US presidential) election year. I expect the further stages of negotiations will be more difficult,” he said.

Limited benefits

Iris Pang, Greater China economist at ING, said the rollback on tariffs is likely to benefit only “a very small group of exporters”. UOB bank’s head of research Suan Teck Kin said that while the deal suggests that trade tensions have stopped escalating, it does not address other sources of strain such as China’s subsidies to state-owned enterprises. Analysts also remain divided on whether China is likely to raise its purchase of US agricultural goods to at least \$40 billion annually over two years, a figure invoked by US officials. China has not confirmed the numbers, but Suan said it was not impossible to achieve.



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo China's Vice Premier Liu He (left) speaks with US President Donald Trump during a trade meeting in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, DC, on April 4, 2019. — AFP

If US farm-product purchases hit around \$40 billion by 2021, it would likely represent about 23 percent of China’s agricultural imports. At its 2015 peak, US farm products made up nearly 25 percent of China’s imports, he said.

Tensions also remain on other fronts, especially in technology, with the US having

imposed sanctions on Chinese telecom champion Huawei. “There seems to be an escalation of the tech war between China and the US, and between China and the rest of the world,” said Pang. “It seems that it’s not only a trade war now, it’s an overall resistance towards China’s development of advanced technologies.” — AFP

French PM offers concession to unions over pension reform

PARIS: French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe on Saturday offered a major concession to unions contesting his government’s overhaul of the pension system, in a move aimed at ending strikes which are now in their fifth week. Philippe said in a letter to unions and employers

that he was prepared to withdraw plans to raise the retirement age for full pension benefits by two years to 64 if certain conditions were met.

“The compromise that I’m offering ... seems to me the best way to peacefully reform our retirement system,” Philippe said in a copy of the letter obtained by Reuters.

He made the concession after talks between the government and trade unions to break the deadlock failed on Friday. The CFDT, France’s biggest union which is inclined to accept a limited reform, welcomed the move, saying in a statement that it showed “the government’s will to find a compromise”. But the hardline CGT union, which wants the reform dropped altogether, rejected the offer and called on workers to participate in a series of protests planned for next week.

The government’s concession comes as tens of thou-

sands of demonstrators marched through eastern Paris against the reform, which aims to replace France’s myriad sector-specific pension schemes with a single points-based scheme. The protest turned violent on its fringes with police firing tear gas and charging groups smashing windows and lighting rubbish bins and billboards on fire.

The government’s standoff with the unions is the biggest challenge yet of President Emmanuel Macron’s will to reform the euro zone’s second-biggest economy.

Philippe’s government had hoped to create incentives to make people work longer, notably by raising the age at which a person could draw a full pension to 64 while maintaining the legal retirement age at 62. The government has argued that the pension reform, which would be the biggest since World War II, would make

the system fairer while also putting it on a more sound financial footing.

With one of the lowest retirement ages among industrialized nations, France currently spends the equivalent of 14 percent of economic output on pensions.

Philippe aims to present the reform bill on Jan. 24 so that it can be discussed in parliament starting in mid-February with the aim of passing a law before the summer break. He said in the letter he expected unions and employers to agree on how to ensure the long-term financing of the pensions system in April. If they failed to agree, the government would pass decrees guaranteeing the pension system is in the black by 2027, he added. The CGT said that was simply a tactic to impose a higher retirement age as unions and employers were unlikely to find an agreement. — Reuters



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Business

The stunning Lexus LC 500 Convertible

LC lineup represents Lexus' evolution towards becoming a luxury lifestyle brand



LOS ANGELES: The much-anticipated convertible version of the Lexus LC 500 flagship coupe made its global debut at Los Angeles Auto Show recently. The LC lineup is representative of Lexus' evolution towards becoming a luxury lifestyle brand, providing driving pleasure and excitement to enrich customers' lifestyles. The new LC 500 Convertible joins the coupe as aspirational halo models for the entire Lexus lineup, providing unique driving experiences that stimulate the senses, and express ultimate beauty.

The exterior of the new LC artfully blends the coupe's unique roofline with the character of a convertible, achieving beauty with the top open or closed. The interior design considers how details such as the tonneau cover and seating materials become part of the design impression when viewed from the outside.

The new model follows the coupe's 'Exhilarating Performance' driving signature, providing a sense of unity with nature and an exhilarating driving experience that can only be enjoyed with a convertible.

The interior body structure has optimal placement and shape of braces to yield high dynamic performance faithful to the driver's intentions. And thanks to the car's



robust and sensual sounding V8, the LC 500 Convertible accelerates in a pleasantly linear manner. To further enhance the driving experience, the LC 500 Convertible comes equipped with neck heaters and a transparent wind deflector supporting the leading comfort and quiet that is Lexus' DNA. The naturally aspirated 5.0-liter V8, mated to the DirectShift-10 automatic transmission, gives the LC linear-yet-invigorating acceleration. Power



output is tuned according to the driving scene, with smooth acceleration character during normal commuting, and acceleration at the limit when the driver desires.

In order to make the LC 500 Convertible's V8 more

enjoyable when the top is down, a sound generator transmits sensual engine intake sounds through the dash panel, while an exhaust valve enhances the powerful engine sound.

Venezuela's virtual currency at crossroads

CARACAS: With the government of Nicolas Maduro distributing half Petro, the cryptocurrency launched in February 2018 to more than 8 million people, the month of December was a key month for the state virtual currency.

The system to pay with the so-called Venezuelan cryptocurrency was temporarily suspended since last January 4 and should be reactivated on Saturday 11 after a week in maintenance.

The operations with petro of the Bank of Venezuela will remain suspended until further notice while the integration with the Patria and PetroApp subsidies platform, as reported by the state financial institution on Friday, January 10, "in order to allow the diversity of operations and products in petro".

The wait that began with the seven days of technological maintenance that the Bank of Venezuela announced on January 4, is not over yet. This is because the system is not ready for businesses to receive payments in Petro and also settle it in Petro. That is, without making the change to bolivars.

Currently, 1 petro equals \$59, this according to the Petros calculator, which can be used to see the value in other currencies.

With this amount of money, equivalent to approximately 8 minimum salaries, a good part of the beneficiaries with this help from the government seek to stock up on food, since the money earned monthly is not enough for a week.

However, the dollar is still the main alternative for payments of goods and services, the lack of trust from citizens would be the main problem for Petro to take off as the main payment alternative.

A study carried out in October in seven of the main cities of Venezuela by the Ecoanalitica firm determined that 53.8 percent of the commercial operations were made in foreign currency. This trend is also driven by the Central Bank of Venezuela, which has spent months placing dollars and euros in cash at the bank's exchange tables to stimulate its sale to companies seeking foreign exchange to make imports and other purchases abroad. Thus, banks no longer only offer euros in cash to companies through their exchange tables but also to individuals.

The collapse of the bolivar, which threw 99 percent of its value against the dollar in 2019, reflects that of the Venezuelan economy, which has suffered 21 consecutive quarters of decline.

While inflation has decreased somewhat, largely through severe loan restrictions, it is still the highest in the world, at an estimated annual rate of 6.567 percent. According to the Bloomberg index "Cafe con leche" (Coffee With Milk Index) a year ago a cup of coffee cost 450 bolivars, while at the end of last month it cost 30,000 bolivars. —Reuters

A breakdown for Boeing and FAA after years of trust

NEW YORK: When Dennis Muilenburg, Boeing's ousted chief, was summoned to Washington last month, he scarcely knew he was in for a dressing-down from the head of the Federal Aviation Administration.

FAA chief Steve Dickson—a former Delta Air Lines employee who in August took over the reins at the world's most influential aviation regulator—had announced the day before that Boeing's 737 MAX would not return to the skies before 2020. The plane was grounded worldwide last March after two crashes in less than five months left 346 people dead. The meeting between the two men was tense, according to a US official. Muilenburg had promised airlines and investors the MAX would be back in the sky by December 2019.

Ominously, he warned a delay could force a temporary halt to production, something that could inflict pain on the entire US economy. But Dickson was unwavering, telling Muilenburg to focus on fixing the MCAS anti-stall system implicated in the crashes.

Strikingly, he also publicly accused Boeing of making statements "designed to force FAA into taking quicker action."

The souring relations between the two men alarmed Boeing board members, including Larry Kellner, former head of Continental Airlines, according to people with knowledge of the mat-

ter. The board feared a complete breakdown in the crucial relationship with the FAA. Boeing needs the agency's support both to emerge from the unprecedented crisis, which has cost it billions of dollars, and also to certify the airworthiness of other jets like those in Boeing's long-haul 777x aircraft line.

Ten days of talks followed. And on December 23 Muilenburg's unceremonious firing was announced in a terse Boeing statement that offered no thanks for his years of service. David Calhoun, chairman of Boeing's board, had finally dropped Muilenburg after having earlier assured him of his support in the face of blistering attacks from lawmakers and the victims' families.

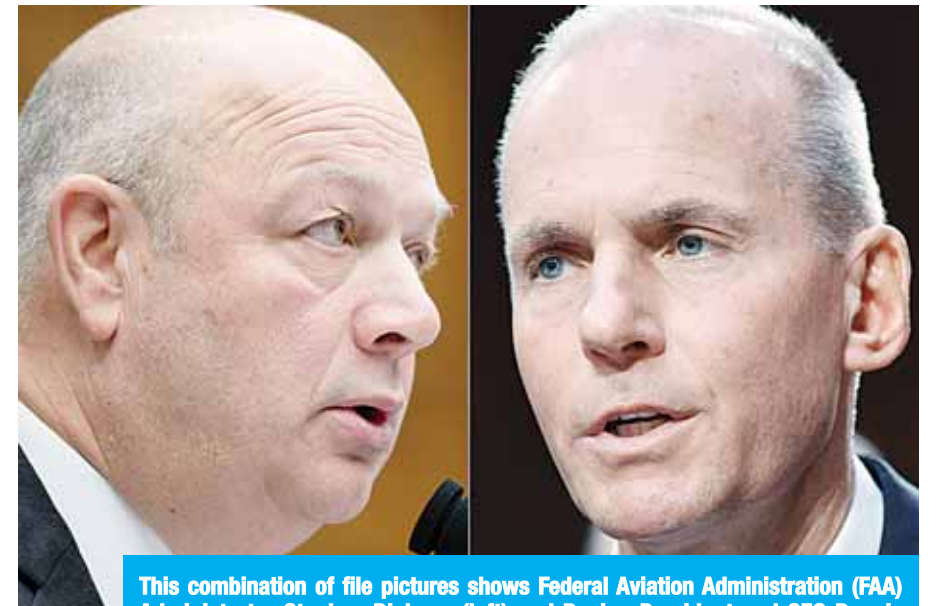
Adding insult to injury, Muilenburg was informed just hours before the announcement, according to a knowledgeable person.

Jedi mind tricks

The bonds of trust between Boeing and the FAA had been fraying since October. That month, as lawmakers intensified a probe of the 737 MAX's certification, Dickson leveled explosive accusations against Boeing. He said the company had concealed important documents, including exchanges between employees, showing that the MCAS system, which was meant to prevent stalling, made piloting the aircraft difficult during simulator training.

"I expect your explanation immediately regarding the content of this document and Boeing's delay in disclosing the document to its safety regulator," Dickson said in a letter.

In the documents, former Boeing test pilot Mark Forkner boasted of easily convincing the FAA to approve the



This combination of file pictures shows Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Administrator Stephen Dickson (left) and Boeing President and CEO Dennis Muilenburg. —AFP

MCAS. Forkner told a colleague he was "Jedi mind tricking" regulators. And the FAA ultimately approved the MCAS software without in-depth scrutiny.

Another episode further eroded trust between Dickson and Muilenburg. In early November, Muilenburg asked Dickson to authorize Boeing to resume deliveries of the 737 MAX—which Boeing assembly plants were still producing at the time—even before allowing the planes to return to service.

Dickson agreed to consider the request, according to an FAA spokesperson. But six days later, before Dickson could respond, Boeing announced it had won approval to resume deliveries before the end of 2019. The FAA was dumbfounded and Dickson had to assure officials that he had not in fact buckled under pressure. "Relations between Boeing and the

FAA sucked," said Scott Hamilton, an analyst at Leeham. Richard Aboulafia of Teal Group likewise told AFP that regulators have "lost confidence" in Boeing. Calhoun, a former top executive at General Electric who is due to take over at Boeing today, hopes to repair relations and win permission for the 737 MAX to return to service.

The manufacturer recently advised all MAX pilots to undergo simulator training before returning the jets back into the skies—a concession from Boeing, which had said for years that such training was unnecessary. But the latest release of messages between Boeing employees ridiculing the FAA could make Calhoun's job even tougher.

The MAX was "designed by clowns who in turn are supervised by monkeys," one message said in 2017. —AFP

Qatar Airways to showcase its Airbus A350-1000 at Kuwait Aviation Show 2020

DOHA: Qatar Airways is pleased to announce its participation in the Kuwait Aviation Show 2020, where it will display its state-of-the-art Airbus A350-1000 fitted with its multi award-winning Business Class seat, Qsuite, and the ultra-modern private jet Gulfstream G500 from its Qatar Executive fleet.

Taking place over four days from 15-18 January 2020, the Kuwait Aviation Show 2020 is held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Kuwait Aviation Show 2020 is an important platform for regional and international airlines and aviation companies to showcase their latest products and services. The event will kick-start the New Year for the industry, with over 300 exhibitors, 60 aircraft on display, 15,000 trade visitors, and 60,000 public visitors expected.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, His Excellency Mr. Akbar Al Baker, said: "Qatar Airways is delighted to participate in the second

edition of the Kuwait Aviation Show, which is set to draw thousands of visitors from the aviation industry. In this year's edition, our Airbus A350-1000 and Gulfstream G500 will be on display to international visitors as a demonstration of our commitment to ensuring the best service for our passengers."

"Qatar and Kuwait enjoy a strong relationship and bilateral cooperation at all levels. Demand for our flights between Doha and Kuwait City continues to grow as we now operate 84 flights weekly between Hamad International Airport and Kuwait International Airport. We are proud to offer our passengers from Kuwait the opportunity to visit more than 160 destinations worldwide on board young aircraft via Doha."

On display the Kuwait Aviation Show 2020 will be Qatar Airways' Airbus A350-1000. The world's most technologically advanced aircraft features an unparalleled ambient design and superior levels of comfort and well-being, setting a new standard of passenger experience.

Qatar Airways' Airbus A350-1000 aircraft features the airline's patented, award-winning Business Class experience, Qsuite, which offers the industry's first-ever double bed in Business Class, as well as stow away privacy panels that enable passengers in adjoining seats to create their own private room - a first of its kind in the industry.

Also on display will be the Gulfstream G500,

the airline's ultra-modern executive jet that sets an industry benchmark by offering one of the quietest cabins as well as optimum cabin altitude pressure. Operated by Qatar Executive, the private jet charter division of Qatar Airways Group, the aircraft is perfectly suited for passengers who wish to maximise their travel time while experiencing the ultimate in comfort and privacy.

A multiple award-winning airline, Qatar Airways was named 'World's Best Airline' by the 2019 World Airline Awards, managed by Skytrax. It was also named 'Best Airline in the Middle East', 'World's Best Business Class', and 'Best Business Class Seat', in recognition of its ground-breaking Business Class experience, Qsuite. It is the only airline to have been awarded the coveted 'Skytrax Airline of the Year' title, which is recognised as the pinnacle of excellence in the airline industry, five times.

Qatar Airways currently operates a modern fleet of more than 250 aircraft via its hub, Hamad International Airport (HIA), to more than 160 destinations worldwide. The world's fastest-growing airline has added several exciting new destinations to its growing network this year, including Rabat, Morocco; Izmir, Turkey; Malta; Davao, Philippines; Lisbon, Portugal; Mogadishu, Somalia; Langkawi, Malaysia; and Gaborone, Botswana. The airline will add Santorini, Greece; Dubrovnik, Croatia; and Osaka, Japan to its extensive route network in 2020.

What's On

Tamer Hosni live in concert

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Over 3000 people mostly young attended the musical concert held on Thursday evening at the International Fair Ground in Mishref. During this period almost every week a concert is held for local or Arab singers.

The concert started at 8:30 pm with the Egyptian young pop star Tamer Hosni, who was warmly welcomed by the audience. Tamer who is also a popular actor started his career in 2002 when he launched his first album, while he acted for the first time in a movie in 2003.

During the concert he performed for about 90 minutes presenting some of his old and new songs including songs from his movies. After he finished, the concert organizer awarded him with a special trophy.

At 10:40 the most popular Kuwaiti music band Miami came on stage. Although they just had a concert two months back in Kuwait, yet thousands of their fans came to attend their concert. The band that consists of four members was formed in 1986 but they presented their first song in 1991. Miami got popular with presenting new modern style of music, and renewing some old folk songs in new style.

They presented different fast rhythmic songs while the audiences applauded and sang with them. They concluded at 12:15 after midnight.



— Photos by Yaser Al-Zayyat



Australian bushfires spark global knitting frenzy



This handout photo from the Australian Department of Defence shows Australian Army veterinarian Captain Garnett Hall (L), Kangaroo Island Wildlife Park owner Dana Mitchell (C) and Private Alexie Tarasov from the 10th/27th Battalion, Royal South Australia Regiment (R) bandaging one of many burnt koalas being treated at the Kangaroo Island Wildlife Park in Kingscote. — AFP photos

Knitting needles are clicking furiously around the world to create hundreds of protective pouches and blankets for native wildlife made homeless by Australian wildfires that have razed large swathes of bushland.

The Animal Rescue Craft Guild said on Monday it has been deluged with offers of help after putting out a call for volunteers to make bat wraps, joey pouches, birds nests, possum boxes, koala mittens and other snugly homes for marsupials.

Donations to the volunteer-run group have come in from as far afield as the United States, Britain, Hong Kong, France and Germany.



This handout photo taken and released from the Australian Department of Defence shows Army veterinarian captain Garnett Hall treating a koala for burns from bushfires on Kangaroo Island, in South Australia.

"It's been going crazy," Belinda Orellana, a founding member of the guild, told Reuters. "The response has been amazing." Blazes across Australia in recent weeks have scorched through 8 million hectares of bushland, an area the size of Austria.

Some experts estimates put the number of animals, including domestic pets and livestock, killed as high as half a billion, with potentially hundreds of thousands of injured and displaced native wildlife.

"It's the poor little souls that survived where we come in," said Orellana. "Our group creates and supplies items to rescue groups and carers around the country who take in and care for the wildlife."

Orellana said the guild supplied thousands of rescue groups around the country and demand was growing, adding there was urgent need for fabric donations. Originally formed a few months ago to make dog and cat beds and coats for animal pounds, the guild's Facebook page has 75,000 members. Many of the crafters have crocheted, knitted and sewed a range of items including koala mittens for burnt paws and pouches for infant "joey" kangaroos who have lost their mothers.

Lara Mackay, a new volunteer who lives in New Zealand, has just made her first makeshift joey pouch, which she enlisted her cat to test out at home. "I'm planning to make as many as possible and am asking fabric outlets for fabric donations to sew," Mackay told Reuters.

In Singapore, Leslie Kok was working on her fourth joey pouch and meeting up with other volunteers to share materials and tips. "I will knit as long as there is a need for the pouches," Kok said.

Closer to the fires, Simone Watts in the Blue Mountains outside of Sydney, saw the plea for help and set to work turning pillow cases into beds for bats or flying foxes. "I looked at the list of what is most needed versus my fairly basic sewing capability and decided I could contribute the bat wraps," Watts said. — Reuters



This handout photo from environment group Greenpeace Australia-Pacific shows Caitlin McFadden, a local veterinarian from the nearby Milton Veterinary clinic in Milton in Australia's New South Wales state, looking after a brushtail possum named Ambo - named after the paramedics who rescued him.



This photo shows volunteer Sarah Price of wildlife rescue group WIRES, who are working to save and rehabilitate animals from the months-long bushfire disaster, taking care of a rescued kangaroo at her house on the outskirts of Sydney. — AFP

Embassy of Islamic Republic of Iran

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kuwait Presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all Diplomatic and consular Missions and International Organizations accredited to the State of Kuwait and has the honor to inform the sorrow news of the tragic disaster of the Iranian and non-Iranian victims onboard the Ukraine International Airlines flight that crashed on the outskirts of Tehran.

Condolence book will be opened at the Islamic Republic of Iran Embassy on Monday 13 January, 2020 (today) from 10:00 hours to 15:00 hours.

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all Diplomatic and consular Missions and International Organizations accredited to the State of Kuwait the assurances of its highest considerations.

Residents 'not worried' in pneumonia-stricken Wuhan

WUHAN: Wuhan, the Chinese city known as the home of a new virus that has sickened dozens, killed one man and sparked international concern, is not an obvious holiday destination. But Tian, a tourist from another metropolis around three hours' drive away, decided to make the trip despite trepidation from his family over reports of a mysterious pneumonia outbreak.

"I said I should be fine, so I came," he said after checking out of his hotel yesterday, wearing a face mask as a precaution nonetheless. Residents of the central city seem just as unconcerned about the disease, believed to be from the same family as SARS — an infectious coronavirus that killed hundreds of people in mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003. So far 41 people with pneumonia-like symptoms have been diagnosed with the new virus in Wuhan, with authorities disclosing on Saturday the death of a 61-year-old man two days earlier. The outbreak began just weeks before China's busiest annual travel period, and national plane and rail authorities are closely watching developments as millions prepare to visit family at Lunar New Year.

No clear evidence of human-to-human transmission has yet been detected, according to the local health commission. Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in the city center — where multiple pneumonia patients worked — is still cordoned off after being shut down on January 1.

But multiple restaurants sharing the same building were open and serving customers early Sunday morning. Initial reports about the virus had raised fears that SARS was back, prompting authorities to punish eight people for posting false information online.

While the outbreak sparked a run on face masks at pharmacies in Hong Kong, where scientists urged people to stay vigilant, few on the streets of central Wuhan were

sporting masks this weekend. Most of the guards stationed around the seafood market were not wearing protective gear, although one group of security staff who had entered the market area wore masks and hats and were instructed at a morning briefing to stay covered at all times.

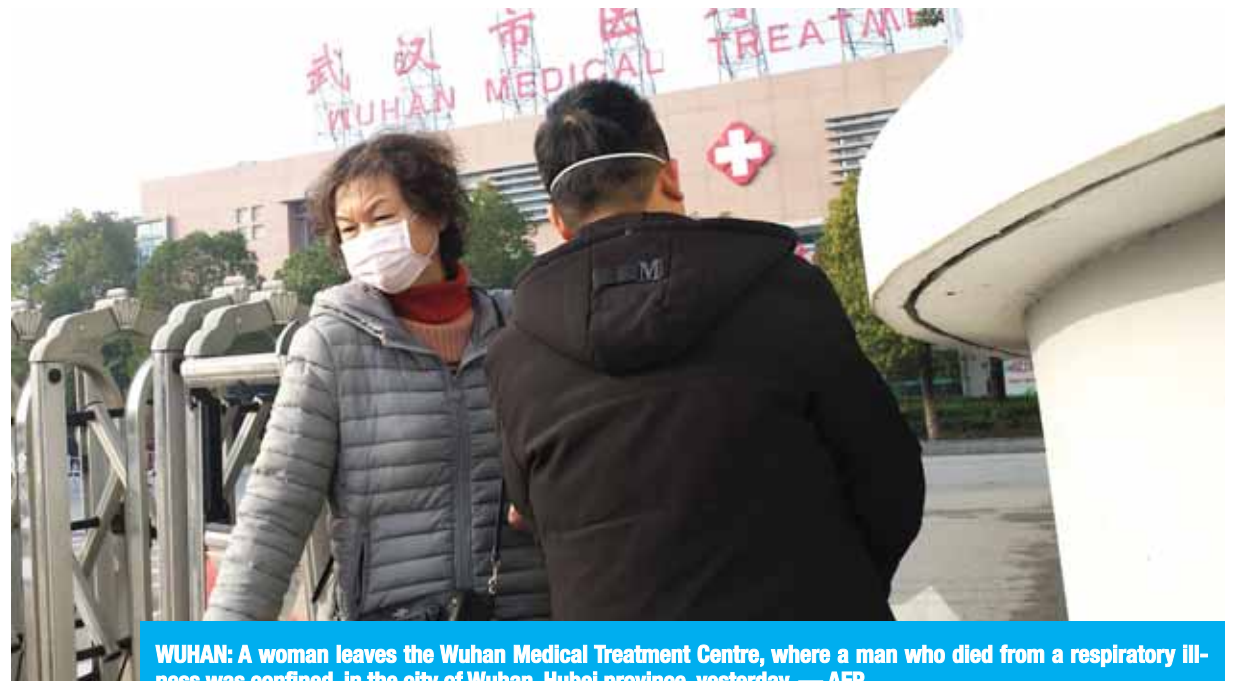
Multiple people without safety equipment were seen exiting and entering the market, however, while some guards appeared more concerned about the spread of unflattering images than contagion. One of them threatened to track down AFP reporters for filming a confrontation between the guards and an elderly man who wanted to enter the market. The same guard said merchants had been allowed to enter the facility to check on their stalls, accompanied by security staff.

'Nothing you can do'

Chinese scientists said last week they believe the pathogen is a previously unknown type of coronavirus — a broad family ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses like SARS. Hong Kong's Department of Health said Saturday that genetic sequencing of the virus found in one of the Wuhan patients indicated it was 80 percent similar to SARS found in bats.

But they said it was too soon to conclude that it was a SARS strain. Outside the medical center in Wuhan where the infected are being treated, patients discharged after being seen for other illnesses waited for buses and taxis, some without face masks. Visitors were free to enter and exit the hospital compound, although a guard physically blocked AFP from filming a group of patients moving between buildings, saying it was a "sensitive" scene.

Two women surnamed Yan and Shu who had been discharged said on Sunday that hospital authorities had



WUHAN: A woman leaves the Wuhan Medical Treatment Centre, where a man who died from a respiratory illness was confined, in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, yesterday. — AFP

pushed overnight for as many patients unrelated to the pneumonia outbreak to be sent home as possible. "Most of the building is empty," Shu said, adding that she believed more pneumonia patients would soon be transferred there.

Another woman surnamed Yan, waiting for a bus near the hospital with her husband and three-year-old daughter,

said she was concerned about the virus but felt there was little point in worrying. "If the illness looks for us, there's nothing we can do," she said. Her husband Cao said most of their neighbours in the Wuchang district across the river from Huanan market were "not worried", as they rarely crossed over to the other side of the city. — AFP

CLINIC
PAGE

248 33 199

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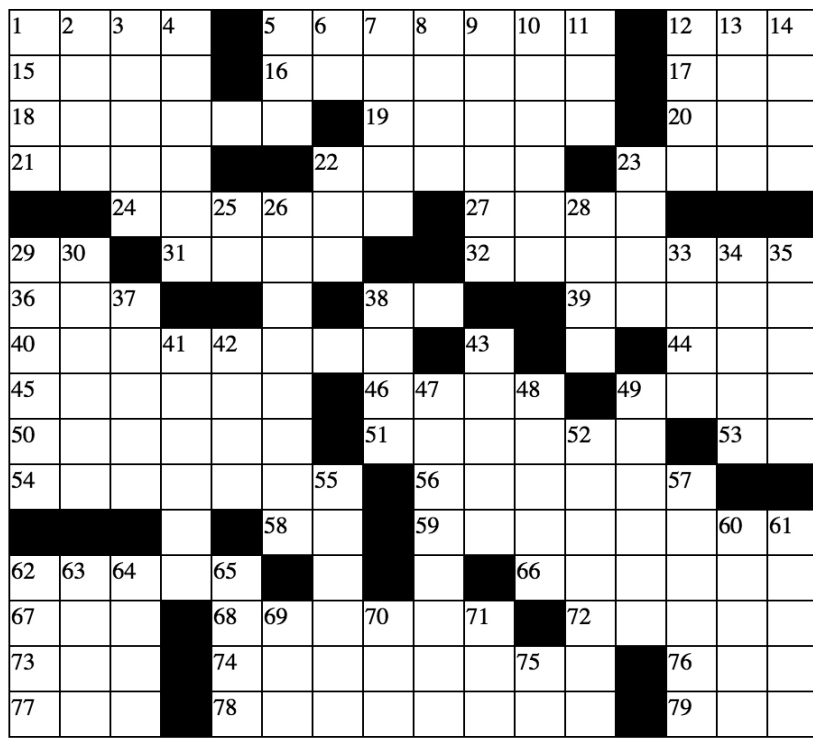
Scope of clinical Practice.

- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

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Stars

CROSSWORD 2408



ACROSS

- 1. A quantity of no importance.
5. An esoteric or occult matter that is traditionally secret.
12. Inquire about.
15. (Norse mythology) Ruler of the Aesir.
16. A member of a North American people formerly living in the Colorado river valley in Arizona.
17. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
18. Shrub bearing round-fruited kumquats.
19. Lap at the front of a coat.
20. Thigh of a hog (usually smoked).
21. The sixth month of the civil year.
24. Conqueror of Gaul and master of Italy (100-44 BC).
27. The dynasty that ruled much of Manchuria and northeastern China from 947 to 1125.
29. Being ten more than one hundred ninety.
31. Plant with an elongated head of broad stalked leaves resembling celery.
32. Gull family.
36. Annual grass of Europe and North Africa.
39. The formation of frost or ice on a surface.
40. Squeeze together.
44. A sudden abrupt pull.
45. A field where grass or alfalfa are grown to be made into hay.
46. Look at with amorous intentions.
50. Give an incentive.
51. Of or relating to or symptomatic of alexia.
53. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
54. Hardy breed of cattle resulting from crossing domestic cattle with the American buffalo.
56. Of or relating to abasia (inability to walk).
58. A logarithmic unit of sound intensity.
59. A port city in northeastern Greece on an inlet of the Aegean Sea.
62. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
66. Derived by copying something else.
67. The cry made by sheep.
68. A knitted fabric or one resembling knitting.
72. Any of numerous low-growing cushion-forming plants of the genus Draba having rosette-forming leaves and terminal racemes of small flowers with scapose or leafy stems.
73. Any of various systems of units for measuring electricity and magnetism.
74. A city in southern Japan on Kyushu.
76. A local computer network for communication between computers.
77. An informal term for a father.
78. Of or relating to an agent or agency.
79. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- 1. Acute ulceration of the mucous membranes of the mouth or genitals.
2. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
3. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics

- 4. (zoology) Relating to frogs and toads.
5. The 22nd letter of the Greek alphabet.
6. A soft yellow malleable ductile (trivalent and univalent) metallic element.
7. (Norse mythology) God of light and peace and noted for his beauty and sweet nature.
8. (Scottish) Bluish-black or gray-blue.
9. Strike with disgust or revulsion.
10. Any of various spectacular plants of the genus Laelia having showy flowers in many colors.
11. Aromatic bulb used as seasoning.
12. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
13. A fraudulent business scheme.
14. God of love and erotic desire.
22. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
23. Pertaining to animals or animal life or action.
25. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
26. Make circular welds.
28. Lacking sufficient water or rainfall.
30. A chain of connected ideas or passages or objects so arranged that each member is closely related to the preceding and following members (especially a series of patristic comments elucidating Christian dogma).
33. Evergreen tree of eastern Asia and Philippines having large leathery leaves and small green-white flowers in compact cymes.
34. Frogs, toads, tree toads.
35. Moth having nonfunctional mouthparts as adults.
37. An extended area of land.
38. Small buffalo of the Celebes having small straight horns.
41. One of 7 to 12 sons of Aditi.
42. A tiny or scarcely detectable amount.
43. Fleshy spore-bearing inner mass of e.g. a puffball or stinkhorn.
47. A policy of the Soviet government allowing freer discussion of social problems.
48. Praise, glorify, or honor.
49. Pertaining to one of the small sacs (as in a compound gland).
52. Drug (trade name Isordil) used to treat angina pectoris and congestive heart failure.
55. Force or compel somebody to do something.
57. Stout-bodied insect with large membranous wings.
60. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
61. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
63. A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
64. Cheap showy jewelry or ornament or clothing.
65. An inactive volcano in Sicily.
69. A small piece of cloth.
70. Airtight sealed metal container for food or drink or paint etc.
71. Of or relating to or characteristic of Thailand of its people.
75. Unknown god.

Yesterday's Solution

Grid for Yesterday's Solution crossword puzzle with filled-in letters.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today you might want to concentrate on one of your private projects for which you have a lot of passion, Aries. If one of your family members keeps you from working on this project, explain just how important this is for you. Usually you work very hard, so you deserve to do whatever you want to do in your off time. Just try to be tactful! They will understand!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Memories from the distant past, perhaps as far back as early childhood, could keep popping into your conscious mind today, Taurus. You may feel really silly, crying over a fairy tale your grandmother read to you when you were five years old, but as embarrassing as this can be, it's actually a positive form of release. Old pain from the past, even as inane as this, can actually limit you in your current situation. Let it go and learn from the process.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

An object that you treasure, perhaps a family heirloom, could be missing, Gemini. Don't panic. It's probably somewhere in the house, although it may have slipped behind something or had a pile of other stuff put on top of it. At any rate, it's among other objects. Searching too much, however, could make it more elusive than it should be. Keep looking when you have time and the item will probably turn up in a very strange place!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today you might play detective, Cancer. Something or someone, perhaps a pet, has gone missing in your neighborhood and you'll be out there leading the charge. The object of your search could prove elusive, but will probably turn up none the worse for wear. The only caution: when searching, don't look too far afield. Whatever you seek is probably no more than a block or two from you. Stay close to home and all should be well.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Worries about money that plague you today could well be misplaced, Leo. To all appearances, the financial road might temporarily get a little rough, but probably all is not as dire as it seems. Let go of your panic for a moment and sit down and actually go over your figures. You'll probably find that some careful budgeting and a little belt tightening are all that are needed to get you through. You can do it.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Rational thought gets muddled today as everything seems to be happening to you at once, Virgo. Everyone wants your advice, lots of people need favors, and those in authority have new tasks for you. Stay calm and don't react by getting short with people. Play triage officer and help those in the most need first. Warn the others you might not get to them. This way you won't make yourself crazy. Hang in there!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

A strange communication could come from a person who doesn't leave a name and whose voice you don't recognize, Libra. It might, however, sound important and therefore could bother you throughout the afternoon. How can you return a call when you don't know who the person is? Don't make yourself crazy. This isn't worth agonizing over. If it's important, the person will call back. Remember that as you move through the day.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This is not the day to do in-depth research of any kind, Scorpio, whether it's an intellectual subject or how to put together a new computer system. Your mind is not as focused as it usually is, and it might temporarily be difficult for you to grasp new concepts that you've never encountered before. This is no reflection on your intelligence, just one of those vague days we all have. By tomorrow, all should be normal again.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A friend you've known for years might suddenly shock you by saying some unkind things that you would never have expected of him or her, Sagittarius. If they're said about you, you might be very upset because it isn't fair or justified! Sometimes it's hard to forgive these things, but make the effort. Your friend is going through some rough times that you may not know about. Try to put yourself in the other's shoes. Forgive and forget.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Have you just recently reached a cherished goal, Capricorn? If so, you might temporarily be confused as to what you're going to pursue in the future. You may be toying with a number of options but not be sure which one is right for you. Perhaps it's none of them. Maybe your perfect goal is still over the horizon. Don't feel you have to get started on something right away. Be patient and have faith.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You might be introduced to a new colleague, Aquarius. Don't be surprised if this person makes your flesh crawl. This could be a warning signal or it could simply mean that this person is absolutely terrified and therefore acting defensive. Don't jump to any conclusions about this person until you get to know him or her better. Remember, always give others the benefit of the doubt whenever possible.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Perhaps it's best if you stay away from your current love partner today, Pisces. Your friend is having some very draining hassles with family and on the job and won't be in the best of moods. If the two of you get together, you might find your partner in a surly and uncommunicative mood, and you might be the recipient of some unkind words. Either be prepared to deal with it or do something else tonight.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Treasure Island

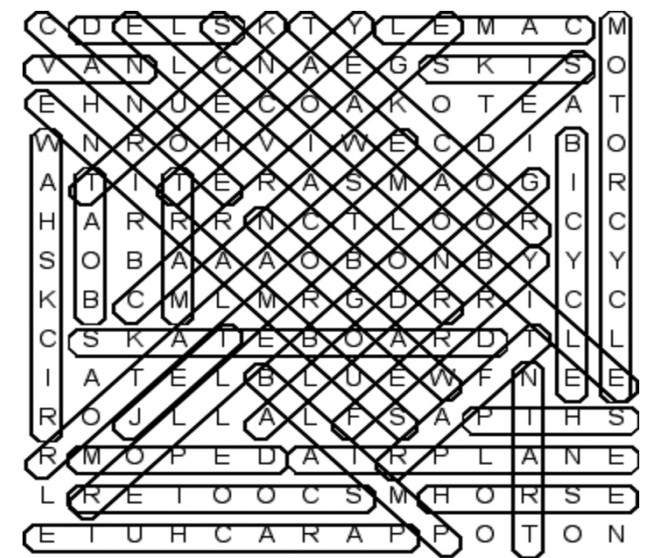
Find and circle all of the words and names from the book Treasure Island. The remaining 46 letters spell a secret message.

MUSKETTELLLOMSNIATPACT
THEBLACKSPOTRNEMAESSL
EASCURCOSSNONNACLEQIT
CISSAHREVIAATSAOCOUAOL
AIACENTELEALNDAWISRAR
BSSSHANFVBDWGSRRNRBIE
IRTSRONOELMMHYETAUKT
NATIEIONNEIOUPTPPRCOS
BEPNAAAGNNBRSTASSUCOA
OLSTLUFOEDAEENPIBISABM
YHPNNOTADRLLPHSNHANGR
YARNIETRRABLLLEOOYEEOE
CNBCKLKSWEENSJRTRFLT
IDSEUIWNIWNOSHIPGTRLR
OSKSVTEAAPBGMAROONEDA
WSLEAYLRHYOSURLAWUOIU
SESAEPRALMWGUINEASSLOQ
TERPNEMLSEIREGORYLLOJ
YVACLIDIOESNJGODKCALBN
HCAEBBSOCCNJBURIEDGOLD

- ADMIRAL BENBOW INN
APPLE BARREL
ASHORE
BEACH
BEN GUNN
BILLY BONES
BLACK DOG
BUCCANEER
BURIED GOLD
CABIN BOY
CANNON BALLS
CANNONS
CAPE
CAPTAIN FLINT
CAPTAIN SMOLLETT
CHEST
COAST
COMPASS
COVE
CREW
CUTLASS
DR. LIVESY
GUINEAS
HISPANIOLA
ISLAND
ISRAEL HANDS
JIM HAWKINS
JOLLY ROGER
LOGBOOK
LONG JOHN SILVER
MAROONED
MUSKET
CREW
MUTINY
PARROT
PIRATES
PISTOL
QUARTERMASTER
SAIL
SCHOONER
SEAPARING
SEAMEN
SHIP
SKELETON
SPY-GLASS
SQUIRE TRELAWNEY
THE BLACK SPOT
TREASURE
WALKUS

Yesterday's Solution

Transportation



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

The hidden transportation method is: HOT AIR BALLOON

Daily SuDoku

4x4 grid for Daily SuDoku with numbers 4, 9, 8, 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 5, 3, 6, 8, 5, 4, 7, 6, 4, 9, 4, 7, 1, 5, 8, 4, 9.

hard

Yesterday's Solution

9x9 grid for Yesterday's Solution SuDoku with numbers 9, 2, 3, 4, 7, 5, 8, 1, 6, 4, 1, 5, 9, 8, 6, 3, 2, 7, 7, 8, 6, 2, 1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 5, 7, 4, 8, 6, 2, 9, 3, 1, 2, 6, 8, 1, 3, 9, 7, 4, 5, 1, 3, 9, 7, 5, 4, 6, 8, 2, 8, 5, 1, 3, 9, 7, 2, 6, 4, 6, 4, 7, 5, 2, 8, 1, 9, 3, 3, 9, 2, 6, 4, 1, 5, 7, 8.

easy

Lifestyle

MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 2020



In this file photo taken on March 31, 1968, the Onitsha bridge, one of the most important communication pathways of West Africa, is destroyed by Biafran Forces on the Niger River at Onitsha in southeastern Nigeria. — AFP photos

50 yrs on, Nigeria struggles with memory of Biafra war



In this file photo taken on Oct 24, 1967, British and American nationals arrive by boat in Lobe, Cameroon, after their evacuation from Calabar after the Nigerian federal army took the city.



In this file photo taken on Aug 16, 1967, Colonel Odumegwu Emeka Ojukwu, the leader of the breakaway Republic of Biafra, stands in front of a Biafra flag as he addresses a press conference in Enugu.



In this file photo taken on Nov 1, 1967, Nigerian federal troops man the Nine-mile Corner checkpoint in Enugu, former capital of the short-lived nation of the Republic of Biafra, after it was captured by Nigerian troops on Sept 28, 1967.



In this file photo taken on Nov 13, 1967, a Nigerian federal army soldier points to a sign in Calabar, the oldest port on the West African coast, after federal troops took the city.

Dikoye Oyeiyinka, 33, has been billed as one of the most promising Nigerian writers of his generation. He went to some of the finest schools in his West African homeland but says that like the majority of his classmates he "didn't know about Biafra until I was 14". When he did begin to find out about the brutal civil war that nearly tore Nigeria apart, it was not in the classroom. Instead it was a schoolmate in his dormitory who showed him a separatist leaflet demanding Nigeria's southeast break away from the rest of the country.

Before then Oyeiyinka had known nothing about how leaders from the Igbo ethnic group declared the independent state of Biafra in 1967. He knew nothing of the conflict that resulted and the 30 months of fighting and famine estimated to have cost over a million lives before the secessionists surrendered 50 years ago in Jan 1970. "We've had a very brutal history, the older generation went through a lot of trauma," Oyeiyinka told AFP. "We just sweep it under the carpet, pretending nothing happened. But without knowing our history we will repeat the same mistakes. Our history is a succession of deja-vu."

It was to try to break this cycle of ignorance that the Oyeiyinka wrote the novel *Stillborn* - a historic epic about Nigeria from the days of British colonial rule in 1950 to 2010. In it the civil war is the pivotal event.

'Our history, our conflict'

Unlike other famed Nigerian writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, with her novel *Half Of A Yellow Sun*, or Chinua Achebe's memoir *There Was A Country*, Oyeiyinka is one of the few non-Igbo writers to have dwelt on the conflict. "An Igbo friend got angry at me and said 'You can't write about us, it's our conflict,'" he recounted. But Oyeiyinka insists that all Nigerians need to be made aware of what happened. "We need to address these traumas ourselves, as a country, otherwise we are a tinder box ready to explode."

While in the rest of Africa's most populous nation many know little about the history of Biafra, in the former capital of the self-proclaimed state at Enugu the memory of those years lives on. Biafran flags - an iconic red, black and green with a rising golden sun - make appearances on the front of buildings and hardline separatists still demand independence. The security forces - deployed heavily in the region - are quick to stamp out any clamor for a new Biafra.

At the end of the war in 1970, Nigeria's war leader Yakubu Gowon famously declared there would be "no victor, no vanquished" as he sought to reunite his shattered country. The leader of the breakaway Republic of Biafra,



In this file photo taken on July 24, 1967, European families wait for their evacuation by boat in Port Harcourt during the Biafran war.



In this file photo taken on Jan 19, 1970, Nigerian leader General Yakubu Gowon (right) welcomes United Nations Secretary General U Thant (left) at Ikeja airport after he arrived to hold talks over the continuing Biafran refugee crisis unfolding during the Biafra war.

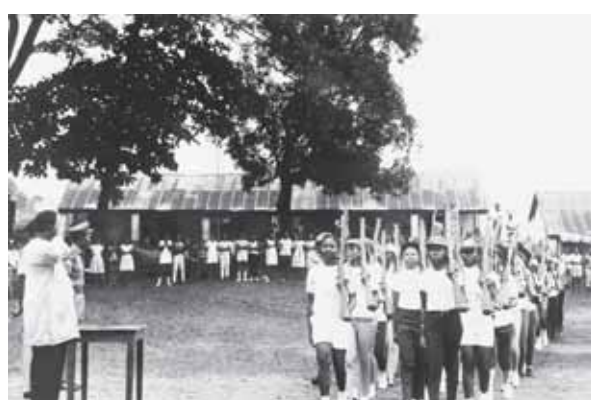
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, went into exile for 13 years before being pardoned. He returned to Nigerian politics but was detained for 10 months in prison. Leading Nigerian intellectual Pat Utomi says that many Igbos - the country's third biggest ethnic group after the Hausa and the Yoruba - still feel marginalized.

One key event was when current President Muhammadu Buhari - then a military chief - seized power in 1983, and stopped the only Igbo aspirant to get close to leading Nigeria since the war from becoming head of state. "In the early 1980's, people had forgotten about the war, but this succession of poor leadership brought bitterness among the new generations," Utomi said.

'More divided'

Nowadays any incident - from the closure of the only airport in the southeast last year to the sacking of Igbo shops by customs officials in economic hub Lagos - can cause grievances to flare. "It's important to deal with history, to write it down. In Nigeria, we try to cover it up," Utomi said. "We are more divided today than we've ever been before the civil war. We learnt nothing from it."

In order to try to heal the rifts Utomi helped organize a "Never Again" conference aiming to bring together key cultural and political figures to discuss the lessons of the Biafra war half a century after it ended. He is also a patron of the "Centre for Memories" in Enugu, a combination of a museum and library where visitors can come and "dig into history".



In this file photo taken on Aug 17, 1967, young militia women of the civil defense parade during military training in Enugu, capital of the new Republic of Biafra, during the Biafran war.



In this file photo taken on Nov 16, 1967, Nigerian federal army soldiers patrol near the destroyed prison of Calabar, the oldest port on the West African coast, which they took from Biafran rebels during the Biafran war.

'History is essential'

History itself has been absent from Nigerian schools. The current government reintroduced it only from last term as an obligatory subject for pupils aged 10 to 13, after more than a decade off the curriculum. "Teaching history is essential to build our identity as a country, and defend our patriotic values," said Sonny Echono, permanent secretary at the education ministry.

But schools still remain woefully short of qualified history teachers and there is no unified narrative about the civil war which does not figure in the lessons. "We need to teach the war in our schools," said Egodu Uchendu, a history professor at University of Nsukka, in the former Biafra territory. "Eastern Nigeria is completely different from how it was experienced in other parts of the country. We need to bring in the different angles to it."

Chika Oduah, a Nigerian-American journalist, has crossed the country to collect hundreds of testimonies of the victims and combatants of the Biafra conflict which she publishes on her website *Biafran War Memories*. She says that for many of those she interviewed it was the first time they had retold the horrors of the period. "A 70-something former soldier... broke down crying, when he told me how he lost his brother during the war," she said.

She herself only learnt at the age of 17 that her mother as a child spent two years in a camp for displaced people. "Our parents wanted to move on, not look at the past," Oduah insisted. "But we need to talk about it, otherwise we won't heal". — AFP



In this file photo taken on Oct 28, 1967, Nigerian federal army soldiers survey a police checkpoint on the west bank of the Niger River at Asaba, from where they launched an amphibian offensive on Biafra.



This photo taken on Wednesday shows Kiahna Bellchambers and her brother Jesse Bellchambers looking for belongings amongst the ruins of their house destroyed during bushfires in Batlow, in Australia's New South Wales state. — AFP photos



This photo taken on Jan 8, 2020 shows a firefighter in Batlow.



Dead cattle are seen on a farm after bushfires in Batlow.

Fire-hit Australian farmers vow to rise from the ashes



Animals are seen on a farm that survived bushfires in Batlow.

Steve Bellchambers is digging pits to bury the carcasses of livestock killed by bushfires which swept through his farm in Batlow, New South Wales. He is one of several dozen residents who remained in the southeastern Australian town to protect his animals as authorities urged everyone to leave last week, calling the place "undefendable". Bellchambers lost his home and many of his animals - some he was forced to shoot to end their suffering from burns. He did manage to save some horses, however. "The smell is ingrained in your memory," he told AFP.

Australia's months-long bushfire disaster has scorched more than eight million hectares (80,000 sq km) of land - an area about the size of Ireland or South Carolina. The fires are another blow for farmers already reeling from a crippling drought that has turned agricultural land bone dry. Across the country, tens of thousands of livestock are thought to have perished.

Bellchambers, a 45-year-old father-of-

four, said the 1,000-strong local community in Batlow had vowed to pull together. "Just because people aren't crying, doesn't mean they are not bleeding inside," he said. "A lot of people are running on adrenalin. They have to keep moving because once they stop, it will hit them." Stephenie Bailey watched in horror from afar as massive firestorms destroyed parts of her orchard. She returned to find her home reduced to twisted metal and charred remains.

Sparked anger

Standing beside a patch of scorched, smoldering earth, the air thick with smoke, the 64-year-old physiotherapist expressed shock at the destruction. "How will I ever feel truly safe again?" a tearful Bailey asked AFP. "Your vulnerability is exposed. We were just naked in the face of these demonic fires. But we will pull through... we are going to rebuild."

Nationwide, the bushfires have killed 26 people, destroyed more than 2,000 homes

and sparked anger in affected communities at the response by authorities. Rallies are planned for Friday calling on the government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison to step up efforts to tackle climate change, which experts say has helped fuel the blazes by increasing the length and intensity of Australia's fire season.

Batlow - a gateway town to the Australian Alps - is known for its fruit orchards and soaring pine plantations. Farmer John Garner, 68, said he has hardly slept in recent weeks as he battled around-the-clock to keep his cattle alive. He was not sure how much longer he could live on the land in light of the devastation, but said he was determined to press on. "It's very stressful. Everything you pick up is black. Can't do anything 'cos it's all black. It's a mess," he told AFP. "But I'm going to try and stay and hang on. We've got to try and feed the country somehow." — AFP

Drought ignites human-wildlife conflict in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean villager Dumisani Khumalo appeared to be in pain as he walked gingerly towards a chair under the shade of a tree near his one-room brick shack. The 45-year-old was attacked by a buffalo days earlier, and he was lucky to be on his feet. Wild animals in Zimbabwe were responsible for the deaths of at least 36 people in 2019, up from 20 in the previous year. "I thank God that I survived the attack," said Khumalo with a laugh, making light of the fact that the buffalo almost ripped off his genitals.

Authorities recorded 311 animal attacks on people last year, up from 195 in 2018. The attacks have been blamed on a devastating drought in Zimbabwe which has seen hungry animals breaking out of game reserves, raiding human settlements in search of food and water. "The cases include attacks on humans, their livestock and crops," said national parks spokesman Tinashe Farawo. He said elephants caused most fatalities, while hippos, buffalos, lions, hyenas and crocodile also contributed to the toll.

Hwange National Park, which is half the size of Belgium, is Zimbabwe's largest game park and is situated next to the famed Victoria Falls. The park is not fenced off. Animals breach the buffer and "cross over to look for water and food as there is little or none left in the forest area," Farawo said.

Starving animals

Khumalo vividly remembers the attack. He was walking in a forest near his Ndlovu-Kachechete village to register for food aid, when he heard dogs barking. Suddenly a buffalo emerged from the bush and charged, hitting him in the chest and tossing him to the ground. It went for his groin and used its horn to rip off part of the skin around his penis. Khumalo grabbed the buffalo's leg, kicked it in the eye and it scampered off.

Villagers in Zimbabwe's wildlife-rich but parched northwestern region are frequently fighting off desperately hungry game. More than 200 elephants starved to death over three months last year. Despite suspecting that Khumalo was hunting illegally when he was attacked, Phindile Ncube,



In this file photo taken on Nov 12, 2019, a hippo is stuck in the mud at a drying watering hole in Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. — AFP photos

CEO of Hwange Rural District Council admitted that wild animals are killing people and that the drought has worsened things. "Wild animals cross into human-inhabited areas in search of water as ... sources of drinking water dry up in the forest," said Ncube.

He described an incident that took place a few weeks earlier, during which elephants killed two cows at a domestic water well. Armed scouts have been put on standby to respond to distress calls from villagers. But it was while responding to one such call that the scouts inadvertently shot dead a

61-year-old woman in Mbizha village, close to Khumalo's. "As they tried to chase them off one (elephant) charged at them and a scout shot at it. He missed, and the stray bullet hit and killed Irene Musaka, who was sitting by a fire outside her hut almost a mile away."

Chilli cake repellent

Locals are encouraged to play their part to scare off animals. One way is to beat drums. But the impact is limited. "Animals, such as elephants get used to the noise and know it... won't hurt them, so it does not deter them in the long term," said George Mapuvire, director of Bio-Hub Trust, a charity that trains people to respond to animal attacks. Bio-Hub Trust advocates for a "soft approach" that encourages peaceful co-existence between humans and wildlife.

Mapuvire suggested burning homemade hot chilli cakes to repel wildlife. "You mix chilli powder with cow or elephant dung and shape it into bricks, once the bricks dry, you can burn them when elephants are approaching. They can't stand the smell!"

Villagers have created an elephant alarm system by tying strings of empty tin cans to trees and poles. When the cans click, they know an elephant is approaching and they light chilli cakes to keep it away. Another way of keeping elephants at bay is the chilli gun, a plastic contraption loaded with ping-pong balls injected with chilli oil. "When it hits an elephant, it disintegrates, splashing the animal with the chilli oil," Mapuvire explained. — AFP



In this file photo taken on Nov 12, 2019, an aerial photograph shows fish flipping in the mud at a drying watering hole in the Hwange National Park.



In this file photo taken on Nov 12, 2019, the carcass of an elephant that succumbed to drought in Hwange National Park is seen.

Dsquared2 kick off Milan men's fashion week to Sister Sledge



Models present creations for Salvatore Ferragamo as part of the men's fall/winter 2020/21 fashion collections in Milan yesterday. — AFP photos



Models present creations for MSGM.

Dsquared2's Canadian twins Dean and Dann Catten kicked off Milan men's fashion week Friday with their label celebrating its 25th anniversary with a return to its rugged leather and denim DNA and an appearance by disco divas Sister Sledge. Milan Fashion Week, which takes over from London, ends tomorrow with heavyweight Gucci before Paris starts.

Sister Sledge sang their 1979 disco anthem "We Are Family" as a photo retrospective paid tribute to the work of the Catten brothers, who count Ronaldo and Beyonce among their fans. Their show tapped a Canadian backwoods vibe, with models dressed like cowboys and girls in flannel plaid shirts and jackets paired with jeans or leather pants. The women wore mini-shorts or ultra-short corseted dress-

es, with pumps and stockings rising to the knee. Others wore oversize knitwear along with fur and leather.

Also on show, Ermenegildo Zegna presented a functional collection of elegant suits in muted tones along with stylish berets and chunky bomber jackets. The models paraded through thousands of hanging ribbons from scrap Zegna fabrics, an installation by artist Anne Patterson reflecting the brand's commitment to more sustainable development. "Fifty percent of this collection is made from recycled fabrics," Zegna's artistic director Alessandro Sartori told AFP.

During this Fashion Week, 77 collections for the fall-winter 2020-21 season will be presented, including 26 by fashion shows, compared to 52 in Jan 2018. Gucci, Salvatore Ferragamo and No. 21, who for several seasons had opted for mixed parades during Women's Week, decided to organize separate shows again and return to the men's calendar. Instead of ending today evening, Milan will extend the festivities until tomorrow noon.

"The separate fashion shows and

the longer week bear witness to the fact that the world of men's clothing and accessories is growing," Stefania Saviolo, director of the fashion center at Bocconi University in Milan, told AFP, and consequently "needs more visibility". She suggested the sector has seen the emergence and development of new brands against a background of innovation, which has seen designers use elements of formal clothing to inspire increasingly popular informal items, such as street and sportswear, down jackets, sneakers and technical clothing.

According to Euromonitor International, global turnover for men's fashion rose 4.5 percent in 2019, slightly more than women's fashion, which was up 4.3 percent. Among the other heavyweights present during Fashion Week are Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, who as usual show outside the calendar, Fendi and Prada, who return after a stopover in Shanghai. Against the trend, Versace will be absent, having opted for a mixed fashion show in February during Women's Week. — AFP



Models present creations for Prada.



Models present creations for Dolce & Gabbana.



Models present creations for Emporio Armani.



Models present creations for Dsquared2.

Models present creations for Ermenegildo Zegna.



In this file photo taken on May 18, 2019, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, leave St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle, west of London, after the wedding of Lady Gabriella Windsor and Thomas Kingston. — AFP

Queen, Prince Harry, senior royals set for crisis meeting

Queen Elizabeth II will host a showdown meeting with Prince Harry today in an attempt to solve the crisis triggered by his bombshell announcement that he and wife Meghan were stepping back from the royal frontline. Other senior royals including Harry's father Prince Charles and brother Prince William, with whom he has strained relations, will join the monarch at her private Sandringham estate in eastern England, according to British media.

Meghan will join the meeting via conference call from Canada as they attempt to work out the "next steps" towards a compromise and nip the growing crisis in the bud. Issues up for debate include how much money the couple will still receive from Charles's estate, their royal titles and what commercial deals they can strike, according to the Sunday Times. The newspaper reported that William believes he and Harry are now "separate entities", breaking the bonds forged following their mother's tragic death.

"I've put my arm around my brother all our lives and I

can't do that anymore; we're separate entities," the Times reported he told a friend. Harry, Meghan and son Archie spent Christmas in Canada, with the American former actress returning there this week. The Queen on Thursday demanded that staff work with the couple to find urgently a "workable solution" that would take into account their demands for more freedom.

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 Duke and Duchess of Sussex wanted to seek a "progressive new role" and divide their time between Britain and North America.

'Toxic mix'

The Queen's office issued a terse statement the same evening, saying there were "complicated issues that will take time to work through". 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 their desire to live as both members of the monarchy and private individuals making a living was described as a "toxic mix" by David McClure, an investigator into royal finances. "The history of senior royals making money - the two is a toxic mix. It hasn't worked well in the past," he told the Press Association. "How can you be half-in, half-out - half the week perform public duties and the other half earn your own income with TV, lectures, books? It is fraught with dangers."

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. The British public currently appears to be siding with the family, with a Daily Mail poll showing that a majority believe Harry should give up his right to the throne and be stripped of cash support from the royals or taxpayer. — AFP

Spirit world: Voodoo makes a comeback in its Benin home



Voodoo devotees parade on the main boulevard of Porto-novo in Benin on Saturday. — AFP photos



In his long life, voodoo priest Kpohinto Medji has seen his religion flourish and then go into decline, banned for years by the authorities and pressured by other faiths. Today, the ageing priest with mischievous eyes is somewhat happier. Benin is gearing for its annual voodoo festival - an event that lures an influx of visitors to the capital Porto-Novo and underscores voodoo's comeback in the country of its birth.

Houngo Houngo Square is among a number of squares, once owned by voodoo-worshipping families, that are being renovated. Painters have been putting the finishing touches to its ochre walls ahead of the January 10 festival, and fetishes and tokens of the old religion are proudly on display. "Before, it was a run-down, abandoned square," the old priest said, speaking in the local language of Goun. "Today, it's lovely."

Voodoo, more often called "vodun" in West Africa, has a hierarchy of deities and tribal spirits of nature and sees revered ancestors living alongside the living. It uses fetishes, magical practices and healing remedies, which followers consider to be divine. But its rituals have often been distorted by Hollywood, which tends to stereotype the religion as a source of black magic.

Years of decline

In Benin itself, voodoo was battered by French colonization, when it was demonized by Catholic missionaries. A dozen years after Benin gained independence, voodoo was banned by Mathieu Kerekou, a Marxist-Leninist who came to power in a military coup. His elected successor, Nicephore Soglo, lifted the ban, but the religion came under pressure once more with the spread of evangelism in West Africa, whose preachers often compare native religions with sorcery.

According to the latest available official figures, which date from 2013, practitioners of voodoo, who are called vodouns, account for just 11 percent of Benin's population, against nearly 30 percent Muslim and 25 percent Christian. "There are so many religions which have arrived in Benin, they have turned our brothers away from our faith," said Raymond Zannou, a printer. He ancestors built Houngbo Houngbo Square. Today, "a minority of people take care of maintaining the squares, and often they are elderly," he said.

City of squares

Porto-Novo, a city of about a quarter of a million people, originally developed as a port for slave trade under the Portuguese empire in the 17th century. Its squares - 44, according to Gerard Bassale, head of a local cultural association called Ouadada - are one of its most distinctive features. Many of them belong to local families, who built their homes there and established temples and housed their divinities as protection.

But many of them fell into sad disrepair, becoming a symbol itself of voodoo's marginalization. Many blamed squabbles within families about sharing out the cost of renovation. "They are the identity of our town. They create links between people, they are where important ceremonies take place," said Bassale, whose organization is refurbishing the squares. "If they disappeared, part of the town's history would go with them."

Restoring each square costs the equivalent of around \$66,000. The funding comes from Cergy-Pontoise, a town in the greater Paris region that has twinning links. Porto-Novo's authorities are paying for solar-powered lighting for the squares and for cleaning them, but does not maintain the voodoo shrines there, which it considers to be private areas.

Sacred tree

King Te Houeyi Migan XIV, the descendant



of a long line of local chiefs, is delighted at the rebirth of the squares. French colonizers used a forest that was sacred to his forebears to build Porto-Novo's cathedral and governor's palace. The chief, clad in a magnificent purple gown, pointed to an ancient kapok tree towering over one of three renovated squares

near the old palace. "It is a sacred tree. Spirits live there," said the king. "Every five years, we hold a great party and make sacrifices there."

Paul Nouatin, treasurer of an association that maintains two of the squares, said there had been an upturn in interest in voodoo - around 20 young people had been initiated

into the religion in December alone, he said. Mito Akplogan Guin, the supreme head of voodoo in Porto-Novo, said he was optimistic. "Catholics, Protestants, Muslims... all their ancestors (in Benin) were followers of voodoo. Our religion can't disappear in a flash." — AFP



Classifieds

Monday, January 13, 2020

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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 - 40 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 35 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING		No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 12/01/2020 0000 UTC
KUWAIT CITY	18 °C	11 °C	
KUWAIT AIRPORT	18 °C	10 °C	
ABDALY	17 °C	07 °C	
BUBYAN	17 °C	08 °C	
JAHRA	17 °C	09 °C	
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C	
SALMIYAH	16 °C	12 °C	
AHMADI	17 °C	10 °C	
NUWAISIB	19 °C	10 °C	
WAFRA	18 °C	08 °C	
SALMY	15 °C	06 °C	

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	01/13	Rather cool and some scattered clouds will appear.	18 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h
Tuesday	01/14	A significant decrease in temperature and Partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust over open	15 °C	11 °C	NW	12 - 40 km/h
Wednesday	01/15	Rather cool	18 °C	08 °C	NW	12 - 32 km/h
Thursday	01/16	Rather cool	18 °C	07 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h

Fajr	05:20
Sunrise	06:44
Zuhr	11:56
Asr	14:50
Sunset	17:09
Isha	18:30

MAX. Temp.	18 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	67 %
MIN. RH	35 %
MAX. Wind	NW 57 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

I Arackal Vareed Beena, holder of Indian Passport No. K7038262 issued at Kuwait on 12/07/2012, permanent address, Arackal House, no. 582, Kakkulissery, P.O. Thrissur, Kerala and presently residing at Kuwait do hereby change my name as Given name: Beena Vareed, Surname: Arackal.

I Padamadan Antony Jose, Father of Kevin Jose Padamadan holder of Indian Passport No. 59919434 issued at Kuwait on 21/10/2018, Permanent address of Padamadan House, Pallikunnu, Varandarappilly P.O, Thrissur District, Kerala - 680303, India. Presently residing at Kuwait do hereby change as follows: Given name: Kevin Jose, Surname: Padamadan.

I Padamadan Antony Jose, holder of Indian Passport No. P7115988 issued at Kuwait on 02/01/2017, Permanent address of Padamadan House, Pallikunnu, Varandarappilly P.O, Thrissur District, Kerala - 680303, India. Presently residing at Kuwait do hereby change as follows: Given name: Jose Antony, Surname: Padamadan. (C 5605)

I Abdullah S/o Abdullah Tanwar holder of Indian Passport No. M1802552 & Civil ID No. 293011803513 has changed my name from Abdullah to Abdullah (given name) Tanwar (surname) hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Abdullah Tanwar. (C 5606)

I Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan Ashraf, F/o Alameen Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan Ashraf. Residing at Ceeyam New House, Ayikara, Poovalap, Cannanore 17, Kerala, holder of Passport No: R2316678 issued at Kuwait on 26.03.17 have changed my minor son's name as Alameen Ashraf Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan.

I Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan Ashraf, F/o Ahnaf Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan Ashraf. Residing at Ceeyam New House, Ayikara, Poovalap, PO Cannanore 670017, Kerala, holder of Passport No: N1900966 issued at Kozhikode on 19.08.2015 have changed my minor son's name as Ahnaf Ashraf Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan. (C 5608)

Notice is given to general public at large that I have wholly renounce/relinquish and abandon the use of my former name i.e. Austin Fulaji Vaity (Add- Naigaon, Chrstan wadi, Vasai (W), Dist. Palghar 401207) and I hereby declare that henceforth I will be called, known and distinguished by my new name i.e. Austin Fulaji Baretto. (Gazette No. X-26640) Place- Vasai. (C 5607) 13-1-2020

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) 10-1-2020

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

I, Nasim Mohammed Ishaque Karjekar, 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: Karjekar. Objection if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, 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 22816107, 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

SHARING ACCOMMODATION

Sharing accommodation for Filipino ONLY Farwaniya block 4, near Big Jamia, available on December 25, Contact 55571873. 10-1-2020

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

EMERGENCY 112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is
1889988

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

Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Airlines	Arrival Flights on Monday 13/1/2020	Time	Airlines	Departure Flights on Monday 13/1/2020	Time
PIA	239 Sialkot	00:05	ZJR	215 Jeddah	00:05
IGO	1757 Kochi	00:10	AIC	982 Ahmedabad/Chennai	00:05
AIC	989 Mumbai	00:10	MSC	412 Asyut	00:15
JZR	716 Sohar	00:35	QTR	1093 Doha	00:25
JZR	254 Amman	00:45	FDB	072 Doha	00:35
JZR	734 Cairo	00:50	PIA	240 Sialkot	01:05
THY	772 Istanbul	00:50	AIC	990 Mumbai	01:10
PGT	858 Istanbul	00:55	IGO	1758 Kochi	01:10
KAC	102 London	00:55	JZR	111 Doha	01:55
KAC	504 Beirut	01:05	KAC	363 Colombo	02:00
DLH	625 Dammam	01:30	KAC	285 Dhaka	02:00
RJA	642 Amman	01:40	PGT	859 Istanbul	02:00
THY	764 Istanbul	01:50	KAC	677 Dubai	02:10
IGO	1759 Delhi	01:55	THY	773 Istanbul	02:20
JZR	722 Alexandria	01:55	JZR	119 Dubai	02:25
UAE	853 Dubai	02:15	KAC	417 Manila	02:30
ETH	620 Addis Ababa	02:15	DLH	625 Frankfurt	02:30
KLM	446 Bahrain	02:30	IGO	1765 Delhi	02:55
GFA	211 Bahrain	02:30	ETH	621 Addis Ababa	03:05
QTR	1086 Doha	02:40	UAE	854 Dubai	03:40
OMA	643 Muscat	02:55	KLM	446 Amsterdam	03:55
ETD	305 Abu Dhabi	03:10	THY	765 Istanbul	04:00
MSR	612 Cairo	03:15	QTR	1087 Doha	04:00
QTR	1076 Doha	04:00	OMA	644 Muscat	04:00
IGO	1751 Chennai	04:10	ETD	306 Abu Dhabi	04:00
KAC	418 Manila	04:25	MSR	613 Cairo	04:15
OHY	352 Istanbul	04:30	KAC	621 Doha	04:20
KAC	302 Mumbai	04:40	JZR	707 Luxor	04:40
JZR	702 Asyut	04:50	IGO	1752 Chennai	05:10
FDB	069 Dubai	05:00	QTR	1077 Doha	05:30
DHX	170 Bahrain	05:10	OHY	351 Istanbul	05:30
JZR	404 Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	101 Bahrain	05:50
KAC	358 Kochi	05:10	THY	771 Istanbul	06:25
KAC	784 Jeddah	05:20	JZR	121 Dubai	06:35
KAC	382 Delhi	05:20	JZR	113 Doha	06:40
THY	770 Istanbul	05:25	RJA	643 Amman	06:55
JZR	654 OSS	05:25	FDB	070 Doha	07:05
JZR	112 Doha	05:35	GFA	212 Bahrain	07:15
JZR	502 Lahore	05:35	UAE	874 Dubai	07:15
KAC	346 Ahmedabad	05:45	KAC	413 Bangkok	07:30
UAE	873 Dubai	05:50	KAC	167 Paris	07:35
JZR	216 Jeddah	05:50	RBG	214 Sohar	07:50
KAC	284 Dhaka	05:55	IGO	1767 Mumbai	08:10
JZR	402 Mumbai	06:05	KAC	173 Munich	08:20
KAC	344 Chennai	06:10	FDB	054 Dubai	08:35
KAC	544 Cairo	07:00	JZR	001 LGW	08:40
BAW	157 London	07:05	KAC	787 Jeddah	09:00
KAC	678 Dubai	07:05	KAC	501 Beirut	09:00
RBG	213 Sohar	07:10	JZR	539 Jeddah	09:05
IGO	1766 Mumbai	07:10	JZR	731 Cairo	09:10
KAC	204 Lahore	07:15	BAW	156 London	09:10
JZR	120 Dubai	07:35	KAC	545 Cairo	09:30
FDB	053 Dubai	07:50	QTR	1085 Doha	09:30
QTR	1084 Doha	08:00	KAC	671 Dubai	09:35
KAC	354 Bengaluru	08:25	KAC	101 London	09:45
KAC	622 Doha	08:30	KAC	561 Amman	09:45
UAE	855 Dubai	08:35	ABY	126 Sharjah	09:45
ETD	301 Abu Dhabi	08:55	JZR	151 Mashhad	09:55
JZR	102 Bahrain	08:55	ETD	302 Abu Dhabi	09:55
IRA	667 Esfahan	09:00	KAC	751 ELQ	10:00
KAC	334 Trivandrum	09:00	KAC	117 New York	10:00
ABY	125 Sharjah	09:05	UAE	856 Dubai	10:00
KAC	384 Delhi	09:30	IRA	666 Esfahan	10:00
KAC	304 Mumbai	09:30	KAC	613 Bahrain	10:05
IGO	1753 Ahmedabad	09:40	JZR	301 Istanbul	10:05
FDB	055 Dubai	09:40	KAC	773 Riyadh	10:15
QTR	8511 Doha	09:40	KAC	155 Istanbul	10:20
QTR	1070 Doha	09:45	KAC	617 Doha	10:35
JZR	114 Doha	10:20	FDB	056 Dubai	10:35
GFA	213 Bahrain	10:40	JZR	211 Jeddah	10:40
AXB	395 Kozhikode	10:50	QTR	1071 Ahmedabad	11:00
JZR	708 Luxor	10:55	KAC	741 Dammam	11:05
AXB	889 Mangalore/Bahrain	11:10	JZR	305 Istanbul	11:10
JZR	122 Dubai	11:15	QTR	8512 Doha	11:25
QTR	1074 Doha	11:35	GFA	214 Bahrain	11:25
KAC	352 Kochi	11:35	AXB	396 Kozhikode	11:50
MEA	404 Beirut	11:55	JZR	221 Riyadh	12:00
MSR	610 Cairo	12:25	JZR	213 Jeddah	12:00
UAE	871 Dubai	12:50	KAC	515 Tehran	12:10
QTR	1078 Doha	13:35			
KAC	614 Bahrain	13:50			



Kashmiri farmers carry radish on boats on Dal Lake during snowfall in Srinagar. — AFP

Indian police officer arrested for helping Kashmir militants

SRINAGAR: A decorated Indian officer has been arrested for helping to transport rebel militants in Kashmir, the police chief of the restive and highly-militarized Himalayan province said yesterday. Deputy superintendent Davinder Singh had worked for the police for decades and was a member of an elite counter-insurgency force in the disputed territory, which both India and Pakistan claim in full.

He was apprehended late on Saturday when his vehicle was pulled over at a police checkpoint south of Srinagar, the region's main city. "The fast moving car was stopped and searched. Two wanted militants and our officer... and a third person were arrested in the operation," Kashmir police chief Vijay Kumar told reporters.

Kumar said police and intelligence agencies were

questioning Singh, accusing the officer of a "heinous crime". Security forces recovered guns and ammunition from several locations in the follow up to the arrests, including from Singh's residence in Srinagar. Hours after the four men were detained, police killed three alleged rebels during a gunfight in southern Kashmir's Tral district, where the arrested militants were based.

One of those arrested was Naveed Baba, the deputy commander of the local rebel outfit Hizbul Mujahideen. Baba had stolen four assault rifles and deserted the police force to join the militant group in 2017, according to police. Singh had risen steadily through the ranks of the Kashmir security apparatus during his career and was last year awarded a medal by the Indian president for his service. But years earlier he was accused of forc-

ing a man to help armed militants travel to New Delhi in a deadly attack on the Indian parliament in 2001.

Twelve people including five attackers were killed in the attack, which India blamed on Pakistan-based militant groups - prompting a months-long military stand-off that brought the two nuclear-armed countries to the brink of war. India had accused Pakistan based militant groups of launching the attack and resulted in a months-long military stand-off at the border with Pakistan before both the armies retreated under international pressure.

Singh acknowledged in 2006 he had tortured his accuser, Mohammad Afzal Guru, while he was in custody, but the claims were not taken seriously by investigators. Guru was later convicted for his part in the

attack and hanged. Kumar told yesterday's press conference that the allegations would now be revisited. "We will ask him about the attack in the interrogation," the police chief said.

Scores of militant groups in Kashmir have fought India's administration of the territory since an armed rebellion broke out more than three decades ago. Police and Indian troops are routinely accused of human rights abuses against the local population. Security across the territory has been tightened since Aug 5, when India revoked Kashmir's semi-autonomous status, arrested the region's top political leaders and imposed a security and communications blockade. Some restrictions have since been slowly eased but internet services for the public remain blocked. — AFP

Qatar, Iran agree de-escalation...

Continued from Page 1

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt all cut ties with Qatar in 2017, accusing Doha of backing extremism and being too close to Iran, charges Qatar denies.

Meanwhile, protests erupted across Iran for a second day yesterday, piling pressure on the leadership after the military admitted it had mistakenly shot down the Ukrainian airliner at a time when Tehran had feared US air strikes. "They are lying that our enemy is America, our enemy is right here," a group of protesters outside a university in Tehran chanted, according to video clips posted on Twitter.

Posts showed other demonstrators outside a second university and a group of protesters marching to Tehran's Azadi (Freedom) Square. The videos also showed protests in other cities. Some state-affiliated media carried reports of the university protests, after Saturday's demonstrations sparked by Iran's announcement that its military had mistakenly brought down the Ukrainian plane on Wednesday, killing all 176 aboard. Tehran residents told Reuters police were out in force in the capital yesterday, as public anger boiled up following days of denials by the military that it was to blame, issued even as Canada and the United States said a missile had brought the plane down. Riot police fired teargas at thousands of protesters in the capital on Saturday, where many had chanted "Death to the dictator", directing their anger at the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"Apologize and resign," Iran's moderate Etemad daily wrote in a banner headline yesterday, saying the "people's demand" was for those responsible for mishandling the plane crisis to quit. The latest upsurge in anger adds to challenges facing the authorities, which launched a bloody crackdown in November to quell protests. The leadership is also struggling to keep the crippled economy afloat under stringent US sanctions.

US President Donald Trump tweeted: "To the leaders of Iran - DO NOT KILL YOUR PROTESTERS. Thousands have already been killed or imprisoned by you, and the World is watching." The Ukraine International Airlines plane was shot down minutes after taking off from Tehran on Wednesday, when Iranian forces were on alert for US reprisals following tit-for-tat strikes. Many on board were Iranians with dual citizenship, while 57 were holders of Canadian passports.

Iran's president said it was a "disastrous mistake" and

apologized. But a top Revolutionary Guards commander added to public fury when he said he had told the authorities on the same day as the crash that an Iranian missile had struck the plane. The Guards' top commander, Hossein Salami, said "we are more upset than anyone over the incident", state media reported. Another commander said Iran did not intend to conceal the cause.

But others said Iran's enemies, a term usually used to refer to Washington and its allies, were exploiting the incident. "Iran's enemies want to take revenge on the Guards for a military mistake," said Ali Shirazi, Khamenei's representative to the Quds Force, an elite Guards unit, state media reported.

Britain said its ambassador in Iran, Rob Macaire, was briefly detained on Saturday, which Iranian media said was because he was inciting protests. Macaire tweeted yesterday that "I wasn't taking part in any demonstrations! Went to an event advertised as a vigil for victims of #PS752 tragedy". "Normal to want to pay respects - some of victims were British. I left after 5 mins, when some started chanting," he said. Iran summoned Macaire yesterday, while state-affiliated media said members of the hardline Basij militia gathered outside the mission with signs demanding the "treacherous embassy" be shut. Up to 200 protesters chanted "Death to Britain" and burned a Union Jack. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab condemned the arrest and said Iran "can continue its march towards pariah status ... or take steps to de-escalate tensions" with diplomacy.

Protests inside Iran followed a build-up of tension between Iran and the United States, which withdrew from Tehran's nuclear pact with world powers in 2018 and then toughened up sanctions. On Jan 3, a US drone strike in Iraq killed Soleimani, responsible for building up Iran's network of regional proxy armies in Iraq and beyond. Tehran responded with missile strikes on US targets in Iraq. No US soldiers were killed, but in the tense hours after that, the Ukrainian Boeing 737 was cleared to take off from Tehran airport and brought down by a missile fired by mistake.

"It is not a human error. This is a crime against humanity," the son of the toppled shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, wrote on Twitter. "Khamenei and his regime should go." In the November protests, demonstrators had chanted slogans supporting him. His father died in exile in 1980. Rallying to the establishment, Iranian lawmakers praised the elite force's commanders for courage in admitting the error, according to Fars, a news agency seen as close to the Guards, a parallel military set up to protect the theocratic system.

Iranian officials sought to portray the plane disaster as a second blow to a mourning nation after Soleimani's death in a US drone strike. The commander's funeral had prompted huge public gatherings, which the authorities described as a show of national unity. But the displays of emotion have been swiftly overshadowed and protesters on Saturday tore up pictures of the slain general. — Agencies

Philippine volcano halts Manila flights...

Continued from Page 1

A column of ash was visible in the sky above Taal and several volcanic tremors were felt within the vicinity of the volcano, which is popular among tourists for its scenic view, seismologists said.

The local disaster office said it had evacuated over 2,000 residents living on the volcanic island, which lies inside a bigger lake formed by previous volcanic activity. Solidum said officials will also order the evacuation of people living on another island nearby if the situation worsens.

Fragile truce agreed in Libya after nine...

Continued from Page 1

Sarraj stressed the GNA's "legitimate right ... to respond to any attack or aggression" that may come from the other side, while Haftar's forces warned of a "severe" response to any violation by the "opposing camp". Artillery fire could be heard shortly after midnight in the capital, before quiet settled over the southern Tripoli suburb where pro-GNA forces have been resisting Haftar's offensive.

The GNA, however, stressed that "any ceasefire initiative cannot succeed without the withdrawal of the aggressor from where they came", from the country's east and south. Turkey's defense ministry said: "The belligerents have been trying to respect these truces since they came into force... and the situation has been calm apart from one or two isolated incidents."

The truce comes after a diplomatic offensive, led by Ankara and Moscow, which have established themselves as key players in Libya. Ankara dispatched military support to the GNA in January. And Russia has been accused of backing pro-Haftar forces, which are also supported by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, all regional rivals of Turkey. Erdogan and Putin called for a truce at a meeting last

Wednesday in Istanbul, and Turkey later asked Russia to convince Haftar, who had initially vowed to fight on, to respect it.

Europe and North Africa have also launched a diplomatic offensive to try to prevent Libya, with the increased involvement of international players in its conflict, from turning into a "second Syria". European governments, also including former colonial power Italy, fear that Islamist militants and migrant smugglers, already highly active in Libya, will take further advantage of the chaos. The US embassy in Libya, in a statement Saturday, voiced its "serious concern about toxic foreign interference in the conflict".

It said "Russian mercenaries" had backed Haftar's Libyan Arab Armed Forces, while "Turkish-supported Syrian fighters" had backed the GNA, a development that had "significantly degraded security, to the detriment of all Libyans". "All responsible Libyan parties should end this dangerous escalation and reject the destructive involvement by foreign forces," the embassy said.

On Saturday, Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel at talks in Moscow threw their weight behind the Berlin conference being organized by UN special envoy Ghassan Salame that could be held in the coming weeks. Putin on Saturday again denied Russia had deployed mercenaries to Libya, saying: "If there are Russians there, they do not represent the interests of the Russian state and do not receive money from it." — AFP

Sports

Dakar Rally in mourning as Portuguese rider Paulo Goncalves dies in crash

Paulo's death cast a pall over the seventh stage action won by Carlos Sainz

WADI AD-DAWASIR: Portuguese motorbike rider Paulo Goncalves has died after a crash in the Dakar Rally yesterday, the 40-year-old becoming the gruelling motorsport marathon's 25th fatality. Goncalves suffered the fatal accident after 276 kilometres of the seventh stage from Riyadh to Wadi ad-Dawasir. "The organisers received an alert at 10:08 (0708 GMT) and dispatched a medical helicopter that reached the biker at 10:16 and found him unconscious after going into cardiac arrest," a statement on the rally's official website reported.

"Following resuscitation efforts in situ, the competitor was taken by helicopter to Layla Hospital, where he was sadly pronounced dead," it added. Dakar director David Castera revealed it was Australian defending bike champion Toby Price who was the first to discover the stricken Goncalves lying on the sand.

Goncalves was competing in his 13th edition of the Dakar. He made his debut in 2006 when it was staged in Africa, and took second to Marc Coma in 2015 in South America. "Paulo was someone who had been around for a long time, who we all knew, who was a feature of the rally," Castera said.

"So this is a very difficult time," Ignacio Casale, leading the quad standings, said that "from the moment I saw the crash, I was unable to focus. "I spent the rest of the stage thinking about it. The result doesn't really matter today."

The Indian-backed Hero Motosports rider only made it to this year's first Dakar staged in Saudi Arabia after recovering from a ruptured spleen in a crash in his native Portugal in December. Following surgery he said before the rally got underway: "It's a victory for me to be here at the start." Goncalves was

placed 46th in the overall bike standings after Friday's sixth stage.

'KNOT IN YOUR STOMACH'

His death cast a pall over the seventh stage action won by Carlos Sainz in a Mini with Joan Barreda timing fastest in the bike category. The last Dakar competitor to be killed was Polish rider Michal Hernik in 2015 in Argentina.

"The entire Dakar caravan would like to extend its sincere condolences to his friends and family," the organisers' statement said. With 20 of the 25 Dakar deaths since the inaugural edition in 1979 made up of bike riders Castera dwelt on the risks faced by riders.

"We know that bikes are dangerous. "You set off in the morning, you have a knot in your stomach sometimes because you don't have any protection, you have nothing. "They all know that, these riders," said Castera, a veteran of five Dakars on a motorbike.

Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa in an official statement said Goncalves had died "attempting to accomplish the dream of winning one of the most dangerous and toughest rallies in the world". He described him as "a highly distinguished" sporting ambassador for Portugal while Portuguese MotoGP rider Miguel Oliveira paid tribute to Goncalves' "courage and bravery". Castera said a tribute would be held for the fallen competitor on Sunday evening.

On a sombre day in the desert Sainz tightened his grip on the overall car standings with his third stage win of this year's edition. The 57-year-old Spaniard in a Mini completed the longest special between Riyadh and Wadi ad-Dawasir over two minutes clear of Toyota rival Nasser Al-Attiyah with his fellow Mini



WADI AL DAWASIR: Hero's Portuguese motorbike rider Paulo Goncalves (C) is attended by medical staff after a crash during the Stage 7 of the Dakar 2020 between Riyadh and Wadi Al Dawasir, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. — AFP

driver Stephane Peterhansel in third.

Sainz, a two-time former world rally champion, is in a strong position to add to his Dakar wins in 2010 and 2018. With seven stages completed and five days of racing to go he enjoys a comfortable 10 minute cushion

over last year's winner Al-Attiyah, with 13-time Dakar champion Peterhansel a further nine minutes adrift.

Joan Barreda came out on top in the bikes category with American Ricky Brabec retaining his overall lead finishing fourth on the day. — AFP

Amir's shooting grand prix



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The first five gold medals in HH the Amir Ninth International Shooting Grand Prix, being held at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex will be distributed today.

The preliminaries of the 10m Air rifle for men will begin at 10:15 am, while the finals will be held at 12:00 noon.

The qualifications for the men's 10m air pistol will be held at 12:30 pm, while the finals will be at 2:30 pm.

Trap qualifications for men and women will start at 9:00 am, while the women's finals will be at 12:45 pm, and the men's will



follow at 2:30 pm. The archery finals will take place at 11:45.

Meanwhile, President of the Asian Shooting Federations Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah visited Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex yesterday morning, to see first hand how the tournament was progressing. He was accompanied by Italian Shooting Federation President Luciano Rossi, who expressed satisfaction to be participating with 19 shooters in various events.

Rossi spoke about the continued cooperation between Kuwait and Italian Shooting Federations, adding that Kuwait organizes tournaments in an outstanding form, as

those involved in shooting are highly professional, with the facilities and the marvelous shooting complex, that is known worldwide.

Rossi said this year's competition has special flavor because it is a strong preparation for shooters qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Meanwhile, Italian Coach Ricardo Rossi lauded the preparations and facilities for HH the Amir Grand Prix, specially that the shooting complex is among the best in the world. He said competition for the gold medal will be difficult due to the presence of the best shooters in the world, so it is really difficult to have any expectations.

2020 Dakar Rally reaches hard-earned rest day in Riyadh



Red Bull KTM factory team

RIYADH: The 2020 Dakar Rally has taken competitors on a gruelling 3,700km route between Jeddah and Riyadh, and we're only at the halfway mark! The offroaders that remain in the race will now take a well deserved Rest Day before tackling six more challenging stages before the chequered flag falls in Qiddiya.

The first week of the inaugural Saudi Arabian Dakar concluded with a dash over 352 kilometres of sand dunes between Ha'il and Riyadh. The pace was relentless as competitors jostled for position in the open desert.

The three-way battle between Dakar legends Carlos Sainz (ESP), Nasser Al-Attiyah (QAT) and Stephane Peterhansel (FRA) continues to intensify in the car race. On Stage 6 it was the turn of Peterhansel to lead home the frontrunners, but Sainz and Al-Attiyah were both able to minimise any lost time.

"Today's rhythm was fast, slow, fast, slow. In the high speed sections you needed to really concentrate. It's not so much physically tiring as mentally exhausting." - Stephane Peterhansel

Two-time Dakar winner Sainz has the overall lead of the car category, a position he has held since the conclusion of Stage 3. Sainz's fellow Mini Buggy driver Peterhansel is third in the general classification, 16 minutes behind his teammate. Sandwiched between Sainz and Peterhansel is reigning Dakar champion Al-Attiyah, less than eight minutes off the overall lead.

"I lost a little bit of time in the last part of the stage, but not too bad. Opening the road is not easy so I'm happy with the result today. Now I need one Rest Day." - Carlos Sainz.

Elsewhere in the car race, 2009 Dakar champion Ginieil De Villiers (ZAF) is chasing a ninth podium finish at the world's toughest rally. Meanwhile Kuba Przygonski (POL) will be happy to see the back of an unfortunate first week at the Dakar.

In the side-by-side category, Lopez finished ahead of yesterday's stage winners Cyril Despres by seven minutes. A breakdown in communications didn't make Despres and Horn's work any easi-

er on Stage 6. Despres and Horn's teammates Mitch Guthrie Jr. (USA) and Blade Hildebrand (USA) both got through the stage to ensure all three of the OT3 by Overdrive machines will start the second half of this Dakar. Guthrie Jr. is leading Red Bull Off-Road Team USA's podium challenge, the Dakar debutant is currently fifth overall in the SxS contest.

"Today was a lot of dunes. It was fun and I felt right at home, it was like Glamis, California out there." - Mitch Guthrie Jr.

Overnight leader of the bike race, Ricky Brabec (USA), was able to increase his advantage over the chasing pack. Brabec will be hoping to avoid another second week retirement, the fate that has met him at his previous three Dakar outings.

Looking to reel in Brabec when the Dakar gets back underway on Sunday will be the Red Bull KTM Factory Team riders: Toby Price (AUS), Matthias Walkner (AUT) and Luciano Benavides (ARG). These three bikers are all placed in the Top 10, with two-time Dakar winner Price best placed in third overall despite a tough end to Stage 6.

"Around the 400-kilometre mark my rear tyre fell off. I don't know why it happened. Andrew Short gave me his wheel so I didn't have to ride in on the rim. It wasn't the best day, but that's how it goes sometimes." - Toby Price

The targets are different for Laia Sanz (ESP), CS Santosh (IND) and Mohammed Balooshi (UAE) as the trio look to build on a solid first week of riding to pursue personal best finishes at the Dakar.

It was a bittersweet Stage 6 for Team Kamaz Master. Race leader Andrey Karginov (RUS) was able to increase the gap between himself and nearest rival. However, five-time Dakar winner Eduard Nikolaev (RUS) was forced to retire from the rally due to insurmountable technical issues. The most straightforward first week at the Dakar belongs to two-time quad race champion Ignacio Casale (CHI). The former bike, truck and SxS Dakar entrant has given himself a 35-minute cushion at the head of the quad race going into the rally's second week.

Kuwait national handball team begins training

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Handball team began its training yesterday at Kuwait Club hall in preparation for its training camp, before the start of the 19th Asian handball tournament which will start on Thursday and continues until 27th January at the Hall of Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Complex with the participation of 13 Asian teams. Assistant coach of the team Mohammad Mubarak said the training session included physical exercises, followed by weight lifting.

He said the training camp that was held in Serbia was highly successful, especially after the notable improvement of all players in technical, tactical or physical aspects.

He said training was divided into two stages, the first was for technical and tactical reviews, while the second was for implementing plans and ways to play on which the team will rely on during the tournament through the seven friendly the team played there.

Meanwhile, the General Coordinator of the Championship Dr Khalid Al-Sharji said we are ready to host the Asian championship at all levels due to cooperation of all involved.

He said reception of delegations and logistics were done very accurately, and it was coordinated with all concerned ministries including interior and health ministries.



Sports

Serena ends three-year title drought, gives winnings to bushfire appeal

Pliskova wins in Brisbane to fire Australian Open warning

AUCKLAND: Serena Williams ended a three-year title drought and donated her winner's cheque to victims of the Australian bushfires in an emotional WTA Auckland Classic final yesterday. Williams raised expectations for this month's Australian Open, where she can equal Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam titles, with her 6-3, 6-4 victory — her first WTA trophy since she won in Melbourne in 2017.

But the 38-year-old tempered celebrations as she donated her US\$43,000 winners cheque to the Australian bushfire relief fund and described how the tragedy had affected her deeply.

"I've been playing in Australia for over 20 years and it's been really hard for me to watch all the news and everything that has been happening in Australia with all the fire and... animals and people that have lost their homes," she said. "I decided at the beginning of the tournament... I'd donate all my prize money for a great cause." It is Williams' first title since 2017 — and her first as a mother — since she won the Australian Open while pregnant. Her 73 WTA titles now stretch across four decades, after she won her first in 1999.

The tournament top seed slipped 1-3 behind in the first set against the unseeded Pegula, a fellow American. But once she found her range there was never any doubt about the final result, which Williams greeted by raising her arms in triumph while her husband Alexis Ohanian and two-year-old daughter Olympia looked on. "It's been a long time, I think you could see the relief on my face," she said, adding she could feel her game sharpening up as she prepares to head to Melbourne.

"It definitely feels good, it feels like I was definitely improving as the week went on and obviously I needed to." Pegula, who has only one title to her credit, had

stunned former world number one Caroline Wozniacki — a close friend of Williams — in a three-set semi-final, winning every game in the deciding set.

The 25-year-old continued in the same fearless vein at the start of the final, seemingly untroubled by her heavily bandaged left thigh as she chased down everything Williams delivered and even broke Williams' first serve. Pegula held her own serve and appeared set to break again when Williams, by this stage yelling with every point she won, fought back from 15-40 to hold her second service game on the fifth deuce.

Williams eventually achieved a break of her own to level at 3-3, finding the power and precision that had deserted her until then. With her confidence boosted, Williams held to love in the next game, broke Pegula again and then served to clinch the first set.

Pegula was down 0-40 at the start of the second set before rallying to hold serve but the strain of facing the player who has dominated women's tennis for two decades was showing. Williams broke on Pegula's next service game and stayed in front until the end to take the title and extinguish a sequence of five defeats in finals since her 2017 win in Melbourne.

Williams, whose last tournament was the US Open in September, was looking for as much game time as possible in Auckland and an hour after winning the singles crown she was back on court partnering Wozniacki in the doubles final. However, the pair were beaten 6-4, 6-4 by Americans Asia Muhammad and Taylor Townsend.

Meanwhile, in Brisbane, Karolina Pliskova said her tough three-set win over Madison Keys in the final of the Brisbane International yesterday was the ideal preparation for next week's Australian Open.

The Czech world number two won 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 in two hours, seven minutes on Pat Rafter Arena.



AUCKLAND: Serena Williams of the US poses with her trophy after winning against Jessica Pegula of the US during their women's singles final match during the Auckland Classic tennis tournament in Auckland yesterday. — AFP

Pliskova's third Brisbane title in four years and her 16th on the WTA tour stamps her as one of the favourites for the year's first Grand Slam.

The former world number one is yet to win a Grand Slam singles title, but she reached the semi-finals in Melbourne last year, falling in three sets to eventual

champion Naomi Osaka.

Pliskova beat Osaka in a marathon three-hour semi-final on Saturday night, and the way she backed up to defeat Keys in another gruelling clash yesterday shows she has form and fitness heading into the Australian Open. — AFP

Aussie legends to pad up for bushfire relief

SYDNEY: Cricket greats Shane Warne and Ricky Ponting will come out of retirement to skipper star-studded teams at a charity game to raise money for victims of Australia's bushfires, it was announced yesterday. Other former greats signed up for the "Bushfire Cricket Bash" include Adam Gilchrist, Brett Lee, Michael Clarke, Shane Watson and Australian coach Justin Langer, while Steve Waugh will have a non-playing role.

All match profits and funds raised during the February 8 game, played as a curtain raiser to the Big Bash League final, will go to the Australian Red Cross Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund. Cricket Australia chief Kevin Roberts said he hoped it would play a part in helping those impacted by the devastating fires that have killed at least 27 people and destroyed more than 2,000 homes.

"People the world over have seen the overwhelming images of hundreds of thousands of hectares burnt, precious lives lost, hundreds of properties destroyed and the devastating loss of wildlife as a result of the fires," he said. "These images have reinforced the need to get behind organisations like the Australian Red Cross which is responding to the immediate requirements of people who have lost loved ones, their homes, and their livelihoods."

Cricket Australia also injected Aus\$2 million (US\$1.38 million) into a fund to assist community cricket clubs impacted by the fires. It is the latest initiative by sports stars to stomp up memorabilia and cash to help in the relief effort. — AFP

Malinga ready to quit after T20 debacle in India

COLOMBO: Lasith Malinga said yesterday he was ready to stand down as Sri Lanka's Twenty20 skipper after the team's humiliating 2-0 loss to India in their latest foreign tour. Returning from the series, the 36-year-old told reporters that Sri Lanka was just not good enough to make an impact in the 20 over game.

He said Sri Lankan bowlers weren't able to restrict opponents while the batsmen were incapable of putting up the 170 runs needed for a fighting chance in a match. "We don't have that," Malinga said, adding that it was unfair to expect a winning performance from the team given they were ranked just ninth in the world when returned to the captaincy just over a year ago.

But he added that he was "ready to accept" his responsibility for the team's performance. "I am ready any time. I am ready to quit," he said. Malinga led Sri Lanka to the T20 World Cup title in 2014 and remained in charge until early 2016.

His return to the top job in December 2018 was a surprise as he had lost his spot in the team after recurring injuries forced him to sit out several tournaments. Frictions were evident in the Sri Lankan team under Malinga's leadership, the Sunday Island newspaper reported.

"There seems to be deep divisions in the side. As captain, he has also sidelined his predecessors" including Thisara Perera and Angelo Mathews, the paper said. The first match in Guwahati was abandoned after rain, but India won the second by India by seven wickets and the third by 78 runs. — AFP

Dashti brothers win Arabian Veteran Tennis Championship

MUSCAT: The Seventh Arabian Veteran Tennis Championship was recently held in Muscat, Oman from January 4-8, 2020 with participation of professional and pioneer tennis players in the Arab world.

Kuwaiti brothers, Ahmed and Hussein Taqi Dashti won the first place in the category of men's doubles over 35 when they beat the Bahraini team 2/0.

Qadisiya Sports Club player, Ahmed Taqi Dashti also won the veteran individual competition after beating Algerian player, Abdul Jabbar Ghoul 2/1 then playing a most wonderful final match with the Saudi champion, Essam Al-Jazeeri to win also by 2/1.

Despite the fact that he had not competed outside Kuwait for long, Hussein Dashti won the third place in 35 year individual championship. The conclusion ceremony was held under the auspices and with the presence of the chairman of Oman's State Council, Dr Yahya Bin Mahfouth Al-Monthery, chairman of Oman Tennis Association, Khaled Bin Ali, a number of diplomats and the head of the organizing committee, Abdul Majeed Al-Asfoor.

The championship was held with the participation of over 200 players from 15 countries including Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, KSA, Bahrain, UAE, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Sudan.

Lightning shut out Flyers for 10th straight win

PHILADELPHIA: Pat Maroon scored the only goal to lift the visiting Tampa Bay Lightning past the Philadelphia Flyers 1-0 on Saturday for their 10th straight victory. The 10 straight wins tied a franchise record set last season. The Lightning improved to 19-0-4 this season when leading after two periods, as goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 23 shots for his second consecutive shutout. Flyers goaltender Carter Hart made 27 saves in a rare home loss. Philadelphia fell to 14-3-4 at home. The Lightning went ahead 1-0 at 7:27 of the second when Maroon took advantage of a bouncing puck in front and sent it past Hart. Philadelphia's Matt Niskanen tried to knock the puck out of the air before Maroon gathered it and scored.

FLAMES 4, OILERS 3

Elias Lindholm scored twice, while Johnny Gaudreau collected one goal and one assist as host Calgary won its fifth straight game with a victory over Edmonton. Goaltender Cam Talbot made 29 saves — 15 in the third period — for the Flames, who moved atop the Pacific Division. Lindholm scored his second of the night — and 20th of the season — 39 seconds into the third period, a power-play goal while Zack Kassian served a double minor for going after Matthew Tkachuk after Tkachuk checked him hard. Mikko Koskinen stopped 28 shots for the Oilers, who saw their three-game winning streak snapped.

SHARKS 2, STARS 1

Brent Burns had a goal and an assist as San Jose spoiled the return of former captain Joe Pavelski, defeating visiting Dallas. Patrick Marleau, who became the fifth player in NHL history to appear in 1,700 games, also scored for the Sharks, and goaltender Aaron Dell made 27 saves. Pavelski played his first 13 seasons in San Jose, serving as captain for his final four. He received a video tribute and a rousing ovation from Sharks fans. Jamie Benn scored for Dallas, which had its six-game winning streak snapped. Anton Khudobin stopped 24 of 26 shots.

BLUES 5, RANGERS 2

David Perron scored his eighth game-winning goal as St. Louis beat visiting New York. The Western Conference-leading Blues extended their home winning streak to eight games.



MUSCAT: Kuwaiti brothers, Ahmed and Hussein Taqi Dashti with Omani officials after winning the men's doubles tennis finals.

Robert Bortuzzo, Vince Dunn, Zach Sanford and Jaden Schwartz also scored for the Blues, who are 11-2-1 overall in their last 14 games. Filip Chytil and Brett Howden scored for the Rangers, who are 1-5-1 in their last seven road games. Henrik Lundqvist stopped 24 of 29 shots.

BRUINS 3, ISLANDERS 2 (OT)

Patrice Bergeron scored 1:33 into overtime as Boston edged New York in Brooklyn, N.Y. Bergeron fired a slap shot past Semyon Varlamov for a power-play goal 53 seconds after Brock Nelson was whistled for tripping Brad Marchand. Jake DeBrusk and John Moore also scored for the Bruins, who have earned points in 12 of their last 13 games (7-1-5). Goaltender Tuukka Rask made 35 saves. Scott Mayfield and Mathew Barzal scored for the Islanders, who had their two-game winning streak snapped. Varlamov recorded 30 saves.

DEVILS 5, CAPITALS 1

Nico Hischier scored twice, and backup goaltender Louis Domingue sparked in goal as visiting New Jersey claimed an emphatic upset victory over Washington. With No. 1 goalie Mackenzie Blackwood — as well as rookie forward Jack Hughes — out of action due to an upper-body injury, the Devils were forced to turn to Domingue. He responded with a 33-save performance for just his second win of the season. Goaltender Braden Holtby stopped 17 shots for the Capitals, who have dropped two straight.

CANUCKS 6, SABRES 3

Brock Boeser capped his two-goal performance by scoring the go-ahead tally in a four-goal third period, lifting Vancouver to a win at Buffalo. With the game tied at 3, Boeser and defenseman Christopher Taney worked a crisp give-and-go that ended with the former's second goal at 6:24 of the third period. Jake Virtanen scored on a delayed penalty 74 seconds later with an extra skater on the ice to give the Canucks a 5-3 lead. J.T. Miller and Bo Horvat each notched a goal and an assist, and Loui Eriksson scored into an empty net for the Canucks, who snapped a two-game losing streak in which they were outscored 14-4 against Tampa Bay and Florida.

CANADIENS 2, SENATORS 1 (OT)

Ilya Kovalchuk scored 4:08 into overtime as visiting Montreal snapped its second eight-game winless skid of the season with a victory over Ottawa. With the teams playing in their third overtime game of the season, Kovalchuk slowly skated up the left wing before wiring a shot from the circle past Marcus Hogberg. The goal was Kovalchuk's fourth of the season and first with Montreal since signing a one-year, two-way contract. Rookie Nick Suzuki scored a power-play goal in the



PHILADELPHIA: Alex Killorn #17 of the Tampa Bay Lightning controls the puck against Travis Sanheim #6 of the Philadelphia Flyers as Pat Maroon #14 trails on the play in the second period at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia. — AFP

first period, and Carey Price finished with 41 saves for the Canadiens, whose last win was 6-2 over Winnipeg on Dec. 23.

HURRICANES 2, KINGS 0

James Reimer made 41 saves as Carolina recorded a shutout for the second night in a row, this time blanking Los Angeles in Raleigh, N.C. Nino Niederreiter scored in the first period, and Teuvo Teravainen added an empty-net goal with four seconds remaining. The Hurricanes have won three games in a row and completed a season-long, seven-game homestand with a 5-2 mark. Kings goaltender Jack Campbell stopped 28 shots, but Los Angeles was unable to notch consecutive victories after Thursday night's win at Vegas. It hasn't won back-to-back games since mid-December.

BLUE JACKETS 3, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 0

Elvis Merzlikins stopped 27 shots to record his first NHL shutout as Columbus cruised to a victory over slumping Vegas in Las Vegas. Merzlikins improved to 5-6-4 while playing in just his 17th career game. Emil Bemstrom had a goal and an assist, and Pierre-Luc Dubois and Alexander Wennberg also scored goals for Columbus, which improved to 7-1-3 in its last 11 road games. Kevin Stenlund added two assists. Marc-Andre Fleury finished with 19 saves for Vegas, which lost its third straight game, all in regulation. — Reuters

Sports

Rockets' Harden hits scoring milestone in rout over Wolves

Tatum hits career-high 41 as Celtics stomp Pelicans

HOUSTON: James Harden became the 45th player in NBA history to score 20,000 career points, as the Houston Rockets rolled to a 139-109 victory over the visiting Minnesota Timberwolves on Saturday. Harden drilled a stepback 3-pointer with 6:30 remaining in the first half to reach the milestone and finished with 32 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists. He also recorded 11 turnovers, all in the first half, but his wayward ball-handling did little to stem the offensive onslaught. Houston has won 21 of its last 25 meetings with the Timberwolves, including 13 straight at home. The Rockets blistered Minnesota despite playing without center Clint Capela (heel) and losing forward P.J. Tucker to a stinger early in the first quarter. The Timberwolves were without center Karl-Anthony Towns for a 13th consecutive game. Josh Okogie paced seven Wolves in double figures with 16 points. Rookie Jarrett Culver added 15 points, eight rebounds and five assists.

MILWAUKEE BUCKS 122 - PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS 101

Giannis Antetokounmpo recorded 32 points, 17 rebounds and six assists to help visiting Milwaukee roll over Portland. Khris Middleton added 30 points, and Eric Bledsoe scored 29 as the Bucks won for the eighth time in the past nine games and reached the halfway point of the season with a 35-6 record. That puts Milwaukee on pace to win 70 games and surpass the franchise-best 66-16 mark set by the 1970-71 squad led by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Damian Lillard scored 26 points, and CJ McCollum added 20 as the Trail Blazers lost for the eighth time in 10 games.

LOS ANGELES LAKERS 125 - OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER 110

Kyle Kuzma scored a season-high 36 points as Los Angeles won its eighth straight game. The Lakers led by as many as 32 points in the second half, but the Thunder cut the lead to just 11 with less than three minutes remaining before Kuzma hit back-to-back shots to

put the game firmly in control once again. Rajon Rondo added 21 points and 12 rebounds for the Lakers. Danilo Gallinari and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 24 points each to lead the Thunder, who lost for just the second time in nine games.

MAVERICKS 109 - 76ERS 91

Luka Doncic and Dwight Powell scored 19 points each as host Dallas used a dominating third quarter to send Philadelphia to its fifth loss in its last seven games. Dorian Finney-Smith scored 16 points as the Mavericks erased a 12-point deficit in the first half and recovered after trailing 50-41 at halftime by outscoring the Sixers 32-16 in the third quarter. Tobias Harris scored 20 points, and Josh Richardson and Al Horford added 16 each as the Sixers fell to 1-1 without Joel Embiid, who is out for as much as two weeks following a finger injury that required surgery this week.

BOSTON CELTICS 140 - NEW ORLEANS PELICANS 105

Jayson Tatum scored a career-high 41 points in three quarters as host Boston crushed New Orleans to snap a season-long three-game losing streak. Tatum shot 16 of 22 from the field with a career-best six 3-pointers, and Enes Kanter added season highs of 22 points and 19 rebounds. Frank Jackson had a team-high 22 points off the bench for the Pelicans, who lost for just the third time in their last 10 games. Rookie Jaxson Hayes scored a career-high 20 points, and Lonzo Ball (10 points, 13 rebounds) fell an assist shy of a triple-double.

CLEVELAND CAVALIERS 111 - DENVER NUGGETS 103

Collin Sexton scored 25 points, Kevin Love had 19 points and 15 rebounds, and Cleveland won at Denver. Tristan Thompson had 18 points and 13 rebounds, Cedi Osman had 11 points and 12 boards and Darius Garland scored 18 for the Cavaliers. Jamal Murray scored 24 points, Nikola Jokic had 19 points and 12 rebounds and Will Barton scored 18 points for Denver, which trailed 85-71 entering the fourth quarter but rallied to take a



HOUSTON: Russell Westbrook #0 of the Houston Rockets shoots the ball against the Minnesota Timberwolves at the Toyota Center in Houston, Texas. — AFP

brief lead with about five minutes to go before Cleveland reasserted control.

BULLS 108, PISTONS 99

Zach LaVine had 25 points and six assists as visiting Chicago snapped a six-game losing streak by defeating Detroit. Chicago completed a sweep of the four-game

season series for the first time since the 2011-12 season. Detroit center Andre Drummond was ejected with 10:42 remaining in the third quarter. Chicago rookie Daniel Gafford scored an inside basket and was whistled for a technical after saying something to Drummond, who retaliated by throwing the ball off the back of Gafford's head. — Reuters

Klopp cares only for titles, not records as Liverpool streak further clear

LONDON: Roberto Firmino's strike ensured Liverpool made a record-breaking start for one of Europe's top five leagues after beating Tottenham 1-0 on Saturday, but ending a 30-year wait to win the title is the only history Jurgen Klopp is interested in.

Klopp's men have earned 61 points from a possible 63 in 21 games to streak 16 points clear at the top and with a game in hand to spare over second-placed Leicester.

There is now a 31-point gap between the sides that contested last season's Champions League final as Spurs remain in eighth, nine points adrift of even the top four. However, the European champions were made to sweat by the side they beat in Madrid last June as Son Heung-min and Giovanni Lo Celso missed the target with the goal gaping in the final 15 minutes.

"The problem is you don't get anything for best starts apart from numbers," said Klopp. "If people say in 50 years... it was the best start, cool, but the only thing we are interested in is what we can get in the summer. That is not done yet because this league is so strong, because we face so many strong opponents. The moment when we have enough points that nobody can catch us anymore, then we start talking about it. Until then I couldn't be less interested."

Lo Celso's miss left Jose Mourinho on his knees in anguish and the honeymoon period for the Tottenham manager is already over after just two wins in their last eight games in all competitions. The Portuguese's game plan to cede possession to Liverpool before the break backfired, but he still believed his side deserved at least a point for their onslaught in the final quarter.

"Liverpool have worked with this coach for five years. The players are totally adapted physically to the football he wants to play," said Mourinho. "If we try to play the way we did in the last 20 minutes from the start, I think we would collapse because the players are not used to this style. We knew that (Erik Lamela, Giovanni, in the last 25-30 minutes they could turn the game. I think we deserve more."

Mourinho sprang a huge surprise with his team selection as Japhet Tanganga was handed his Premier League debut in defence. The 20-year-old was forced into action straight away as he blocked Firmino's goalbound effort before Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain struck the post inside four minutes.

Spurs will be without Harry Kane for most of the remainder of the season after the England captain underwent surgery on a torn hamstring. Mourinho responded to Kane's absence by utilising Lucas Moura and Dele Alli in attack as he sat back and hoped to catch the European champions on the break. — AFP

Titans shock Ravens, 49ers sink Vikings in NFL playoffs

SAN FRANCISCO: Derrick Henry rushed for 195 yards and completed a dazzling touchdown pass to Corey Davis as the Tennessee Titans reached deep into their bag of tricks to shock the top-seeded Baltimore Ravens 28-12 in the NFL playoffs.

Henry has carried the Titans on his back in the post-season and their star pulled off the trick play of the playoffs so far on Saturday by connecting on a three-yard jump pass with Davis for a third-quarter touchdown. "Watch us work," said Henry, who is the first player in NFL history with 180 or more rushing yards in three consecutive games. "We don't do too much talking. We're just going to work and believe in each other. That's our mentality, to come out here and work. That's our mindset, focus on business." The Titans advanced to next weekend's AFC championship game at the winner of Sunday's game between Houston and Kansas City.

Earlier, the San Francisco 49ers halted the Minnesota Vikings' giant-killing run, also moving to within one win of a Super Bowl berth with a ruthless 27-10 playoff victory.

When they weren't handing the ball off to Henry, the Titans were taking advantage of Lamar Jackson's turnovers in front of 71,000 fans at M&T Bank Stadium. "I had a lot of mistakes — three turnovers. That shouldn't happen," Jackson said. "But they came out to play, and we started off slow. We just got to do better next time."

Jackson completed 31 of 59 passes for 365 yards, one touchdown, the two interceptions and a lost fumble. He rushed for 143 yards on 20 carries.

Jackson's unheralded counterpart, quarterback Ryan Tannehill, ran for a touchdown in the third quarter, finishing off a short six-play drive with a one-yard scamper to give Tennessee a 28-6 lead. He improved to 3-0 as a playoff starter. Jackson supplied the magic and force for the Ravens this season, throwing 36 touchdowns and



BALTIMORE: Quarterback Lamar Jackson #8 of the Baltimore Ravens carries the ball against the defense of the Tennessee Titans during the AFC Divisional Playoff game at M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore, Maryland. — AFP

rushing for a quarterback-record 1,206 yards, but he was unable to solve Tennessee's defense.

It was no secret the Titans planned to give the ball over and over to Henry, who carried the sixth-seeded Titans to a stellar 20-13 upset of the third-seeded New England Patriots last weekend.

Henry, 26, rushed for a team playoff record 195 yards, carried 30 times and caught two passes against the Ravens with his longest run being 66 yards.

With 6:54 left in the third on third-and-goal from the three, Henry took the direct snap and paused behind the line before jumping high to throw a perfect strike to Davis. "Just trying to find the right time to call it and use it," coach Titans coach Mike Vrabel said of the trick play. "It was very well executed."

The Ravens set a record this season with 3,296 rushing yards but the Titans beat Baltimore at their own game, rushing for 217 yards compared to only 185 for Baltimore. The host 49ers advanced to a home NFC championship showdown against either the Seattle Seahawks or Green Bay Packers, who meet today, with a relentless defensive display to throttle the Vikings offense led by quarterback Kirk Cousins.

Xavi favours summer return, Barca want immediate move

MADRID: Barcelona remain hopeful they can persuade former player Xavi to make a dramatic return as coach immediately rather than in the summer, according to reports in the Spanish press yesterday.

Xavi is currently in charge of Qatar team Al-Sadd, who confirmed on Saturday he has held talks with Barca.

The Spaniard who won pulled the strings at the heart of Barcelona's midfield in their golden era admitted it is his "dream job" to take charge of the Catalans. Barcelona's sporting director Eric Abidal and chief executive Oscar Grau met Xavi on Friday in Qatar and then again on Saturday night following Al-Sadd's Qatar Cup semi-final win over Al-Rayyan.

According to Spanish sports daily Mundo Deportivo, Abidal and Grau have offered Xavi the chance to replace Ernesto Valverde immediately, even if Xavi's preference would be to wait until the end of the season.

"The preferred thinking of Xavi would be to arrive at Camp Nou in the summer, a message he has transmitted," Mundo reported yesterday. "Negotiations remain open and the possibility has not been discarded of him signing imminently." The suggestion on Saturday had been that Xavi would make a decision as early as yesterday, with terms and contracts already drawn up between the club.

Another Spanish sports daily Diario AS reported that Xavi will take his time to decide, while noting that with "every passing minute it seems to become more difficult for Xavi to say no to the offer of joining immediately."

Xavi's situation is complicated by the fact he would like to lead Al-Sadd in the Qatar Cup final, which will be played on January 17. It would also be a daunting task to join Barcelona mid-season. The team are level on points in the league with Real Madrid and face a tough last-16 tie in the Champions League next month against Napoli.

There is also the club's political situation to consider, with Xavi believed to be key to the hopes of presidential candidate Victor Font, ahead of the club elections due next year. "It's a difficult decision," wrote El Pais yesterday. "If he accepts, he is put under the wing of a weak leadership, with elections due in 2021. But if he says no, he may be criticised for refusing to return home." Xavi is also said to want to show respect to Valverde, who has overseen Barcelona winning two La Liga titles in his two seasons in charge. But Champions League collapses against Roma and Liverpool have not been forgotten and poor performances in recent weeks have prompted fears of a repeat.

Barca were beaten 3-2 by Atletico Madrid on Thursday in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia. "I respect Barcelona, I respect Valverde and I respect my club and I'm doing my job here," Xavi said on Saturday. "I'm focussing on Al-Sadd. Yes Abidal is my friend, I met him many times," he continued. "They were here to talk to me and we discussed many things. And they were here to check on Ousmane Dembele. I cannot inform you too much, just that I met Abidal and he is my friend."

But Xavi added: "I cannot hide that it's my dream to coach Barcelona. I said it many times."



Xavi

French international and Barcelona forward Dembele has been in Qatar for treatment on a hamstring injury.

The 39-year-old Xavi, who won the World Cup with Spain in 2010, came through Barcelona's academy and played 855 senior games for the club.

After an emotional farewell, he joined Al-Sadd as a player in 2015 before being appointed coach last July.

Asked about talks between Barca and Xavi, Al-Sadd's sports director Muhammad Ghulam Al-Balushi told the Qatar-based BeIn broadcaster: "I will not deny that. There are negotiations with Xavi and everyone is talking about them... but I can say that Xavi so far is at Al-Sadd."

"The final decision is in the hands of Al-Sadd's management, in the hands of the manager and the hands of Barcelona's management." — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE
Parma Calcio 1913 v US Lecce 22:45
beIN SPORTS

FRENCH LEAGUE
Lorient v Caen 22:45
beIN SPORTS

25 Dakar Rally in mourning as Portuguese rider Paulo Goncalves dies in crash



26 Serena ends three-year title drought, gives winnings to bushfire appeal



27 Rockets' Harden hits scoring milestone in rout over Wolves



Djokovic leads Serbia to ATP Cup glory



SYDNEY: Serbia team celebrate with the trophy after defeating Spain in the final of the ATP Cup tennis tournament in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

SYDNEY: Novak Djokovic inspired Serbia to victory in the inaugural ATP Cup team event in Sydney after defeating his long-term Spanish rival Rafael Nadal in singles yesterday before playing a pivotal role in the deciding doubles match.

With the final locked at 1-1, Djokovic partnered veteran Victor Troicki to beat Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta and Feliciano Lopez 6-3 6-4, triggering celebrations that would not be out of place at a Belgrade football match. The 16-times Grand Slam champion proved to be a calming influence throughout, especially after the Serbian pair fell behind early in the match. He used his powerful serve and fleet-footed returns to haul his country back into the first set and create a momentum shift Serbia rode all the way to a victory completed in the early hours of Monday morning.

"We are filled with joy," Djokovic said. "It was probably one of the best doubles we've played." For Spain, it was a lost opportunity to prove it has the world's best

men's tennis team, having recently won the revamped Davis Cup and boasting two top 10 players in its ATP Cup side.

Nadal, a capable doubles player who won the doubles Olympic gold at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, was substituted out of the Spanish combination in a surprise last-minute move he said was a team decision. The world number one cited a gruelling tournament schedule and lack of energy as part of the reason.

BLUEPRINT

Djokovic earlier beat Nadal 6-2 7-6(4), extending his dominance over the Spaniard on hardcourts, a surface Nadal has not beaten him on since 2013. Djokovic has created the blueprint to beat the Spaniard on hardcourts, although he is one of the very few players good enough to follow the instructions.

The Serbian held his line, and was rarely pushed back deep into the court by the Spaniard's heavy spin,

a position from which Nadal usually dictates terms. "I was trying to take away as much time as possible from him," Djokovic said. "I'm just extremely satisfied with the way I performed."

Djokovic broke Nadal's serve in the first game, lighting up a near capacity crowd in the 10,500-person canopied-stadium. The noise from the flag-waving Serbian supporters between serves weighed on Nadal, who at one stage gave a sarcastic thumbs-up gesture to his rival's supporters.

The Spaniard's reaction only enticed the crowd deeper into the contest as they bellowed Djokovic's nickname - "Nole, Nole". While Nadal is the undisputed king of clay, he hasn't taken a set off Djokovic played on a hardcourt in nine attempts since his 2013 US Open victory.

After a dominant first set marked by Djokovic's strong serving, the contest tightened. Nadal employed more attacking serve-volley tactics, and settled into a

harder-hitting rhythm.

Trailing 0-40 on his serve in the sixth game of the second set, Djokovic looked likely to crack, but the Spaniard was unable to convert. The second set was decided in a tiebreak, ending when Nadal netted a forehand.

Earlier, Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut completed a flawless tournament by defeating Serbia's Dusan Lajovic 7-5 6-1. The ATP Cup received mixed reviews from players. They applauded the high standard of tennis while also questioning the wisdom of having back-to-back men's team events, with the Davis Cup completed just weeks before the Sydney event started.

But the victors said the ATP Cup victory was a career highlight. The Serbian team danced on the centre court, and promised to party with their fans through the night. Djokovic quipped that he might also return to Serbia to celebrate and come back for the Australian Open, which starts next week. — Reuters

City thrash Villa with Aguero's hat-trick

BIRMINGHAM: Sergio Aguero became the most prolific foreign goalscorer in Premier League history with a hat-trick as Manchester City thrashed Aston Villa 6-1 to reclaim second place yesterday.

The Argentine striker struck City's third, fifth and sixth goals at Villa Park to take his league tally to 177, two more than Frenchman Thierry Henry managed for Arsenal and fourth on the all-time list alongside Frank Lampard.

City's resounding victory, in which Riyad Mahrez also scored twice and Gabriel Jesus once, meant they moved above Leicester City and trimmed Liverpool's lead to 14 points, although Liverpool have played a game less.

Mahrez's dribble and shot opened the scoring in the 18th minute and the Algerian struck again six minutes

later. Champions City's slick football was too much for Villa who had dropped into the relegation zone before kickoff after Watford's win at Bournemouth.

Aguero's fierce strike from outside the area made it 3-0 in the 28th minute before Jesus tapped in a fourth on the stroke of halftime after a stunning pass by Kevin De Bruyne. A razor-sharp Aguero moved clear of Henry with a neat finish in the 58th minute and continued to torment a sorry home side by completing his 12th Premier League hat-trick in the 81st minute.

Villa, who have fallen to third from bottom, did not manage a shot on target until they were awarded a stoppage-time penalty that was tucked away by Anwar El Ghazi.

In Bournemouth, Watford moved out of the relegation zone as their stunning revival under new manager Nigel Pearson continued with a 3-0 victory at south coast strugglers Bournemouth yesterday. Abdoulaye Doucoure's goal shortly before halftime gave Watford the lead and Troy Deeney smashed in their second midway through the second half.

Bournemouth offered little by way of a response and substitute Roberto Pereyra completed the rout in stoppage time. The win, Watford's fourth in the six games since Pearson took charge with them bottom of the



BIRMINGHAM: Manchester City's Argentinian striker Sergio Aguero (C) runs with the ball during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Manchester City at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England yesterday. — AFP

table, lifted them to 17th place, ahead of Aston Villa who play Manchester City later.

While Watford, who won only one of their opening 17 league games, are on the up, Bournemouth's hopes of a sixth successive season of top-flight football are

sinking. Eddie Howe's side looked short on confidence as they slipped to their third successive defeat without scoring a goal. They are second bottom with 20 points from 22 games having been as high as seventh in early November. — Reuters