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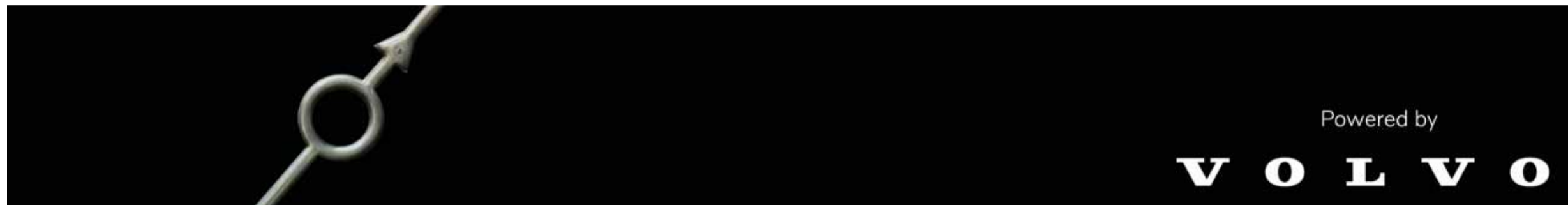
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Assembly ratifies neutral zone agreement with Saudi Arabia

Aqeel: Citizens' pockets won't be touched • MP blames 'expat spies' for KUNA hacking



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah (right) speaks with HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah during a National Assembly session yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MPs yesterday overwhelmingly ratified the neutral zone agreement with Saudi Arabia signed last month, paving the way for the resumption of oil production in the area after almost five years of stoppage. Fifty-five members, including all Cabinet ministers, voted for the pact, while seven members opposed it. Head of the foreign relations committee MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said the agreement has given Kuwait a permanent border with Saudi Arabia in the neutral zone, where oil production is shared equally between the two countries.

He said the agreement also gives Kuwait total control of its territory in its half and in nearby areas against paying compensation to Saudi Chevron for buildings it will vacate as per the pact. He insisted that Kuwait made no territorial or financial concessions under the agreement, which came to reconfirm agree-

ments signed in 1965 and 2000 to demarcate land and maritime borders respectively.

Kandari said under the agreement, Kuwait will be able to access its Al-Zour port, adding that the signing of the agreement came after a row erupted when Saudi Arabia renewed its agreement with Chevron without consulting Kuwait. The row had led to halting production in the area. MP Adnan Abdulsamad however said some oil experts say that Kuwait has lost some of its oil wealth as a result of the deal, adding that the foreign relations committee should have invited them to its meeting. Kandari however denied the claims and said the committee invited many personalities to its meeting. A large number of lawmakers insisted that the agreement is a major gain for Kuwait and also Saudi Arabia, and urged their colleagues to vote for it.

Meanwhile, Minister of Finance Mariam Al-Aqeel said yesterday that the "pockets of citizens" will not be touched under any scenario

for economic reforms, adding that the position of the Kuwait sovereign fund is very strong. The minister was speaking after Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem asked her to clarify statements she made while releasing the new budget about the need to press for reforms and reconsider wages. Ghanem said that the fiscal strength of the country does not mean that there are no distortions in the economy, which should be treated but not at the cost of people.

Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Ghadeer Aseeri denied that she intended to quit after 10 MPs filed a no-confidence motion against her following a grilling on Tuesday. The minister's denial comes amid reports that the number of lawmakers supporting the motion may have topped 20 already - her opponents need just 25 votes to oust her - just a few weeks after she was appointed to the Cabinet.

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News in brief

US mulls travel ban on more countries

DAVOS: US President Donald Trump said his administration was preparing to add a "couple of countries" to the controversial list of states whose citizens are subject to travel bans or severe restrictions on entry to the United States. "We are adding a couple of countries to it. We have to be safe. Our country has to be safe," he said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, adding that the names of the new countries would be announced "very shortly". The Wall Street Journal reported earlier that the administration planned to add seven countries - Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, Belarus, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Sudan and Tanzania. — AFP

Saudi dismisses link to Bezos hacking

WASHINGTON: The Saudi embassy in Washington on Tuesday dismissed suggestions the kingdom hacked the phone of Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos, as media reports linked the security breach to a WhatsApp message. "Recent media reports that suggest the Kingdom is behind a hacking of Mr Jeff Bezos' phone are absurd," the Saudi Arabian embassy said on its Twitter account. "We call for an investigation on these claims so that we can have all the facts out." — AFP

Maduro welcomes Maradona

CARACAS: Former Argentine footballer Diego Maradona met Tuesday in Caracas with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro as the leader was set to begin three days of meetings at the leftist Sao Paulo Forum. "How lovely to see Maradona again in our beloved homeland! Venezuela is your home, friend and soul brother. Welcome!" Maduro tweeted, attaching a video of the two men hugging. — AFP



CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro (right) greets Argentina's former football player Maradona.

Macron loses cool with Israeli security forces

JERUSALEM: When French President Emmanuel Macron visited Jerusalem's Old City yesterday, he also trod in the footsteps of one of his predecessors, Jacques Chirac, by engaging in a heated argument with Israeli security forces. The altercation broke out when Israeli security forces pushed past the French detail and were first to enter the Church of Saint Anne, which is French state property.

"Everybody knows the rules. I don't like what you did in front of me," an animated Macron loudly told the Israeli personnel, speaking in English, in the

crush to enter the building, which remains French territory under international treaties. "Go out - outside please!" he added in a raised voice in scenes captured in video footage that quickly spread on social media.

The Roman Catholic church, located at the start of Via Dolorosa in the Old City's Muslim Quarter, has been part of France's territories in the Holy Land since the 1850s. The rules that have been in place "for centuries", Macron told the Israeli officers, "will not change with me, I can tell you, OK? So everybody, respect the rules. Nobody has to provoke nobody."

French diplomats had cautioned that they want to leave little room for mishaps on Macron's trip. Earlier yesterday, a separate squabble ensued when Israeli police tried to enter St Anne ahead of Macron's visit.

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JERUSALEM: French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday visits the Al-Aqsa compound, Islam's third-holiest site. — AFP

China virus toll hits 17; call to avoid Wuhan

BEIJING: The death toll from a new SARS-like virus that has infected hundreds in China rose to 17 yesterday, as authorities urged people to steer clear of the city at the center of the outbreak. The coronavirus has caused alarm because of its similarity to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed nearly 650 people across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003. With hundreds of millions of people travelling across China this week for the Lunar

New Year holiday, the National Health Commission announced measures to contain the disease - including sterilization and ventilation at airports and bus stations, as well as inside planes and trains.

In Wuhan, the epicenter of the epidemic, large public events were cancelled and international football matches were moved to a new location. Visitors were urged to stay away, while residents were advised to not to leave the central city, which is home to 11 million people. "If it's not necessary we suggest that people don't come to Wuhan," Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang told state broadcaster CCTV. The illness is mainly transmitted via the respiratory tract and there "is the possibility of viral mutation and fur-

ther spread of the disease", health commission vice minister Li Bin told a news conference in Beijing.

More than 500 cases have now been reported, with the majority in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province. The virus has now infected at least 444 people in Hubei province alone, said provincial officials at a press conference, adding that the death toll had risen from nine to 17. Major cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Chongqing have also reported cases, as well as provinces in northeastern, central, and southern China.

The World Health Organization started an emergency meeting yesterday to decide whether or not to

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New PM says Lebanon faces 'catastrophe'

BEIRUT: Lebanon faces a "catastrophe", Prime Minister Hassan Diab said yesterday after his newly unveiled cabinet held its first meeting to tackle the twin challenges of a tenacious protest movement and a nosediving economy. Diab, who replaced Saad Hariri as prime minister, vowed to meet the demands from the street but demonstrators were

unconvinced and scuffled with police overnight.

The 61-year-old academic was thrown in at the deep end for his first experience on the political big stage and admitted that the situation he inherited was desperate. "Today we are in a financial, economic and social dead end," he said in remarks read by a government official after the new cabinet's inaugural meeting in Beirut. "We are facing a catastrophe," he said.

"Government of last resort," was the headline on the front page of Al-Akhbar, a daily newspaper close to the powerful Hezbollah movement that gave

Continued on Page 24



BAABDA, Lebanon: Lebanese President Michel Aoun (left) meets new Prime Minister Hassan Diab at the presidential palace yesterday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Amir congratulates Lebanon on forming cabinet

Sheikh Sabah receives Crown Prince, Prime Minister

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent cables of congratulations to Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Hassan Diab on forming a new cabinet. His Highness the Amir wished ministers of the newly-formed government success in attaining aspirations of the Lebanese people. He also expressed good wishes to the president and prime minister, hoping to see progress and prosperity for the Lebanese people and further promotion in bilateral relations between Kuwait and Lebanon. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah addressed cables of identical content to the Lebanese president and premier. In the meantime, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. —KUNA



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



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

Top Kuwait lawmaker leaves for Turkey on official visit

KUWAIT/ ANKARA: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem headed to Ankara yesterday for a two-day official visit at the invitation of his Turkish counterpart Mustafa Sentop. During his stay in Ankara, the speaker is expected to hold official talks with Sentop and Kuwaiti-Turkish Friendship Committee chairman and members. The top Kuwaiti lawmaker's accompanying delegation comprises several members of Parliament.

The Speaker of the Grand Turkish National Assembly Mustafa Sentop said yesterday that Kuwait adopts a successful foreign policy under the guidance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. This came during an interview on the occasion of Ghanem's visit to Turkey. In the interview, Sentop praised His Highness the Amir's ability to maintain a balanced policy in the region that faces many challenges, thus leading to formation of permanent channels of dialogue to resolve these conflicts. Sentop considered that close views between the two countries and search for a just solution to promote peace and stability in the region had positive impact on bilateral and regional cooperation. He expressed hope to strengthen and raise the level of bilateral cooperation between the two countries in light of the diplomatic and peaceful solutions

adopted by Kuwait and Turkey in their foreign policies to maintain security and stability of the region. He stressed on importance of joint work between the two countries at the level of international and Asian parliaments, in light of the visit of Ghanem and the Turkish-Kuwaiti parliamentary friendship group to Ankara, where Ghanem is scheduled to hold talks with his Turkish counterpart today.

In this regard, Speaker Sentop referred to trade surplus between the two countries that reached \$678 million in 2018, expressing hope to increase it to \$1 billion in the short term. Regarding tourism, Sentop said the number of Kuwaiti tourists who visited Turkey in 2019 reached 350,000, while the figure of Kuwaitis who own real estate in Turkey reached 9,594. He believed that there are many areas in which the two countries can enhance relations other than politics and economy. In the same context, The Turkish Parliament Speaker said that Ankara and Kuwait could enhance relations in security, education, health, culture defense, industries, and technology to develop bilateral relations to a higher level. As for the Turkish-GCC partnership, Sentop said, "we adopt humanitarian and peaceful issues, the launch of joint initiatives will enable us to achieve peace and stability in the region," referring the heritage and values shared with countries of the Arabian Gulf. He stressed the importance of cooperation and joint work between the two parties through international platforms, including the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, pointing to the holding of ministerial meetings for the Gulf-Turkish strategic dialogue that started in 2008. Considering that the economies of the Gulf region depend mainly on energy sources, therefore the security and stability of the region will generally reflect the entire world. —KUNA



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem is seen off at the airport before heading to Ankara yesterday. —KUNA

Australia thanks Kuwait for support during bushfire tragedy



KUWAIT: Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert and Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for the Americas Hamad Sulaiman Al-Mashaan cut the cake during the ceremony. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Guests in attendance.



By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Australia Day 2020 was organized at Jumeirah Beach Hotel on Tuesday with Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for the Americas Hamad Sulaiman Al-Mashaan as the chief guest. Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert thanked Kuwait for its support, especially during the recent wildfires raging in his country. "In difficult times, friends stand by each other, and Kuwait has shown just that," he said. "I sincerely appreciate the genuine concern and messages of support that Kuwaitis including HHH the Amir have conveyed to my government about the situation back home. Despite the bushfire damage, Australia remains open for business. Our trading partners, including Kuwait, can continue to have confidence in Australian agriculture and food exports," he said.

Gilbert said Australia continues to be a safe tourism destination, whether in unaffected regions or those that will soon recover from the terrible bushfires. "The best that we can do now is to support affected communities and continue to promote all the wonderful things about Australia and our people to the world," he said. He also showcased the strong Kuwaiti-Australian relations and friendship between the two countries. "It is a relationship that delivers for both our nations in education, research, trade, investment, regional security or multilateral cooperation," he said.

Gilbert also took pride in Australia being an integral part of the lives and careers of so many young Kuwaitis - be they engineers, journalists, scientists, entrepreneurs or doctors. He also mentioned that approximately 700 Kuwaitis are currently studying in Australia, and believed this number will grow. He said Australian education is exported to Kuwait as well, especially with the presence of two Australian colleges in Kuwait - Australian College of Kuwait and Box Hill College Kuwait.



A general view of people in attendance.



Members of the Australian community pose for a group photo.

Local

Govt to attend 'no-confidence' session, believe minister can survive vote

Twenty-one lawmakers expected to vote against Aseeri

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Cabinet has decided to attend the parliament's session on Feb 4 to vote on a no-confidence motion filed against Minister of Social Affairs Ghadeer Aseeri, well-informed government sources stressed. The sources added that the government reviewed the names of lawmakers for and against the motion after 10 MPs had signed it.



25 votes needed to oust minister

"The government is so far assured that minister Aseeri will survive the motion," the sources underlined, noting that those expected to vote for the motion and against Aseeri are 21 MPs including Osama Al-Shaheen, Adel Al-Damkhi, Mohammed Al-Hadiya, Mohammed Al-Mutairi, Riyadh Al-Adasani, Abdulkareem Al-Kandari, Abdullah Al-Kandari, Abdulwahab Al-

Babtain, Mubarak Al-Hajraf, Mohammed Hayef, Thamer Al-Suwait, Abdullah Fahhad, Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, Farraj Al-Arbeed, Hamdan Al-Azmi, Nayef Merdas, Khaled Al-Otaibi, Majed Al-Mutairi and Mohammed Al-Huwailah. "At least 25 votes are needed to topple the minister, who is in an awkward position, but the government can save her," the sources remarked.

Further, the sources said the Cabinet will decide whether to retain Aseeri or have her resign before the next parliamentary session during its weekly meeting on Monday. "The government is currently working on meeting lawmakers who have not yet declared their stances, as well as trying to neutralize the votes of some of those in favor of the motion, such as Arbeed and Huwailah," the sources said.



KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs Ghadeer Aseeri attends yesterday's National Assembly session. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait FM praises MPs' approval of agreement with Saudi

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday lauded the National Assembly's approval of two draft laws for agreements and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as a "historic moment" in the course of bilateral relations.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah

At yesterday's parliament session, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nasser affirmed that the agreements strengthened the fraternal ties and embodied the common destiny between both nations. He confirmed that the cooperation of the executive and legislative authorities in approving the two draft laws reflected the Kuwaiti national spirit and dedication to defend the rights and interests of Kuwait with full respect for Kuwait's constitution.

Under the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Foreign Minister underlined the cooperation between the head of the executive authority, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Head of the Legislative Authority, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. On this occasion, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nasser congratulated the political leaderships of the two countries, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. —KUNA

Inflation in Kuwait up 1.15% in 2019

KUWAIT: Inflation rates in Kuwait rose by 1.15 percent in 2019 as compared to the previous year, according to the Central Statistical Office (CSO). The average inflation rate rose, in December, by 0.17 percent, in contrast to November. Benchmark of the first group of commodities (food and beverages) rose last

year by 1.76 percent compared to 2018. Likewise, main index of the second group (tobacco and cigarettes), by 1.78 percent. Clothing climbed 2.27 percent, last year, on annual basis, while housing services dropped 0.86 percent. Inflation in the fifth group (home furniture) moved up by 3.04 percent. Similarly, health, 2.81 percent, as well as transports, 3.88 percent. Communications also increased, 4.51 percent on annual basis, entertainment and culture, 3.21 percent and education, 2.9 percent. The sector of restaurants and hotels climbed by 1.31 percent, last year, as well as commodities and diverse services, 1.61 percent. —KUNA

Minister files case over jet deal

KUWAIT: Legal sources said Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour filed a complaint with regards to suspected violations in the Eurofighter jet deal. Sources said the complaint is related to the involvement of several senior officials including a former minister and current and retired officials of the ministry. Sources said the most notable thing in the complaint is accusing some officials of profiteering and deliberately inflating sums of defense contracts to benefit from funds spent by the state, in addition to overstepping their authorities and not receiving the required approvals, which caused great harm to public funds. —Al-Rai

Over 20 percent of Kuwaiti children obese

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Over 20 percent of Kuwaiti children and teenagers are obese, a senior Kuwaiti physician said yesterday, adding that recent World Bank studies showed that obesity amongst children and teenagers aged 2 to 18 may reach 40 percent.

Speaking at a press conference held Monday, Head of the surgery department at Jaber Hospital and chairman of Kuwait Surgeons Association Dr Salman Al-Sabah announced launching a national campaign to fight obesity amongst children and teenagers, including a marathon to be held on Feb 22, and explaining the future health complications of obesity, such as diabetes and hypertension. "Obesity is a huge threat in all Kuwaiti homes," Dr Salman warned, noting that unless obesity was fought amongst children and teenagers, 80 percent of them will grow up suffering from obesity complications and have related future difficulties.

Senior pediatrician at Jaber Hospital and member of the Ministry of Health's child protection committee Dr Danah Al-Haqqa stressed that obesity rates among children in Kuwait is 35-40 percent, adding the problem is worsening annually. "Instead of being a symptom indicating other diseases, obesity is becoming a disease itself," she warned, noting that breastfeeding is one of the ways of protecting children from obesity along with a healthy diet and physical exercise, namely for children aged 6 to 12.

Haqqan also stressed the importance of walking or jogging for adults.

Dr Wadhah Al-Yaqoot said the marathon will be held as a carnival and will also include cycling. The event organizing company's representative Sara Abdul Aziz Al-Hubail explained that the 3-km marathon will be held on Feb 22 around Jaber Hospital's perimeter from 8:30 am till 6:00 pm.

Terminal 2

The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) announced that 26.9 percent of Kuwait International Airport's Terminal 2 (T2) project has been completed. This came in a statement made in a field visit by MPW undersecretary Ismael Al-Failakawi, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Planning and Development Dr Khaled Mahdi and other officials, during which a presentation was made on the progress of work on the project. Mahdi explained that the project is a substantial upgrade of infrastructure and air transport as well as a major step towards turning Kuwait into a regional commercial hub by attracting more visitors. He said the project is scheduled to be concluded by 2022 at a total cost of KD 1.312 billion, adding 75 percent of the eight obstacles the project had been facing were overcome. Mahdi also noted that 6,900 people (including 168 Kuwaitis) were working on the project.

Jleeb campaign

Farwaniya municipal inspection teams launched an inspection campaign in Jleeb, said Farwaniya municipality cleaning manager Saad Al-Khrainej, noting that the campaign resulted in arresting 18 peddlers and referring them to relevant authorities pending further procedures, confiscating six truckloads of fruits, vegetables, used clothing and used furniture, removing 20 abandoned vehicles and pasting 163 warning notice stickers on others.



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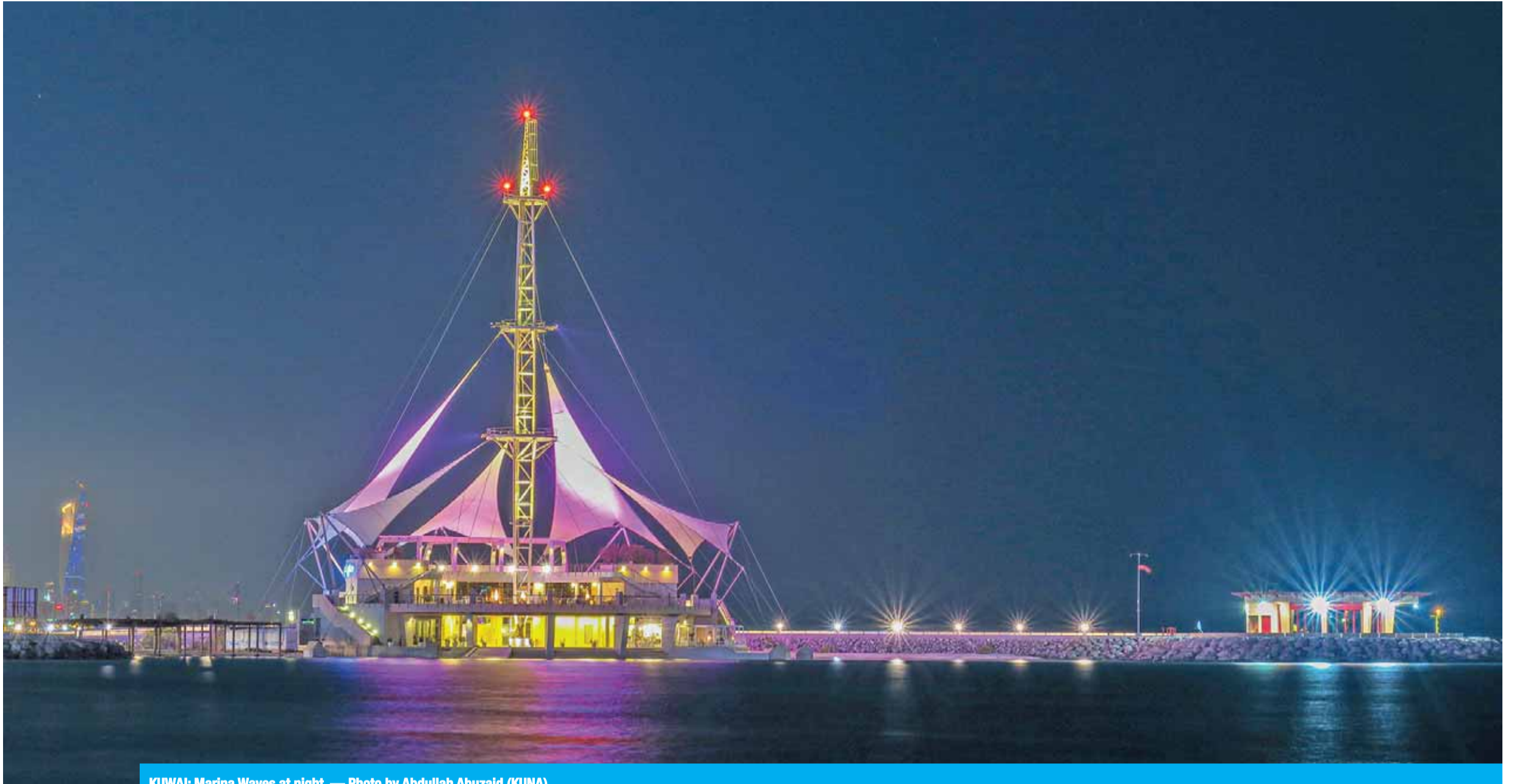
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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Marina Waves at night. — Photo by Abdullah Abuzaid (KUNA)

Museum hosts exhibition by Iranian Islamic calligrapher

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KUWAIT: Interpretations of kufi, naskh and other disciplines of Arabic calligraphy were on display as Iranian calligrapher Ali Reza hosted an exhibition of his best works at Kuwait's Museum of Modern Art on Tuesday. Some 30

murals, mostly depicting verses of the Holy Quran, were showcased amid the artist's collection. The event is being held as part of Al-Qurain Cultural Festival, in cooperation with the Iranian embassy. — KUNA



KUWAIT: NCCAL Assistant Secretary General Bader Al-Daweesh opens the exhibition. — KUNA photos



Kuwait real estate sector to flourish in 2020: Experts

Up to KD 3.4 billion traded in real estate in 2019



KUWAIT: This archive photo shows a general view of buildings in Kuwait City.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's real estate sector witnessed a flurry of transactions in 2019, particularly in private and commercial properties, indeed reflecting a recovery throughout the year. Security of real estate investments has been the safe haven for investors coupled with increasing demand on private, investment and commercial properties. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, contributing to this upward trend, adopted some regulations that would prevent fraud by some companies in real estate exhibitions as well as implementing electronic brokerage. Traders also hoped a law mortgage law would see light soon to enable financing of private houses which will ultimately revive the market, banks and constructions' sectors. Up to KD 3.4 billion (\$11.5 billion) were trad-

ed in the real estate sector in 2019, of which around 50 percent in private properties. Investment properties have exceptional revenues which exceeded those of the commercial properties, according to a report by Kuwait Finance House (KFH). Investment real estates recorded a 7.3-8.3 percent income in the third quarter of 2019. Experts projected high demand in 2020 because there was not enough private, investment and commercial properties that meet this demand. This factor, they said, contributed to maintenance of prices in 2019. "Local real estate sector saw a noticeable improvement in 2019 when we compare it to 2016 and 2017, the two years that witnessed a remarkable decline in this sector," said Sulaiman Al-Dulaijan, of Al-Dulaijan Real Estate brokerage office. He

added that the real estate sector attracted a large segment of investments because it has a yearly yield of 7-8 percent. Demand on housing sector is the highest in Kuwait. Maittham Al-Shakhs, Director of Athra Real Estate Company, said traders in the real estate sector were awaiting projects in the north of Kuwait and Al-Harir City, part of New Kuwait 2035 vision. He said real estate sector was the safest investment with high and guaranteed revenues. Shakhs hoped real estate laws be modified to facilitate transactions. — KUNA

NBK participates in 6th 'Innovation Challenge'



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced that it will be participating in the sixth edition of the Innovation Challenge Program organized by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) in collaboration with the Wharton University of Pennsylvania. A ceremony was held to welcome the new program participants with the attendance of Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO - NBK Kuwait and Emad Ahmed Al-Ablani, General Manager, Group Human Resources at NBK.

The four-months program aims to develop innovative human capabilities in the private sector and foster a culture of creativity and knowledge growth to transform Kuwait's economy into a knowledge-based economy. The program covers numerous topics and activities including the successful implementation of innovative initiatives, business model innovation, innovative delivery models and innovation tournament workshop. Moreover, participants will visit Silicon Valley companies in San

Francisco, USA.

The Innovation Challenge program, launched by KFAS for the first time in 2015, is one of the most prominent executive training programs held annually, bringing together a small group of selected companies to collaborate with prestigious business schools as they seek to develop new initiatives and projects that foster a culture of innovation within each company. Following the competitive application process, participants spend four months learning and training, as they explore innovative ways to make positive changes and add great value to their customer experiences.

NBK always strives to develop its human capital and enrich their experiences as they are the main pillar for the bank's excellence and leadership. This is accomplished through constantly providing the world's best specialized training programs that meet the highest industry international standards in order to encourage professional development and successfully position our workforce to take charge as future leaders.

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International

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2020



A year after Brazil dam breach, mud dried but not tears

Indian state to test facial recognition in polls as privacy fears mount

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WASHINGTON: (From left) Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, Sen Patty Murray, Sen Sheldon Whitehouse and Sen Chris Murphy hold a news conference at the US Capitol yesterday. — AFP

Trump returns to US in triumphant spirits

President's impeachment trial opens with fiery clashes over witnesses

DAVOS: US President Donald Trump flew back to his Washington impeachment trial in triumphant spirits yesterday after turning the Davos forum into a victory tour for the US economy and scoffing at his Democratic opponents. For two days, Trump was unstoppable as he ignored Davos' supposed focus on global warming and inequality. Barely mentioning climate crisis, he relentlessly touted US employment figures and GDP growth and bathed in the attention of CEOs and billionaires.

"Everybody is talking about America's unprecedented economic success. It's really the talk of the town," he crowed at a press conference organized at the last minute before departure, enabling him to give himself one more shout-out. Yesterday morning was breakfast with a Who's Who of American CEOs - the bosses of companies like Morgan Stanley and Apple.

Tuesday evening it had been the turn of foreign corporate titans and the boss of world soccer body FIFA, Gianni Infantino, who declared Trump to be "made of the same sort of fibre" as elite athletes. Then there was Trump's speech on Tuesday, given top billing by Davos' World Economic Forum for its 50th annual gathering in the Swiss mountain resort. The hall was packed, the overflow rooms were packed, but Trump told them what he came to tell - not the message of global togetherness and environmental healing that many of them wanted to hear. Mocking climate campaigners as "the heirs of yesterday's foolish fortune tellers", he instead delivered a rousing defense of fossil fuel industries and said that technical ingenuity could find a solution to any problem. "The American dream is back, bigger, better, stronger than ever before," he said.

Scoffing at impeachment

While the Davos crowd watched in adoration or, in many cases, consternation, Trump's real audience was back home in the US Senate and

in the swing states like Wisconsin that will decide his fate in the November election. The booming economy is the backbone of that reelection campaign, with history showing that an incumbent is hard to beat at a time of strong growth. But more immediately, Trump was talking to the senators about to reconvene for a second day in his impeachment trial for abuse of office and obstruction.

Trump's Republican majority has made clear it will do almost anything to ensure his acquittal and with his roaring boasts of success in Davos he seemed to dare the Democrats to take him on. Half jokingly, Trump even said he would "love" to walk into the Senate himself and observe the trial. "I'd love to go. I'd sort of love (to) sit in the front row and stare in their corrupt faces," Trump said at the press conference. Asked if he wanted the trial to be concluded as quickly as possible, with no witnesses allowed and no extra evidence released, Trump said "I would rather go the long way".

Even if acquitted, he will forever bear the stigma of being only the third president in US history to face an impeachment trial. At his press conference, Trump sounded incredulous that someone with the kind of success he was touting in Davos could even be accused of wrongdoing. "All I do is honest. I make great deals. I make great deals for our country," he said. "I make great deals for our country and they're honest deals." With that, Trump boarded the Marine One helicopter to lift over the Alps down to Zurich and a waiting Air Force One - and back to Washington. Republicans and Democrats battled over summoning high-level White House witnesses Tuesday in a marathon first day of arguments in Trump's trial for abuse of power. The two sides squared off in fiery exchanges that circled around the procedures for the trial and gave the Democrats an opportunity to spell out their arguments for Trump's guilt on national television.

But Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell flexed his own political muscle, mobilizing his side's 53-47 majority in the body to slap down Democratic attempts to amend the trial procedures that he reportedly crafted together with the White House and designed to protect Trump. After 13 hours, just before 2 am, McConnell was successful in pushing back every Democratic effort, ensuring Republicans had control over a trial they hope will be wrapped up by the end of the month.

McConnell's rules set out a schedule of six days of arguments, three days by the House impeachment managers and then three days by Trump's defense team, to be followed by one day of questions from the 100 Senators, who sit as jury in the trial. Democrats though were angered by McConnell's refusal to call witnesses and subpoena documents before the trial's arguments phase is over. They want to hear from current and former top Trump aides, including White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security advisor John Bolton. Without any guarantee that witnesses would be called even at that time, they sought in a last-ditch move to give the presiding judge, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, the last word on calling witnesses. That too was rejected in a stark party-line vote. "They don't want a fair trial," said Adam Schiff, the leader of the House impeachment managers prosecuting the case. "They don't want you to hear these witnesses... they don't want a neutral justice to weigh in."

But Schiff's team took advantage of the opportunity to seek amendments to occupy the television cameras for most of the hearing and lay out their case against the US leader. They used detailed graphics and played videos of US diplomats testifying late last year to demonstrate that Trump oversaw the months-long scheme to pressure Ukraine to help him politically damage potential 2020 election opponent Joe Biden and the Democrats. — AFP

Hillary Clinton says 'nobody likes' Bernie Sanders

NEW YORK: Hillary Clinton launched a scathing attack on presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders, her rival for the 2016 Democratic nomination, telling a documentary that "nobody likes him". The former US secretary of state also refused to say whether she would endorse and campaign for Sanders if he becomes the Democrats' choice to take on President Donald Trump in November's election. Her comments on Tuesday drew the ire of Sanders' supporters, who called on Clinton to support the candidate the party backs in their bid to remove Trump from the White House.

"He was in Congress for years. He had one senator support him," Clinton says in a four-part series due to air on streaming site Hulu in March. "Nobody likes him, nobody wants to work with him, he got nothing done. He was a career politician. 'It's all just baloney and I feel so bad that people got sucked into it,' she adds.

Sanders, a leftist senator from Vermont, is among the leaders in the race for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. He sits second in national polls behind centrist Joe Biden and ahead of Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren, two weeks before the first nomination vote in Iowa. Sanders, 78, pushed 72-year-old Clinton to the wire four years ago in an acrimonious, months-long battle for the party's nomination. Clinton won that race but lost to Trump. She has criticized Sanders and

his supporters for not sufficiently backing her in the presidential vote.

Interviewed by The Hollywood Reporter about the documentary, Clinton stopped short of saying she would support Sanders if he won the nomination this year. "I'm not going to go there yet. We're still in a very vigorous primary season," she said. But in a tweet on Tuesday night, Clinton expanded on her position. "I thought everyone wanted my authentic, unvarnished views! But to be serious, the number one priority for our country and world is retiring Trump, and, as I always have, I will do whatever I can to support our nominee," she wrote.

Sanders played down the attack in the documentary, telling reporters that he was focused on Trump's impeachment trial, which kicked off in earnest Tuesday. "On a good day, my wife likes me, so let's clear the air on that one," he joked. The Justice Democrats, a group close to Sanders, started a petition calling on Clinton to support whoever wins the nomination. The former first lady and US senator also waded into a dispute between Warren and Sanders.

Warren has accused him of privately telling her in Dec 2018, as they contemplated White House runs, that he did not believe a woman could win a presidential election. Sanders denies the claim but Clinton said the comment was "part of a pattern". "If it were a one-off, you might say, 'OK, fine.'" — AFP

On the menu at China virus market: Rats and wolf pups

SHANGHAI: The food market where China's deadly virus surfaced was a smorgasbord of exotic wildlife ranging from wolf pups to species linked to previous pandemics such as civets, according to vendor information and a Chinese media report. The Huanan Seafood Market in the central city of Wuhan came under greater scrutiny yesterday as Chinese officials said that the virus which has so far killed nine people and infected hundreds may have originated in a wild animal sold at the food emporium.

Past deadly epidemics have been blamed on wild animals - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) was linked to Chinese consumption of civet meat - setting Chinese authorities up for potential embarrassment if lax supervision of wildlife trafficking is found at fault in the latest outbreak. A price list circulating on China's Internet for a business at the Wuhan market lists a menagerie of animals or animal-based products including live foxes, crocodiles, wolf puppies, giant salamanders, snakes, rats, peacocks, porcupines, camel meat and other game - 112 items in all.

"Freshly slaughtered, frozen and delivered to your door," said the price list for the vendor, "Wild Game Animal Husbandry for the Masses". Gao Fu, director of the Chinese centre for disease control and prevention, said in Beijing yesterday that authorities believe the virus likely came from "wild animals at the seafood market" though the exact source remains undetermined.

China bans the trafficking of a number of wild species or requires special licenses, but regulations are loose for some species if they are commercially farmed. AFP was unable to directly confirm the authenticity of the price list. Phone calls to the vendor went unanswered, and attempts to connect to its social media accounts were rejected. The Beijing News published a photo Tuesday showing the same vendor's now-shuttered storefront, as authorities in white hazmat suits milled about.



WUHAN, China: In this file photograph taken on Jan 11, 2020, members of staff of the Wuhan hygiene emergency response team leave the closed Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. — AFP

The paper also quoted other merchants as saying trade in wildlife took place up until the market was shuttered for disinfection shortly after the outbreak. A number of the early sufferers of the virus, now known as the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), were employees of the market.

Many exotic species are still widely consumed in China or other Asian countries where they are considered a delicacy - like the civet or some rats or bats - or for purported health benefits that are unproven by science. But this brings growing human health risks, said Christian Walzer, executive director of the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society's Health Program. Walzer said 70 percent of all new infectious diseases come from wildlife, with habitat encroachment increasing the chances of pathogens spreading.

"Wildlife markets offer a unique opportunity for viruses to spill over from wildlife hosts," he said. "It is essential to invest resources not only into discovering new viruses, but more importantly, in determining the epidemiological drivers of... (the) spillover, amplification, and spread of infectious diseases." — AFP

Greece elects first woman president for a 'new era'

ATHENS: Greece's parliament yesterday elected the first woman president in the country's history, a senior judge with no party-political allegiance. A cross-party majority of 261 of the 294 MPs present at the session voted in favour of 63-year-old Katerina Sakellariopoulou, parliament chief Costas Tassoulas said. "Katerina Sakellariopoulou has been elected president of the republic," Tassoulas said. "This is a very important day for the Greek republic," said Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who nominated her for the post. "Parliament has elected a remarkable jurist, a consensus figure who symbolises the transition to a new era."

The new EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen agreed. Tweeting her congratulations to Sakellariopoulou, she added: "Greece is moving ahead into a new era of equality." Sakellariopoulou herself set out her priorities to assembled journalists shortly after the vote: the economic crisis, climate change and mass migration, all of which required international cooperation.

The new president, until now the head of Greece's administrative court, the Council of State, will be sworn in on March 13, taking over from Prokopis Pavlopoulos. The daughter of a Supreme Court judge, Sakellariopoulou completed postgraduate studies at Paris's Sorbonne university. She was the first woman to lead the Council of State, the country's top administrative court. As a jurist, she has particular expertise in environmental and constitutional law.

A consensus candidate

Although the president is nominally the head of the Greek state and commander-in-chief, the post is largely ceremonial. Greek presidents confirm governments and laws and technically have the power to declare war, but only in conjunction with the government. Backed by the



ATHENS: President of Council of State Katerina Sakellariopoulou poses for pictures after the result of a parliament vote for the election of the new President of the Greek Republic yesterday. — AFP

main opposition leftist Syriza and socialist KINAL parties, Sakellariopoulou's candidacy secured one of the highest vote counts in parliament history. Mitsotakis had emphasized that the selection broke with tradition not only because Sakellariopoulou is a woman, but because she is not a member of a political party. Past presidents have often been senior party figures, such as former ministers. Some commentators have welcomed Sakellariopoulou's nomination as a consensus candidate during a difficult time for Greek foreign policy, amid tension with Turkey over energy exploration, Aegean territorial rights and migration.

"The time has come for Greece to open up to the future," Mitsotakis said earlier this month, as he submitted Sakellariopoulou's name for the parliamentary vote. When Mitsotakis became prime minister in July, he was criticised for appointing just a handful of women to his cabinet. A 2017 Eurobarometer poll found 63 percent of Greeks thought gender equality had been achieved in politics, 69 percent at work and 61 percent in leadership positions. — AFP

International

Gold miners face dangerous life in Nigeria's 'bandit' country

Fighters have increasingly exerted control over artisanal mining

ANKA, Nigeria: From dawn, before the sun starts to sear the earth, Biltamu Sani is already hard at work, pounding away at the dusty soil in his perilous quest for gold. The mineral-rich earth of Zamfara State, northwest Nigeria, has provided generations of families with the means to make ends meet. Never easy, it is a work that today is fraught with danger, from the armed groups that rove the region and from the toxic lead that lurks in its soil. "I've been doing this since I was 12 years old," Sani, now 26, told AFP. "It's very challenging work, but this is our livelihood."

The mines lie within the reach of heavily-armed groups - "bandits" in the lexicon of the local authorities - that have been terrorizing this remote region. Gangs of mainly Fulani herders started cattle rustling and small-scale criminality decades back. Lately, they have exploited a security vacuum to become essentially an insurgent army of thousands. As the struggle with farmers over land expanded, other communities took up arms in a spiral of bloodshed that has seen an alarming proliferation of weapons. The violence claimed more than a thousand lives in 2019, the regional government estimates. In the scramble for resources, the fighters have increasingly exerted control over artisanal mining - one of the few reliable sources of income in this impoverished region. Miners have been forced to share profits and carry out the bidding of the armed groups in order to continue their trade. Many locals suspect the gunmen are paid by outside interests to secure mineral-rich areas for private gain. "The challenges in past years have been tough," Sani says.

'Just shoot you'

Nigeria's central government in April announced a ban on mining in the region in a bid to curb the armed groups. But while some companies closed down operations, local miners have carried on working by themselves. The local authorities brokered a controversial peace deal around five months back between bandits and vigilantes that has seen some of the gangs disarm. But the situation at the mines remains perilous. "You enter some places and peo-

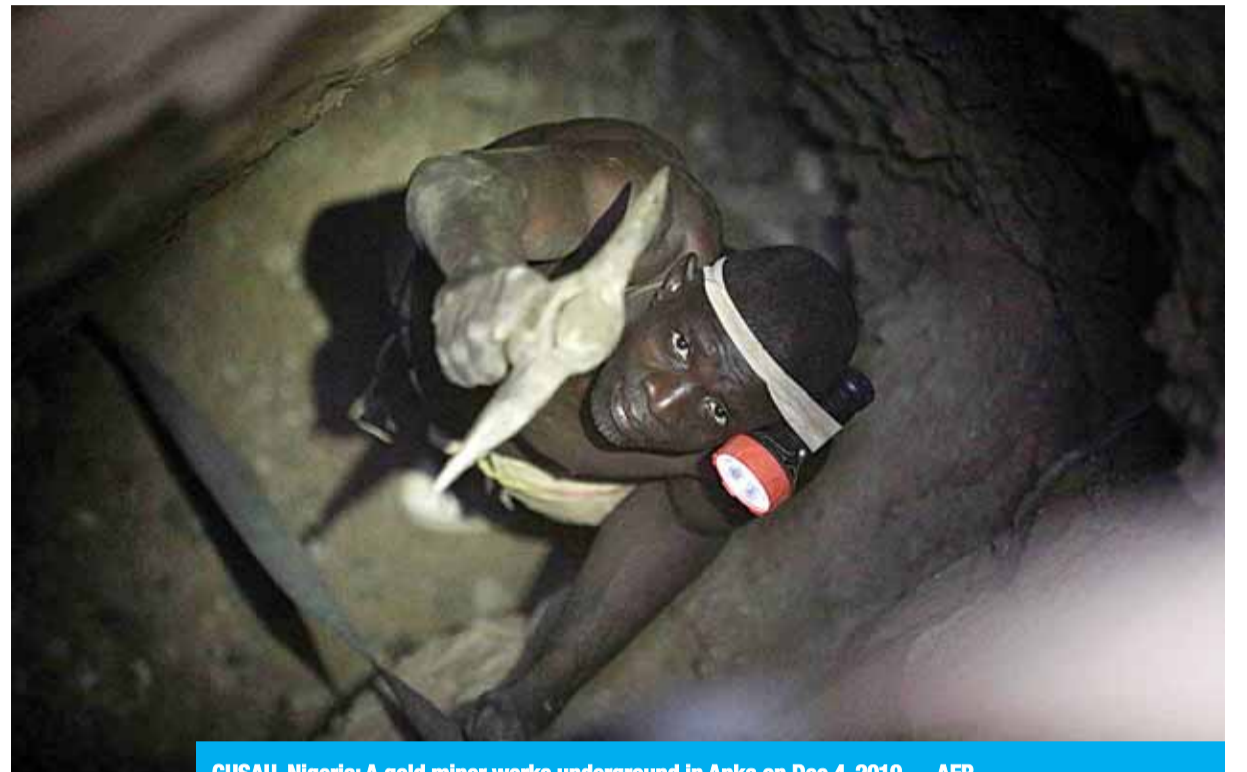
ple will just shoot you," Ayuba Muhammed, the secretary of a large mining union in the state, told AFP.

The remoteness of the mines and the absence of police outside of Zamfara's capital Gusau have left all trade here brutally exposed to insecurity. "Some of the mines you see, they have an arrangement with the bandits so that they can stay. In some other areas they cannot even try to go there," Muhammed said. As he spoke an elderly man in his office poured out small sacks of lilac stones onto a weighing scale. Extracting minerals from tons of solid rock typically yields only small amounts of cash, but it is still vital income for people in a part of Nigeria where 70 percent of the population are estimated to live in extreme poverty. The mining industry in the country remains largely artisanal, beset by corruption and poorly regulated. Successive governments have pledged - and failed - to bolster this lucrative sector as an alternative to the oil resources that account for the biggest chunk of Nigeria's income.

Lead poisoning

Compounding the insecurity are serious health risks from lead. The highly poisonous element occurs naturally and in high abundance in Zamfara's gold-rich areas, escaping into the air when the dusty rock is pounded to extract the precious specks. "People are doing these processes in their homes. Then their children play around in the same areas - it is extremely dangerous," Simba Tirima, a doctor working at a clinic run by aid group Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in the town of Anka, told AFP.

In the past decade more than 500 children have died from lead poisoning, and many others have suffered long-term ill-health. Aliyu Usman, four, began to have violent seizures two years ago as his parents often refined gold in their compound. "He's deaf, you can see he can look around but his gaze is blank," Tirima said, examining the boy at his rudimentary clinic. "His mother brought him in two years ago and said 'he's not the



GUSAU, Nigeria: A gold miner works underground in Anka on Dec 4, 2019. —AFP

same anymore, it's like he's not there."

In 2010, an outbreak of lead poisoning in Zamfara prompted scientists from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to survey 122 villages. They looked in detail at 56 of these villages, three-quarters of whom were involved in the gold trade. Of nearly 400 children who provided blood samples, the average amount of lead in the blood was 8.5 microgrammes per litre - previous research found that lead

can damage health at levels as low as five microgrammes per litre.

The surge of deaths in 2010 led to increased awareness and improvements in the way miners worked. But cases keep coming despite a reduction in the overall numbers. "There are still pockets of lead exposure," Tirima said. "More needs to be done to bring mining practices into better organized and regulated spaces." —AFP

At gates of Libya's war, Tripoli hospital struggles to cope

TRIPOLI: "The pressure was unbearable," said doctor Mohamad Al-Rajehi, recalling a night early this month when an air strike on a military school completely overwhelmed his public hospital in Libya's capital. Al-Khadra, one of the biggest hospitals in Tripoli, treated 33 wounded in one night after the attack on January 4, while 30 dead bodies also arrived at the facility. "The hospital doesn't have the means to treat such a large number" of people, said Rajehi, the hospital's emergencies manager.

After more than nine months of deadly fighting on the city's southern outskirts, all of Tripoli's public hospitals now find themselves unable to cope with the two million or more residents' needs.

Eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive against the capital, seat of a UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), in April last year. Military stalemate swiftly ensued.

The UN says the fighting has killed more than 280 civilians and some 2,000 combatants, while thousands have been wounded. More than 170,000 Tripoli residents have been displaced. A precarious ceasefire took effect on Jan 12, but heavy weapons fire continues to echo sporadically in the south of the capital.

Exodus of foreign medics

Mohamad Ehwaz, a doctor who heads medical services at Al-Khadra, said the night of the military school attack was far from an exception. Instead, it is the norm, for a facility flooded daily by the sick and wounded. "The hospital is operating at twice its capacity," he said. It was established to receive and care for 300 emergency cases at a time, but on "some days, we treat 3,000." The overcrowding means longer waiting times for treatment. Coming back "every two or three days" to Al-Khadra to lobby for an operation for



TRIPOLI: Patients are pictured waiting in Al-Khadra Hospital in the Libyan capital on Jan 8, 2020. —AFP

his father, who needs a coronary angioplasty, Khaled El-Messellati is increasingly disillusioned. "It is nearly impossible to get a quick appointment with a doctor, or

even a nurse," he lamented. And there is no question of him turning to the private sector, despite his father being in desperate need of surgery. —AFP

Italian TV chef serves up cooking lessons at Gaza jail

GAZA CITY: An Italian TV chef is serving up a taste of home cooking in the unlikelyst of places: A Gaza jail. Gabriele Rubini, a former rugby player who reinvented himself as Chef Rubio, is teaching 10 inmates at the prison near Gaza City how to make the perfect pasta - as well as learning about Palestinian cuisine. "My target is to share with them all I know and I want to learn from them all they know," he said during his 10-day trip to the enclave with an Italian NGO.

He said Palestinian food shares many similarities with that of Italy. "Around the Mediterranean Sea all the cultures were mixed," he said. Chefs "use not many

ingredients, good quality and it is all about sharing the food". A longtime supporter of the Palestinian cause, Rubini has been sharing his experience in Gaza with more than 750,000 fans via his Facebook page.

Speaking to AFP, Rubini said he worked in prisons because "jail is a place where there is a lot of humanity". "Someone made a mistake and can in jail (be) reborn and be a better man in the outside world," he said. Islamism movement Hamas has ruled Gaza since 2008 and have fought three wars with Israel, which maintains a crippling blockade on the impoverished territory. Rubini's pupils, serving time for non-violent crimes, said they took inspiration from the cooking lessons. "This is a great training opportunity," said Sami Baraka, who has served most of a two-year sentence. "I'm going to open an Italian restaurant in Gaza." —AFP



GAZA CITY: Gabriele Rubini (second left), known as Chef Rubio, cooks with Palestinian prisoners at a Hamas-run civilian prison on Tuesday. —AFP

Iraqi Sunni leaders spooked by possible US troop pullout

BAGHDAD: Sunni Iraqi leaders who spearheaded a bloody insurgency against the 2003 US-led invasion are now the most nervous about a possible withdrawal of American troops, considered a counterweight to Iran. Tensions between Washington and Tehran have boiled over onto Iraqi soil this month, with the US killing top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad and Iran striking back at an Iraqi base hosting American soldiers.

Furious at the US hit, Iraq's parliament held a vote on Jan 5 to oust all foreign troops, including some 5,200 American soldiers deployed alongside local forces. All Kurdish and most Sunni MPs boycotted the session, despite

threats by Shiite factions that the minorities would be considered "traitors" for backing the US presence. Before the vote, speaker of parliament Mohammed Halbusi, a Sunni from the western Anbar province, made an impassioned appeal to MPs to reconsider. "The decision we take now, we may not be able to amend in an hour's time," said Halbusi, addressing the mainly Shiite lawmakers in attendance. "The US doesn't concern me. Iran doesn't concern me. Nothing concerns me as much as Iraq does," he said. Both Iran and Iraq are Shiite-majority countries. Tehran has cultivated close ties with Baghdad's ruling elite for decades.

It now exercises particularly strong sway through Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi, a network of armed groups absorbed into the state security forces that has significant parliamentary representation. Iran's growing clout has come at the expense of the US, which led the invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein whose dictatorial Sunni-dominated regime oppressed Shiites. That unleashed a deadly insurgency, with Sunni militias attacking US forces, before a broad Iraqi sectarian war erupted in 2006-2007 costing thousands of lives. —AFP

Skepticism over Lebanon's 'technocratic' cabinet

BEIRUT: Lebanon's new prime minister claims to lead a government of technocrats but critics argue the line-up is window dressing for a set of ministers who are neither experts nor independent. Hassan Diab insisted the list of 20 ministers unveiled Tuesday night represented the demands of protesters who first took to the streets three months ago to demand change. But protesters reacted angrily to the line-up, arguing it fell short of a clean break from the sectarian-driven way of apportioning government jobs that has characterized Lebanese politics for decades.

A self-proclaimed technocrat, the 61-year-old Diab is a university professor but also a for-

mer education minister who owes his political appointments to the Shiite group Hezbollah. Before his cabinet was even formed, many protesters rejected him as a pawn of the parties they want removed from the political landscape. The cabinet brought many new faces but the month-long political bargaining that led to Tuesday's announcement fuelled deep-rooted suspicion that behind every technocrat is a party clinging to its share of influence and patronage. A closer look at the line-up confirmed that, with some exceptions, the government is nothing but another product of Lebanon's age-old political pie-slicing game.

"Despite the presence of a few genuinely independent and reformist figures, the cooks who whipped up this government are the usual suspects," said Karim Bitar, a professor of international relations in Paris and Beirut. Gebran Bassil, President Michel Aoun's son-in-law and arguably the politician most reviled by the protest camp, hands over the foreign ministry to Nassif Hitti, a respected career diplomat. Justice Minister Marie-Claude Najm and Finance Minister Ghazni Wazni are also both considered to have strong credentials. —AFP

'Escobar of eggs' faces justice after 35 yrs of poaching

LONDON: Jeffrey Lendrum spent three decades living as the so-called "Pablo Escobar of eggs", smuggling the fragile shells from the nests of falcons and other birds of prey to wealthy international clients. His racket was smashed in 2018 when customs officers at London's Heathrow Airport found him in possession of 19 birds of prey eggs worth a total of £100,000 pounds (\$130,000). During a full search, he was found to be wearing a body belt made out of bandages concealing 19 eggs from vultures, falcons and kites as well as two newly-hatched African fish eagle chicks. His body belt was designed to "brood" his stash so the chicks would not die before he sold them.

A British court sentenced the 58-year-old Irish-Zimbabwean to more than three years in prison in January last year. But he now faces another court appearance on Wednesday, which could see him spend up to three more years in jail in South America, if Britain accepts an extradition request. He is wanted for skipping bail in 2016 after a Brazilian judge sentenced him to four and a half years for attempting to smuggle peregrine falcons out of the country.

Middle East buyers

Stealing bird eggs runs in the family: the veteran thief received his first conviction aged 22, when he and his father were found guilty of petty theft in Zimbabwe. He has since served time in Canada, Brazil and Britain. The main drivers of egg poaching are wealthy clients in the Middle East, where peregrine falcons are in great demand for traditional falconry and can sell for thousands of dollars, according to the wildlife trade specialists Traffic.

Illegal trade in animals is worth nearly \$20 billion each year, according to Interpol. But Traffic spokesman Richard Thomas said there are "fewer than half a dozen" reported cases of egg thefts around the world each year. However, the thefts are "not insignificant" and still constitute "serious crimes", he told AFP. "Some of the species involved are extremely rare and even small numbers (of eggs) illegally taken from the wild can have a significant impact on threatened populations," he added. —AFP



LONDON: An undated handout photo shows prolific bird egg smuggler Jeffrey Lendrum with bird eggs strapped to his body in a sling, after arriving in the UK at Heathrow Airport on June 26, 2018. —AFP

International

Impeachment trial witnesses would be national security risk: Trump

President 'would have loved' to have met Thunberg at Davos

DAVOS: US President Donald Trump yesterday said he would prefer a longer impeachment trial so that current and former top administration officials could testify, but that having them appear would present national security concerns. Trump, speaking to reporters as he prepared to leave the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, also said he would love to go appear at the Senate trial in his own defense but that his lawyers would likely object.

"I'd love to go," he said during a roughly 40-minute-long news conference. "I'd love to do it."

The Republican president said it was up to the Senate to decide how to handle the trial, but that he would like to have former national security adviser John Bolton and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo testify. "The problem with John (Bolton) is that it's a national security problem," Trump said before returning to Washington, where opening arguments were set to begin in the historic proceedings. "He knows some of my thoughts, he knows what I think about leaders. What happens if he reveals what I think about a certain leader and it's not very positive?" he said, adding that Pompeo testifying would also be a risk.

"You could call it presidential prerogative," Trump said. "The way I look at it, I call it national security, for national security reasons. Executive privilege." Senators must decide whether to remove Trump from office after he was impeached last month by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress for pressuring Ukraine to investigate former Democratic Vice President Joe Biden, a political rival, and impeding the inquiry into the matter.

Trump also said he would want to have his acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney testify but that he would not have much more to add to his public comments in television interviews. He also said he would want Rick

Perry, adding that the former US Energy Secretary had asked him if he could testify.

"I would rather go the long way," he said. But, he added, "I'll leave that to the Senate," adding that he would watch the proceedings after leaving the summit. Trump also said that he would like to have his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, whose efforts on behalf of the president in Ukraine are at the center of the impeachment, serve on his legal team in the Senate but that there could be a conflict.

"He could be a witness at some point," he said.

Trump said yesterday he would have loved to have met Swedish environment activist Greta Thunberg at Davos but added that she should not focus her anger on the United States. "I would have loved to have seen her," Trump told reporters before leaving the luxury Swiss resort, while claiming that countries other than the United States were the worst polluters and "Greta ought to focus on those places".

Trump had launched an extraordinary attack on environmental campaigners in a speech to the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Tuesday, saying they were "perennial prophets of doom" and the "heirs of yesterday's foolish fortune tellers". Thunberg sat quietly through the speech and was unrepentant in later remarks. "Our house is still on fire," she said.

Trump denied he thought global warming was a hoax, saying: "No not at all-I think aspects of it are."

He said campaigners had put global warming "at a level that is unrealistic" to the point where people cannot live their lives.

Also speaking at Davos, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin defended the administration's policies, saying its views had been misinterpreted. "The US administration believes in clean air and clean water. This is a very complicated issue. We support a clean environment we just think it can be done in a way that is pro-business," he said.



DAVOS: US President Donald Trump (left), World Economic Forum (WEF) founder and executive chairman Klaus Schwab (center) and White House Senior Advisor Ivanka Trump (right), arrive at the Congress center during the WEF annual meeting in Davos yesterday. —AFP

Kashmir issue

Trump said the United States was watching developments between India and Pakistan over Kashmir "very closely" and was prepared to help if necessary, but did not say how. Speaking ahead of talks with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum, Trump said trade and borders were both critical points for discussion, while Khan said

that for him Afghanistan was the top priority.

"Trade is going to be of very, very paramount importance ... and we're working together on some borders, and we're talking about Kashmir in relation to what is going on with Pakistan and India. And if we can help we certainly will be helping," he said. "We've been watching that and following it very, very closely," he added. —Agencies

Thousands of Greek islanders protest against migrant camps

GREECE: Thousands of residents on Greek islands hosting large migrant camps kicked off a day of protests yesterday, demanding the immediate removal of asylum seekers.

The islanders of Lesbos, Samos and Chios staged a general strike, shutting down shops and public services and rallying in central squares, many waving Greek flags. Packing the waterfront of Lesbos harbor, the protesters chanted: "Our islands are not prisons. Shut down all the camps now." "Soon we will be a minority on our own island," said Vassiliki Ververi, a Lesbos resident. "It's Greece and the islands that are paying the price of migration," she told AFP.

Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi, who was appointed to the post last week, said local anger was "justified". "The burden borne by the islanders is disproportionate," Mitarachi, who represents the island of Chios in parliament, said in a statement.

The largest camp of Moria on Lesbos island, with a capacity for 2,840 people, hosts more than 19,000 asylum seekers. Samos and Chios each have 7,500 and around 5,000 asylum seekers in camps respectively built to handle 650 and 1,000 persons. Dozens more arrive daily from neighboring Turkey. Asylum seekers "should be shared out across Greece," 72-year-old Lesbos pensioner Efstratios Peppas told AFP.

"And Europe must assume its responsibilities. It too must take migrants," he said. "You can't walk alone outside after dark, people get stabbed," Peppas said. Rights groups and medical charities have repeatedly criticized the living conditions at the camps. The government announced plans in November to build larger camps on Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros, which currently host a total of nearly 42,000 migrants and refugees and where outbreaks of violence are frequent.

Two young asylum seekers have been fatally stabbed in brawls at the Moria camp this month. An 18-year-old Afghan girl was also seriously injured in a knife attack this week and remains in hospital.

And three asylum seekers in Greek custody have committed suicide in recent weeks. "We demand the immediate shutdown of Moria," read a banner carried in the Lesbos demonstration. Greece's new conservative government, which has announced tougher asylum laws and hired additional border guards, vows to expel all asylum seekers who are not entitled to protection. —AFP



Residents of the island of Lesbos hold a sign reading "Moria demands the camp to be removed" as they take part in a demonstration against migrant camps, at the port of Mytilene yesterday. —AFP

A year after Brazil dam breach, the mud has dried but not the tears

BRUMADINHO, Brazil: Before saying a prayer for her older sister, Natalia de Oliveira lights a candle and places it next to rosary beads and a photo of her sibling killed in a massive dam collapse in Brazil.

A year after the disaster that unleashed millions of tons of mining waste in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais, de Oliveira still hopes Leicilda's body will be found beneath the mud. Her sister was among 270 people killed in the huge avalanche of toxic sludge that buried houses and swaths of countryside in the mineral-rich region on January 25. The official death toll is 259, but scores of firefighters are still picking through the dried mud for the bodies of 11 people listed as missing but certainly dead.

Leicilda is one of them. "On top of all this tragedy, we were stripped of the dignity of a funeral," says de Oliveira of her sister, who worked in the human resources office of Vale, the Brazilian mining company that owns the dam. "We do not accept anyone saying that she is one of the missing. We know she was in the dining hall of Vale that Friday at 12:28 pm."

Since the tragedy, de Oliveira has listened to the audio messages that her sister sent her on WhatsApp every morning. "I feel like she's still saying 'hello' to me. These messages are the only thing that help me get out of bed," she says, weeping.

Budget battle hampers EU in space

BRUSSELS: Space is becoming increasingly militarized and European satellites are under-protected, experts warned Tuesday, voicing dismay at cuts proposed in the EU's draft budget.

"The rise in geopolitical tensions we see on Earth is being extended and projected into space," EU diplomatic chief Josep Borrell told the 12th European Space Conference, which groups policymakers, industry and researchers. French General Michel Friedling, the head of France's new Space Command, warned of "grey actions" in space that stopped short of being hostile.

"But all space powers are developing capabilities and systems capable of spying, neutralising and even destroying," he said. India has fired missiles capable of hitting a satellite and Russia has been caught spying, while President Donald Trump has launched a US "space force" and NATO has designated space as a domain of conflict alongside land, sea, air and cyberspace.

The threats in space come not only from military actors—but also from more and more private operators, Borrell warned.

The two sisters were only a year apart — 48 and 49 — and had always lived near each other in Brumadinho, where Vale is the biggest employer.

As she passes their old primary school, Natalia again loses her composure. "The whole city has been hit. We lost so many childhood friends, it makes us sick," she says.

'I want justice'

Malvina Firmino Nunes is also struggling to come to terms with the loss of a loved one, her son Peterson. One of her other children called her on that eventful day to tell her that the 35-year-old had been swept away by the mudslide.

In that moment, Nunes says, her life stopped. The sturdy 62-year-old woman cannot even utter her son's name without crying. She needs medication to sleep. Nunes is among 4,000 people to have received compensation from Vale for the loss of family members in the catastrophic dam breach.

With her 700,000 reais (about \$170,000), Nunes was able to buy a small house. But it is not a property that she wants. "I only want justice to be done; these white-collar workers are not where they should be, in prison," she says. State prosecutors on Tuesday charged Vale's ex-president Fabio Schvartsman and 15 others with intentional homicide and environmental offenses over the disaster.

Vale and its German auditor TÜV SÜD also face environmental charges.

A judge must accept the charges before the cases can go to trial. Nunes and de Oliveira say they plan to take Vale to court. "We think that to honor our dead we have to do our part: not

And the space around Earth is becoming congested, with debris increasing the risk of collisions. Of the 5,000 satellites currently in orbit, 2,000 are operational.

Europe's own satellite systems, Galileo, EGNOS and Copernicus, are vulnerable and must be protected, Friedling said—all the more so because they are used by both civilians and the military.

France is ready to face threats in space and is "looking for capable partners with ambitions", the French general added. Italy wants to be involved, planning to equip itself with a space command, junior defence minister Angelo Tofalo told the conference on Tuesday. Critics within the EU of the militarisation of space include notably Belgium, which "is opposed to it," warned Foreign and Defense Minister Philippe Goffin.

Budget wrangling

The European Union has big plans for its space and defence industries, but cuts to the bloc's proposed budget for 2021-27 of some 200 billion euros (\$220 billion) have caused alarm. The European Defence Fund has seen its proposed share fall from 13 to seven billion euros and space programs have lost 20 percent of their allocations. The initial budget plan earmarked huge growth in funding for defense as the bloc looks to become a more credible geopolitical player, but with richer member states looking to trim their contributions after Brexit, a



Aerial view of Parque da Cachoeira, which suffered the January 25, 2019 dam collapse, in Brumadinho, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Brazil marks on January 25, 2020, the first anniversary of the Brumadinho dam collapse, one of the country's worst industrial accidents. —AFP

accepting that mining kills people," says de Oliveira. "Vale must learn the lesson."

'United by tragedy'

Talia Oliveira, 16, still bears the scars of one of Brazil's worst industrial accidents. Trapped in the mud, she owes her survival to firefighters who hauled her aboard a helicopter in a dramatic scene broadcast live on television. Her legs are disfigured by large scars and she relies on crutches to walk.

"I stayed in the hospital for six months. The pain was very intense, I was taking a lot of morphine," Oliveira recalls. Despite the 20 drugs she takes every day and the painful physiotherapy sessions, the teenager says she has "recovered well."

"Sometimes I still have nightmares, the images of the moment when they tried to get me out of the mud come back to me," Oliveira says. "But there are days when I manage to be happy, I sing. I hope to have a future without as much medication, being able to walk normally. Just that would be a perfect life." Brumadinho is preparing for an influx of people from across the state to mark the first anniversary of the tragedy.

It will not be the first tribute: on the 25th day of every month, relatives of the victims gather at the entrance to the town to pay their respects. Natalia de Oliveira has not missed a single vigil.

"We are united by tragedy and pain," she says. "In Brumadinho, we have become a family." —AFP



BRUSSELS: A picture taken on Tuesday shows EU SPACE logo during the 12th European Space Conference in Brussels. —AFP

slimmed-down plan was put forward by Finland when it held the rotating EU presidency. Romanian conservative MEP Christian-Silviu Busoi, chairman of the European Parliament's Industry Committee, warned that the cuts would jeopardize the Galileo program—the European satellite navigation system—and Copernicus, the EU's Earth observation program.

The EU's competition and digital supre-

mo Margrethe Vestager warned that money was needed to back "new ideas and new technology" and said she hoped it would be available in the next budget.

Budget haggling will rumble on for some time, with EU Council President Charles Michel facing the unenviable task of bridging the near 240 billion euro gap between the demands of the European Parliament and Finland's proposal. —AFP

International

India supreme court declines to suspend divisive citizenship law

Govt given four weeks to respond to 144 petitions against disputed law

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court declined calls to suspend the implementation of a new citizenship law yesterday, deciding that a constitutional bench of five judges was needed to hear all the challenges to legislation that critics say discriminates against Muslims.

The court gave Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government four weeks to respond to 144 petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the law which has ignited protests across the country.

The law, which came into effect on Jan.10 after being passed by parliament in December, lays out a path for citizenship for six religious minorities in neighboring mostly-Muslim countries - Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Critics say that the omission of Muslims is discriminatory, and that basing the right to citizenship on religion violates the secular principles of India's constitution.

Opposition leaders, Muslim organizations and student groups had petitioned the court to hold off implementation of the law until the challenges to the legislation were settled.

But Chief Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde heading a three-bench panel told a packed courtroom that only a constitutional bench of five judges could rule on the matter and in the meantime gave the government more time to explain its stance. "We will give you four weeks to file reply to all petitions," Bobde told the government's top lawyer, indicating that the next hearing will be held in late February.

The government says the law is for the benefit of religious minorities such as Hindus, Sikhs and Christians who face persecution in India's Muslim majority neighbors. The biggest student organization in the northeastern



KOLKATA: Protesters hold placards as they take part in a demonstration against India's new citizenship law in Kolkata on Tuesday. — AFP

state of Assam, where some of the worst violence was seen last month during widespread protests against the law, said it would keep up its opposition. "Non-violent

and democratic protests will continue alongside the legal battle," All Assam Students Union general secretary Lorinjyoti Gogoi told Reuters. — Reuters

Desert locust invasion spares India a big hit

NEW DELHI: India has been able to bring swarms of desert locusts under control in two key oilseed producing states and authorities are now trying to assess crop damage, officials said yesterday.

A number of timely measures and a change in wind direction have prevented a spread and large-scale damage to the rapeseed and cumin seed crops, the officials said. The outbreak began late last year in Gujarat and Rajasthan states. "The swarms came from Iran and Pakistan, but the situation has been brought under control with the help of pesticides and specialist equipment. Although we're trying to figure out the extent of damage,

I can tell you that there's no major loss," said a farm ministry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with government rules.

Three villages in Gujarat's Banaskantha district, which shares a border with Pakistan's desert areas, came under fresh locust attacks this month, Prakash Patel, the top farm official of the district, told Reuters. In Gujarat, locust attacks in December damaged crops, mainly rapeseed and cumin seed, planted on about 17,000 hectares.

In the neighboring desert state of Rajasthan, 360,000 hectares came under the attack. Adult locust swarms can fly up to 150 km (93 miles) a day with the wind and adult insects can consume roughly their own weight in fresh food per day. A very small swarm eats as much in one day as about 35,000 people. If allowed to breed unchecked in favorable conditions, locusts can form huge swarms that can strip trees and crops over vast areas.

The last major upsurge was in 2007, when heavy rains created favorable breeding conditions for locusts along the India-Pakistan border. — Reuters



Adult locust swarms can fly up to 150 km (93 miles) a day with the wind and adult insects can consume roughly their own weight in fresh food per day.

Rohingya refugees pray for justice as court to rule in genocide case

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh: Rohingya refugees who fled persecution and violence in Myanmar are praying for justice as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague prepares to deliver an initial verdict today in a genocide case filed against Myanmar.

More than 730,000 Muslim Rohingya fled an army offensive in Myanmar's Rakhine state in 2017. The United Nations says gang rapes and mass killings were carried out with "genocidal intent". Hundreds of villages were burned to the ground and later razed. Myanmar denies the charges of genocide.

Gambia has asked the ICJ to order "provisional measures" to prevent more harm, a first step in a legal case that is expected to run for years. It has also asked judges to order Myanmar to ensure any evidence of atrocities is preserved. At the world's largest refugee camp in Bangladesh, where the Rohingya who fled are settled, many hope for a ruling in their favour after years of persecution.

"The Burmese (Myanmar) government and the army tried to wipe out the entire Rohingya community. We want justice," said 30-year-old refugee Nurul Amin, who fled to Bangladesh with his pregnant wife during the 2017 army crackdown. Mohammed Zubair, a 19-year-old teacher living in the camps, said Myanmar "must be held accountable for the horrific crimes".

"We saw so many people killed before our eyes. All we could do was run while our villages were burnt down," he said. The refugees have urged Bangladesh authorities to restore internet connectivity in the camps - curtailed due to what the Bangladesh government says are security concerns - so they can watch the court deliver its verdict.

"Only justice can heal our wounds"

The Rohingya are demanding to be allowed to return to their homes in Myanmar in safe and secure conditions. Buddhist majority Myanmar says its forces have been waging a counter-terrorism operation against an armed insurgency in Rakhine state. Myanmar also says the UN court should have no jurisdiction on the issue and views its interventions as a violation of its national sovereignty.

A Myanmar government-appointed panel established to probe allegations of abuses against the Rohingya said on Monday it had found no evidence of genocide. Rohingya leaders branded the probe a "whitewash". The quest for justice has been an intensely emotional one for many refugees at the camps who said they saw their family members killed.

"The killers of my son must all be punished," said 65-year-old refugee Nur Alam, whose son was allegedly shot dead by a Myanmar soldier. "Only justice can heal our wounds." — Reuters

Murder accused set to be Nepal's new speaker

KATHMANDU: A former Maoist leader accused of ordering a man's death during Nepal's civil war is set to become the speaker of the parliament, officials confirmed yesterday, sparking criticism from rights activists. Agni Sapkota, a senior member of the ruling Nepal Communist Party, has faced several hearings in the Supreme Court after a case was lodged against him over the death of Arjun Bahadur Lama.

Sapkota denies any involvement and has not been charged. Witnesses say Lama was abducted from his village in 2005 by Maoist insurgents and later killed. More than 17,000 people were killed, 1,300 disappeared and thousands were displaced during the war which ended with a peace deal between Maoist insurgents and government forces in 2006.

Many former rebels now fill the political ranks of Nepal's ruling party. Sapkota was the only candidate to put his name forward for the position of speaker after an

agreement among senior party leaders.

"The house meeting on Sunday will formally announce his election to the speaker post because he is unopposed," Parliament Secretariat spokesman Rojnath Pandey told AFP yesterday.

The speaker's post has been vacant since October after then-speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara, also a senior member of the ruling Nepal Communist Party and a former Maoist rebel, stepped down over attempted rape allegations. Lama's wife Purnimaya Tamang said Sapkota should be punished for her husband's death.

"How can someone responsible for the murder of my husband be elected speaker?" Tamang told Republica newspaper. "How can they appoint a criminal to such a prestigious position?" Civil and human rights activists on Tuesday issued a statement saying they opposed his candidacy.

"The case has made mockery of (the) rule of law and undermined human rights obligations, and disrespected Purnimaya Lama and other victims struggling for justice," the statement said. Despite thousands of complaints, two war crime commissions set up in 2015 have been unable to make progress on a single case, stymied by a lack of funding and political will. Just two convictions related to civil war-era crimes have been handed down in civilian courts, one linked to the murder of a teenage girl and the other concerning the killing of a journalist. — AFP



KATHMANDU: People gather to protest against former Maoist leader Agni Sapkota (unseen) as he registered his candidacy a day before for the post of Speaker of House of Representative, in Kathmandu yesterday. — AFP

Australia evacuates parts of its capital as bushfire fears return

SYDNEY: Some residents of Australia's capital Canberra were evacuated briefly yesterday after a bushfire broke out near the airport as searing hot weather ended a few days of respite and the number of out-of-control blazes surged in the southeast of the country. Roads were closed and the authorities told people to leave or stay away from suburbs east of Canberra, as photos posted on social media showed grey smoke billowing above the city's suburbs. There were no reports of injuries or damage, and the warning was downgraded an hour later.

"I can see the smoke from my house," said Kane Cawse,

a gym owner, by telephone as he drove toward his business in the evacuation zone about 14 km (9 miles) from the country's parliament.

"I'm just going to see exactly what's going on, make sure I've got a gym and make sure that the guys are either safe or out," he added. In recent weeks, Canberra and the cities of Sydney and Melbourne experienced air quality rated among the worst in the world under thick clouds of bushfire smoke.

The fire broke out as a huge dust storm crossed the country's south, leaving skies deep orange and engulfing some outback towns, the Bureau of Meteorology said. Since September, hundreds of wildfires in Australia have killed 29 people as well as an estimated 1 billion native animals, while incinerating 2,500 homes and a total area of bushland larger than the size of Austria.

Firefighters had taken advantage of rain and milder temperatures in the past week to contain blazes, but the respite ended on Wednesday when high temperatures and winds returned. — Reuters

Indian state to test facial recognition in polls as privacy fears mount

BANGKOK: The southern Indian state of Telangana will use facial recognition software in local elections yesterday, authorities said, the first such use of the technology in the country despite growing concerns about privacy and surveillance. Facial recognition software will be used to verify voters in 10 polling stations in the Medchal Malkajgiri district to "reduce impersonation cases", the Telangana state election commission said in an online notification late last week.

The privacy of voters will be protected, and their photographs will not be stored or used "for any other purpose", according to the order. A negative result will not be grounds to deny voting rights to anyone, it said. "Facial recognition is not fool-proof, and in this instance, misidentification can lead to disenfranchisement, which impinges on a core democratic right to vote," said Raman Jit Singh Chima, Asia policy director at digital rights advocacy Access Now.

"It is unclear what legal framework it is being used under, and how the data will be secured and used," he said. Telangana's move comes as facial recognition technology is being installed in airports, railway stations and cafes across India, and as the government prepares to roll out a nationwide system, likely to be the world's biggest.

Last month, the technology was used to screen crowds at a political rally for the first time, sparking fears that it was also being used to profile people at protests. Indian authorities have said the technology is needed to bolster a severely under-policed country, and to stop criminals and find missing children. India's Supreme Court, in a landmark ruling in 2017 on the national biometric identity card program, said individual privacy is a fundamental right. Yet the ruling has not held back the rollout of facial recognition technology, according to digital rights activists who say its use is problematic without a data protection law. The Personal Data Protection Bill, introduced in parliament last month, empowers the government to ask a company to hand over anonymous personal data and other non-personal data.

In Telangana, the technology is vital for tackling fraudulent voting, and voters will not have the option to opt out, said M Ashok Kumar, secretary of the state's election commission.

"There are problems with using just voter identification cards for verification. This is an additional step to curb impersonation," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "We think it will be an effective tool, and that it can be deployed more widely after this trial," he said. India is not the only country to use facial recognition in elections. Afghanistan used it in presidential polls last year, a move that women's rights activists said deterred many female voters from participating.

Elsewhere, backlash against the technology is growing. San Francisco and Oakland in the United States have banned its use, while the European Union is considering a similar move in public areas for up to five years. — Reuters

Pakistan scribe detained for 'anti-state' Facebook posts

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani journalist critical of the government and the army has been detained for five days for having published "anti-state" comments online, his lawyer told AFP Tuesday, in a new illustration of shrinking freedoms in Pakistan. Azhar-ul Haq Wahid, who worked for a small television and newspaper with a limited readership, made several comments about the Pakistani establishment on his Facebook account.

He recently wrote that a court decision to lift the death penalty on former military ruler Pervez Musharraf had "mocked" the constitution. A police report said "anti-state and defamatory material against the public functionaries and state departments" was noted on his Facebook account, according to a copy seen by AFP. Wahid was arrested last Thursday in the eastern city of Lahore, and has been in custody since. His lawyer Mian Dawood said a court must decide his bail later this week.

The arrest "is only to threaten the freedom of media" which has faced "blatant censorship for last three years in Pakistan", Dawood told AFP. It is "clearly another attempt to intimidate journalists who refuse to be censored," said the head of the Asia-Pacific office of Reporters Without Borders Daniel Bastard, asking the Pakistani justice "dismiss the charges against Wahid and free him at once."

Pakistan has long been one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists, once caught between Islamist militants and the powerful security establishment. However security has dramatically improved in recent years. Now Pakistani media complain of increasing censorship and pressure by the military establishment. In 2018 the Committee to Protect Journalists noted that the military had "quietly but effectively" imposed strict limits on the scope of general news reporting. — AFP

Analysis

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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
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After four decades of war, Afghan widows battle for homes

After her husband was killed and their home in Baghlan province torched in Afghanistan's long-running war, Nasim Gul fled nearly 200 miles to Kabul with her four children and moved in with her cousin, sewing clothes to eke out a living. As a widow, Gul could not claim the small plot of land her husband had tilled, nor was she welcome in her family home, which she had left as a young bride. "Without my husband, it was very difficult for me to find a home," said Gul, 45, who wears a burqa that covers her from head to toe when she steps outside the home. "It has been hard living with my cousin for nine years. But no one was willing to give a home to a single woman," she said.

Gul is one of an estimated 2 million widows in Afghanistan who have been disproportionately affected by the war. Often uneducated and with few livelihood options, they are also generally denied a share of land and property, even though these rights are recognized in the Afghan constitution, its Civil Code and in Islamic sharia law, women's rights groups say. Security of tenure is usually tied to men, and Afghan cultural norms and customary practices often deny women these rights, particularly those who are widowed or divorced, said Sheila Qayumi at the nonprofit Equality for Peace and Democracy.

"Especially in the provinces, women face severe restrictions and are treated no better than a cow or a goat. They have no rights, and their names are generally not on any documents, so it can be hard for them to claim their legal rights," she said. "Divorced and widowed women often have to live in the homes of their male relatives or in-laws, where they can also face harassment or violence if they claimed their land or property rights. So they often give up their claim to avoid that."

Harassment and hurdles

Women have made huge strides in the conservative country since a ban during Taleban rule of 1996 to 2001 from school, work, politics and going outside without a male relative. But while growing numbers of women now complete education and work in previously male bastions, they continue to face harassment and hurdles, human rights groups say. This is true particularly of housing, land and property. Only about 12 percent of land in Afghanistan is arable, according to the World Bank, and 40 years of conflict have left warlords and powerful landlords in control.

Today, about 2.5 million registered refugees in the world are from Afghanistan, the highest number after Syria, according to the United Nations. In addition, more than 2 million have been internally displaced by the fighting. As hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees are forced back, or return of their own accord, many have opted to settle in cities for work and have struggled to find housing. So, they have built illegal homes on any patch of available land.

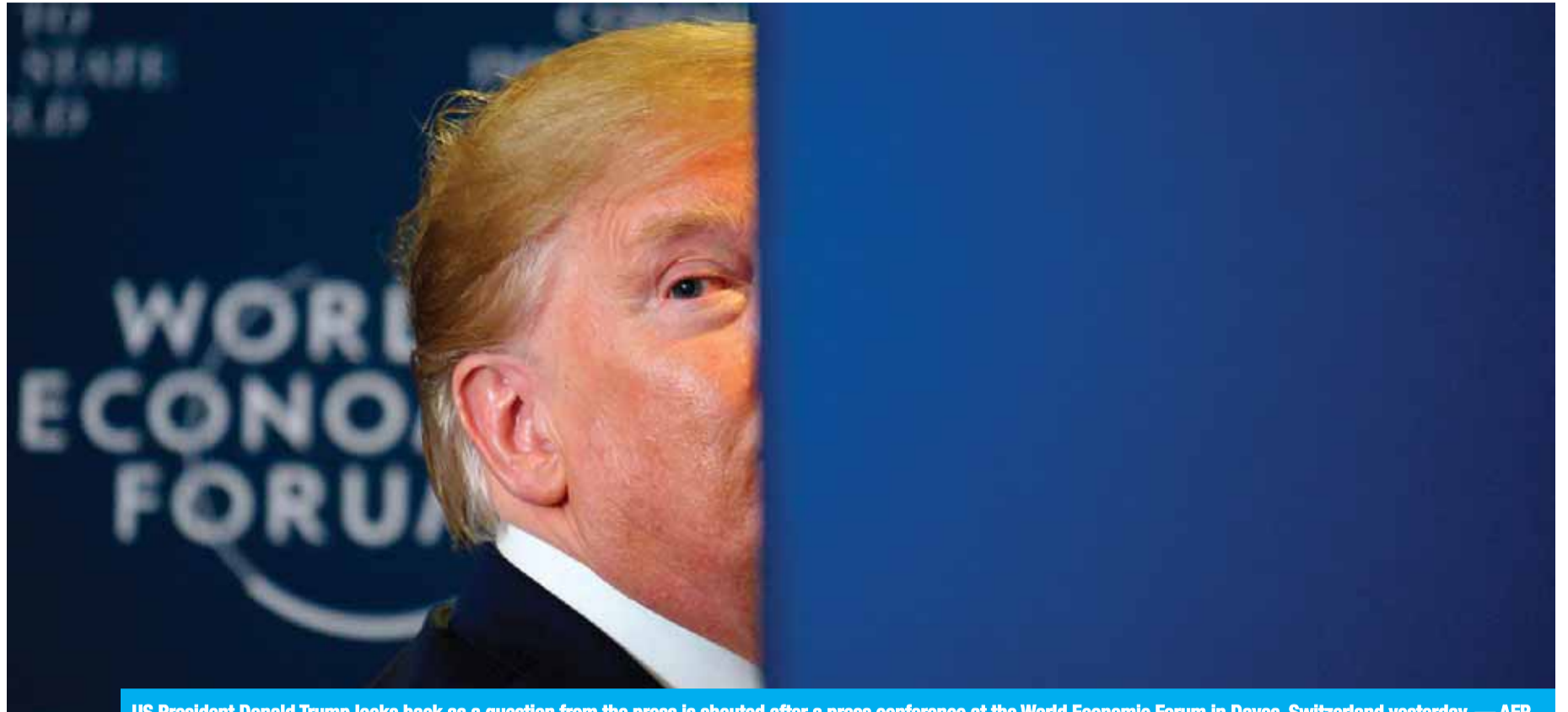
These informal structures make up more than two-thirds of the settlements in big cities including Kabul, according to government authorities. Housing for returning refugees and female-headed households is a priority, said Arifullah Arif, plan and policy director for the Ministry of Urban Development and Land. The government aims to hand out at least 200,000 apartments and plots this year, and build additional housing as required, he said in an interview. It also aims to give one million "Occupancy Certificates" to informal settlers over the next three years. The certificate protects the holder from eviction for five years, after which they are eligible to apply for a land title.

Unusually for Afghanistan, the certificates are issued in the names of both the husband and wife, and just the woman in the case of female-headed households. In Kabul's District 1, the smallest of the city's 22 districts, about 550 households - out of more than 9,600 - have received Occupancy Certificates, many of them female-headed households, said deputy municipal director Wahida Samadi.

"Putting the names of women on the certificates has had a major impact, culturally and psychologically," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in her office. "With the joint title, women are more secure that they won't be divorced or abandoned by their husbands. For widows, it means more security and a place in society," she said.

For Rogul Yermal, 62, a widow who received an Occupancy Certificate two years ago, it has meant just that. When her husband died 15 years ago, his male cousin tried to oust her several times from her modest home on a hillside. He only backed off when her young sons resisted, she said. Since she got the certificate, Yermal has painted her 100-sq-m home and used the document as collateral for a bank loan for a house for her youngest son. "I never had any documents in my name before," she said. "Since I got the certificate, I feel safe and can sleep well, knowing no one can take my house from me." — Reuters

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US President Donald Trump looks back as a question from the press is shouted after a press conference at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland yesterday. — AFP

Trump frames climate change as global culture war

In Davos on Tuesday, President Donald Trump pledged the United States to a major global project to plant a trillion trees worldwide in the next decade. In almost any previous administration, that announcement would have been the centrepiece of the president's speech to the World Economic Forum, focusing this year on climate change amid Australia's wildfires and faster than expected progress towards renewable energy generation.

Instead, Trump grabbed the agenda in a very different way, lambasting climate change campaigners as "prophets of doom" making "predictions of apocalypse" and pledging that America would defend its economy. Like almost every other major action the president takes this year, it paints an unambiguous picture of both how he sees the world and intends to use that framing to win a second term.

It is, as always, an unambiguously divisive approach that Trump knows will antagonize his rivals and, he hopes, mobilise his base. That, he clearly feels, is best done by going on the offensive. Liberal outrage and alarm over draconian measures against migrants, trade wars or risky foreign actions such as the killing of Iranian Major-General Qassem Soleimani, Trump appears to be betting, may simply play into his hands with the demographics that he really needs.

He will hope the same will be true of slamming hardline climate campaigners like Greta Thunberg, whom he did not mention by name but who was in the auditorium to hear him speak. Climate change is rising up the priority list for US voters - one poll by Yale and George Mason University climate change departments in May showed as many as 40 percent saying it might influence their choices. But those voters, of course, remain amongst the least likely to embrace Trump.

Strikingly, he painted the pledge to contribute to the trillion trees - a project of the World Economic Forum supported by the UN Environment Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization - as "conserving the majesty of God's creation". Evangelical Christian voters are at the heart of Trump's strategy, whatever his personal faith, an

approach that has underpinned embracing sometimes controversial preachers and appointing judges keen to roll back access to abortion. The next major global climate summit will be in Glasgow in November - less than a week after the US presidential election on the 3rd of that month. For Trump, that likely means doubling down on this kind of rhetoric.

'Absolute power'

Globally, on climate at least, sentiment appears to be shifting - with high-profile extreme weather events such as the Australian bushfires potentially providing a political turning point even in traditionally sceptical countries. Last year's "yellow vest" protests in France, however, remain a potent reminder of public resistance to efforts to change behavior through steps like fuel tariffs. "These alarmists always demand the same thing - absolute power to dominate, transform and control every aspect of our lives," said Trump.

Such words will grab headlines - but pointedly, Trump did not dispute the science. The Yale and George Mason study showed 73 percent of registered US voters believed climate change was happening - 95 percent of liberal Democrats, 88 percent of Democrats defining themselves as "moderate" or "conservative", 68 percent of liberal/moderate Republicans and just 40 percent of conservative Republicans.

The numbers who believe that warming is mostly caused by humans remain notably lower - 59 percent of registered voters, 84 percent of liberal Democrats, 70 percent of moderate/conservative Democrats, 55 percent of liberal/moderate Republicans - 14 points higher than in October 2017 - and only 26 percent of conservative Republicans.

Intriguingly, though, support for action to lower greenhouse gas emissions turns out to be more widespread than believing in the underlying science: 76 percent of voters say they believe emissions should be cut regardless of what other countries do, while 77 percent told pollsters

they thought Trump was wrong to quit the Paris Climate Agreement. As before, those results are heavily partisan, with liberal Democrats hugely more likely than conservative Republicans to back anti-climate action.

Not a hoax, not an emergency?

An October focus group in the key swing states of Ohio, Minnesota and Wisconsin reported by news website Axios provides a more nuanced view. By and large, those involved believe climate change is a genuine concern, certainly not a hoax. But they also did not feel that it was a genuine emergency requiring radical action.

Like so much in the modern world, this is a global as much as a national political dividing point. Ahead of the Glasgow climate summit, the United Nations, most major Western governments and increasingly multinational firms are on a very similar page. Investment bank Goldman Sachs announced this year it was getting out of investments it judged to be contributing to climate change, while a tsunami of investment stands ready to pour into renewable energy and associated projects as the technology becomes available.

Already, the International Energy Agency says renewable energy generation is growing faster than expected - making up 26 percent of the total world production - and could expand by 50 percent in the next five years, powered by growth in solar energy in particular. Costs of the latter are predicted to fall 15-35 percent by 2024 - but emerging economies, particular China, will remain heavily dependent on coal while the green industrial revolution could prove devastating to energy producing states such as Russia and Saudi Arabia.

If predictions that the world is reaching a tipping point in climate change, ushering in more Australia-style extreme events, that may be enough to win the international argument, even amongst Trump-supporting rural dwellers who distrust the concept now. But that may not bother Trump. He is focused on November. — Reuters

He shoots, he scores! Putin's hockey passion shapes Russian elite

When Vladimir Putin unveiled his new government this week, several top officials had something in common with the Russian president: A love of lacing up and hitting the ice for a hockey game. Since Putin discovered a passion for hockey and founded the amateur Night Hockey League in 2011, prowess on the ice has become a sort of bellwether for Russia's political elite. Few had heard of Mikhail Mishustin, the little-known tax chief, before Putin named him as prime minister in a sweeping political shake-up.

Unless, that is, they were followers of the amateur league, where Mishustin is a regular player. "Since Putin laced up his skates, it is clear that hockey has become the most popular sport among senior officials and businessmen," Moscow-based political analyst Evgeny Minchenko said. "It's now like golf in the United States."

Hundreds of amateur teams across Russia now take part in the Night Hockey League - or NHL in a sly reference to the North American professional league. Team members gather at night after work to let off steam on the ice and chat in the locker room. Most are just groups



Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu take part in a friendly match of the Night Hockey League on an ice rink in Red Square in downtown Moscow on Dec 29, 2018. — AFP

of friends, but in some cases the teams bring together some of Russia's most powerful and influential figures.

Putin the MVP

Putin of course does not play every week, but takes part in several gala matches per year, wearing No. 11 and often playing in the centre position. A judo blackbelt, the 67-year-old has made sport and healthy living a central theme of his presidency. He reportedly fell in love with hockey at 58 and trained in the evenings after work. His appearances at the gala matches are shown on national

Japanese maker pushes umami overhaul for much-maligned MSG

Umami-bomb or toxic allergen? There are perhaps few condiments as controversial as MSG, but most scientists say it's safe, and now a Japanese firm is trying to give it a reputation overhaul. In much of the world, monosodium glutamate or MSG is a beloved ingredient. It's in stock cubes and potato chips, and sprinkled on everything from soups to salads, adding a savory flavor sometimes referred to as umami or the "fifth taste".

It was invented in commercial form in Japan by Kikunae Ikeda, who founded the firm Ajinomoto to sell the product at home and abroad. At Ajinomoto's factory outside of Tokyo, a steady stream of visitors join tours where they sample miso soup with and without MSG, and snap selfies with the firm's mascot - the red and white AjiPanda. But elsewhere the substance is regarded as less benign, with articles dubbing it a "killer condiment" and people reporting side-effects including headaches, sweats and flushing.

The unsavory reputation dates back decades, to a 1968 letter in the New England Journal of Medicine by Chinese-American doctor Robert Ho Man Kwok. He described symptoms he experienced while eating at Chinese restaurants in the US, including "numbness at the back of the neck... general weakness and palpitation". His Chinese

friends - "all well educated" - experienced similar sensations, he wrote. He proposed several potential reasons, including soy sauce, cooking wine, MSG, or high sodium content, and suggested "friends in the medical field" research this "peculiar syndrome". The letter was picked up by the media and made its way into the public imagination, creating a lasting association between MSG and various, poorly defined health effects.

'Unfounded claims'

But most scientific research suggests "Chinese restaurant syndrome" is a myth. The US Food and Drug Administration labels MSG "generally recognized as safe", the same as salt, corn syrup or caffeine. Authorities in Europe, Australia and elsewhere also rate it safe to consume. "The long-standing claim that intake of MSG in food causes 'Chinese restaurant syndrome' in humans is unfounded," Guoyao Wu, a professor of animal science at Texas A&M University who has studied MSG, told AFP.

Some of the experiments suggesting MSG is harmful involve administering huge doses or injecting the compound directly into muscle or brain tissue. "Well-controlled scientific experiments have not shown any adverse effects of oral MSG... on healthy people or relevant animal models," Wu said. That's the message that Ajinomoto is now pushing in a \$10-million, three-year PR blitz. "There's really no doubt that it's a safe food ingredient," insists Tia M. Rains, who is heading up Ajinomoto's campaign.

The message is directed primarily at the US, where the firm has staged a "World Umami Forum" and enlisted food experts to sway public opinion. MSG was once popular with American cooks, sold under the brand Accent. But



Monosodium glutamate (MSG) products of the Ajinomoto food company are displayed at a supermarket in Tokyo on Jan 20, 2020. — AFP

now Ajinomoto mostly sells directly to businesses, which put MSG in popular products from potato chips to salad dressings. The project comes with a shift already underway in the Western food world. Not only is umami a well-established concept, but authorities from food science writer Harold McGee to Michelin-starred chef David Chang have pushed back against the idea that MSG is dangerous. In Japan, there isn't much of a debate about the product, said Kazumi Masuda, who runs the cooking school Tokyo Cook. Her students are taught to extract umami from traditional ingredients, including kombu seaweed, but she sees no harm in using MSG-laden stock cubes, particularly for busy home cooks. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2020

12 Oil prices post biggest gain in 3 years in 2019 on improving demand outlook**13** Syria cracks down on exchange firms to halt currency collapse**14** Audi Kuwait displays latest models at the annual Kuwait Motor Show

DAVOS: US President Donald Trump speaks with reporters at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland yesterday. — AFP

Trump relaunches trade war with Europe

UK says to proceed with digital tax despite US threat

DAVOS: US President Donald Trump relaunched a major trade offensive against Europe yesterday threatening to hit the EU with damaging auto tariffs if Europeans failed to agree a long-delayed trade deal. With observers warning that global harmony on trade was crucial to the health of the world economy, Trump warned Europe that the US would protect its interests, on the second day of his stay at the Davos economic forum.

His interventions took the focus off climate change which had dominated the first day of event, where Trump lashed out at the "prophets of doom" who say that the world is in crisis over global warming.

"The European Union is tougher to deal with than anybody. They've taken advantage of our country for many years," Trump told Fox Business News on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. "Ultimately, it will be very easy because if we can't

make a deal, we'll have to put 25 percent tariffs on their cars," he added. Trump said that his attention would now turn to Europe, after he sealed a trade truce with China that cooled several years of a bitter trade war that destabilized the world economy.

"I wanted to wait till I finished China, to be honest with you. I always like to be very transparent. I wanted to wait till I finished China. I didn't want to go with China and Europe at the same time."

'Arbitrarily putting taxes'

Trump's comments followed a warning by US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin that Washington would proceed with long threatened auto tariffs if Europeans go through with a digital tax that mainly affects US firms. "If people want to arbitrarily put taxes on our digital companies we will consider putting taxes arbitrarily on car companies," Mnuchin told a panel at

the four-day meeting at the elite Swiss ski resort. But France and Britain said they would push through with their digital tax plans as well as continue multilateral talks at the OECD to come up with new tax rules for Google, Facebook and other giants.

"We plan to go ahead with our digital services tax in April," said British finance minister Sajid Javid, emphasizing that the legislation would "fall away" if there was an international solution.

"It is a tax that is deliberately designed as a temporary tax," he said. "This year could be the year of change. There is no agreement yet but I think we should all focus on that and reach a deal this year." Mnuchin emphasized the US was still involved in the OECD solution, but insisted that a digital tax was "discriminatory in nature."

Britain's planned digital tax on tech giants will proceed as planned from April, UK finance minister Sajid

Javid insisted yesterday despite US threats of retaliatory tariffs. "We plan to go ahead with our digital services tax in April," Javid said at the summit.

Javid described Britain's tax, seen as targeting especially US giants such as Amazon, Google and Facebook, as "proportionate" and "temporary". Addressing the annual World Economic Forum, he added: "It will fall away once there is an international solution."

EU-US trade relations deteriorated soon after Trump came to power three years ago and declared a war against the yawning trade deficit with Europe. The earliest transatlantic skirmish came when Trump imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, notably from the EU, which responded by taxing iconic US products, including denim jeans and motorcycles. Trump then threatened duties on European cars, which is of particular concern to Germany, but has so far backed down under the pressure of US lawmakers. —AFP

Zain exclusively offers all-new Zain 5G HUB, powered by HTC

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the offering of the all-new Zain 5G HUB exclusively to its 5G post-paid customers. The smart device, powered by technology leader HTC, combines four devices in one compact mobile smart device on Kuwait's most powerful 5G network. Zain always aspires to offer the latest and most advanced products in the world of technology exclusively to its customer base, considered the largest in Kuwait.

The all-new Zain 5G HUB combines a 5G-supported hotspot and router device that allows up to 20 users to enjoy this revolutionary technology at the same time, along with a plug & play entertainment hub for 4K video streaming and low-latency gaming, and a battery pack to charge smart devices on the go, all in one mobile smart device.

Zain's postpaid customers can now get the new Zain 5G HUB with a variety of flexible plans starting at KD 20 monthly only with 500 GBs of 5G Internet (36-month commitment) and KD 27 monthly only with 500 GBs of 5G Internet (24-month commitment). The company is keen on offering the most flexible and competitive plans to suit customers' unique personal and professional needs.

Customers will also get a number of two-month subscriptions for FREE from Zain's leading entertainment partners, including Amazon Prime and Wavo to watch the latest local and global movies and TV shows, as well as Anghami to listen to the most popular songs and music from the best Arab and world performers. Customers will



also get a number of FREE accessories included with the box, including a Type-C hub, Bluetooth remote, DUALSHOCK(tm)4 controller, and a 32GB SD card.

The new Zain 5G HUB, powered by HTC, offers a great number of unique features. The device supports 5G technology, where up to 20 users can enjoy the high speeds this revolutionary technology offers all at the same time. The device runs on the latest ANDROID(tm) 9 PIE operating system with a Qualcomm(r) Snapdragon(tm) 855 processor, giving users an unmatched 4K gaming and streaming experience when connected to external displays. The device also supports the latest connectivity technologies, including Bluetooth(tm) 5.0 and Wi-Fi 6.

The Zain 5G HUB also features a large 7,660

mAh battery that runs the device and allows charging external devices when needed, a 5-inch touchscreen, dual speakers and a microphone for voice commands, as well as a number of the latest connection ports for networks and data.

This exclusive offering comes in line with Zain's aim to provide its customers with a superior digital experience, and springs from its core understanding of their needs. The company aims at providing its customers with an unmatched experience on the biggest 5G network in Kuwait. Zain emphasized its commitment to the needs of the largest customer base in Kuwait, and will continuously look into expanding its horizons to introduce the latest and most advanced solutions in the market to meet its customers unique needs and aspirations.

Bursa Kuwait raises awareness on ESG reporting

KUWAIT: Reaffirming its commitment to building a sustainable capital market for both issuers and investors, Bursa Kuwait recently hosted a seminar in collaboration with MSCI Inc. to raise awareness of the assessment metrics and benchmarks of MSCI ESG Ratings. Senior officials of the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) and nearly 250 key executives of listed as well as major companies in Kuwait participated in the workshop held at JW Marriott Hotel -Kuwait yesterday.

The seminar shed light on various factors companies should take into consideration when integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) information into their sustainability reporting. MSCI ESG Ratings evaluates ESG risks and opportunities for investors based on 10 different themes across the three ESG pillars, such as climate change, natural resources, pollution and waste, human capital, product liability, and corporate governance.

Commenting on the seminar, Mohammad Al-Osaimi, CEO of Bursa Kuwait, said, "Companies that have excelled in ESG pillars have consistently outperformed their peers with no established ESG metrics. Over the years, the Kuwaiti capital market has evolved into an attractive investment destination for both local and foreign investors. With the country's inclusion in the emerging market indices of MSCI, S&P Dow Jones Indices and FTSE Russell, issuers are promised large capital investment inflows. In order to capitalize on these prospects, however, companies are naturally required to comply with their ESG policies and meet the increasing demand for transparent and effective sustainability reporting from investors. Sound disclosure on ESG requirements will help businesses to enhance their performance and increase competitiveness, thereby improving their appeal to long-term institutional investors." Robert Ansari, Head of the Middle East for MSCI, adds, "Institutional investors in the Middle East are increasingly demanding high-quality ESG ratings, metrics and insight to inform their investment decisions. Driving this trend is investors' need to identify ESG risks and opportunities as they start to integrate ESG into their portfolio construction and asset allocation process."

Business

Syria cracks down on exchange firms to halt currency collapse

Currency crash deepens hardship among war-weary Syrians

AMMAN: Syria cracked down on currency dealers blamed for speculation on Tuesday as part of several measures to stem a rapid collapse in the country's currency that has in recent weeks worsened the plight of a devastated war-torn economy, dealers and traders said.

The Syrian pound hit last week a new record low by breaking below 1,000 pounds to the dollar. The next day, the government announced jail time for anyone caught using the dollar in commercial transactions to halt further dollarization.

On Tuesday, the authorities also announced they had closed at least 14 exchange firms, among them several well-known Damascus-based financial companies in a move that spread panic in the market, traders and business leaders said. The moves helped bring down the dollar 25 percent lower to just a touch below the 1,000 barrier after trading at around 1,250 last week, exchange dealers contacted from Damascus said.

But bankers and dealers said the measure was unlikely to bring a rapid recovery to the battered currency.

"People are afraid and don't know what to do," said a senior banker who requested anonymity saying panicky merchants were now taking stock of the impact of a ban on commercial dealings in the dollar on imports and price of goods in the days ahead. The crumbling of the currency has driven up inflation and aggravated hardship as many ordinary Syrians struggle to afford basics such as food and power.

With growing public anger over the rise in basic goods, thousands of protesters in the mainly Druze inhabited city of Sweida in southern Syria took to the streets last week against worsening living conditions. In rare demonstrations in government-controlled areas that have not risen against Syrian President Bashar al Assad's rule as other opposition areas, protesters chanted against businessmen associated with Assad whom they blamed for robbing the country.

In the last year alone the Syrian pound has lost over half its value with expanded US and European sanctions against business executives close to Assad and targeted non-Americans trading with Syria.

The pound has lost almost 80 percent in nearly nine years of conflict which has caused tens of billions of dollars' worth of damage, disrupted agriculture, devastated industry and wiped out foreign currency flows from tourism and oil exports. It traded at 47 to the dollar before protests against authoritarian rule erupted in March 2011.

The pound's decline has accelerated since mid-October when the financial crisis in neighboring Lebanon choked a main source of foreign currency inflows. Also putting pressure on the currency, the Syrian central bank has largely abandoned efforts in recent months to support the value of the currency in order to protect its remaining foreign exchange reserves which stood at \$17 billion before the war, local businessmen say. —Reuters



DAMASCUS: A man holds a bunch of Syrian pound coins as he attends a shopping festival organized by the Damascus Chamber of Industry in support of the local currency, in the Syrian capital Damascus yesterday. —AFP

Global markets on alert as killer virus fuels new SARS fears

LONDON: World stocks responded yesterday as investors shrugged off fears over a deadly virus from China, while Frankfurt briefly struck a record peak on this month's landmark trade deal, analysts said. Frankfurt equities added 0.1 percent, London won 0.2 percent and Paris gained a marginal amount in late morning deals. Asia bounced back on bargain-buying following the previous day's

sharp losses but investors were on edge after the deadly coronavirus was confirmed to have spread to the United States. "European stock markets are showing small gains despite the fears of coronavirus—a case has now been reported in Hong Kong," noted CMC Markets analyst David Madden. "In early trading, the DAX printed a record-high but the market is off the highs of the session. "The Chinese government's response to the health situation seems to be more upfront than their handling of the SARS crisis, so traders are not as fearful."

Meanwhile in Frankfurt, the benchmark DAX 30 index zoomed to a record high at 13,640.06 points, with dealers attributing the move to the recent China-US trade deal. "German companies are among most exposed global trade worries, and

therefore those enjoying the biggest bounce since US-China relations improved at the back end of last year, resulting in this month's trade deal," said Markets.com analyst Neil Wilson.

Global equities have however been roiled this week by fears China virus outbreak, which has killed nine and sickened hundreds, could cause as much economic damage as the SARS epidemic that killed hundreds of people in 2003.

Shanghai dropped more than one percent in early yesterday trade, extending the previous day's 1.4 percent drop, with authorities battling to contain the coronavirus strain as China prepares for the Lunar New Year holidays, when millions of people travel across the country.

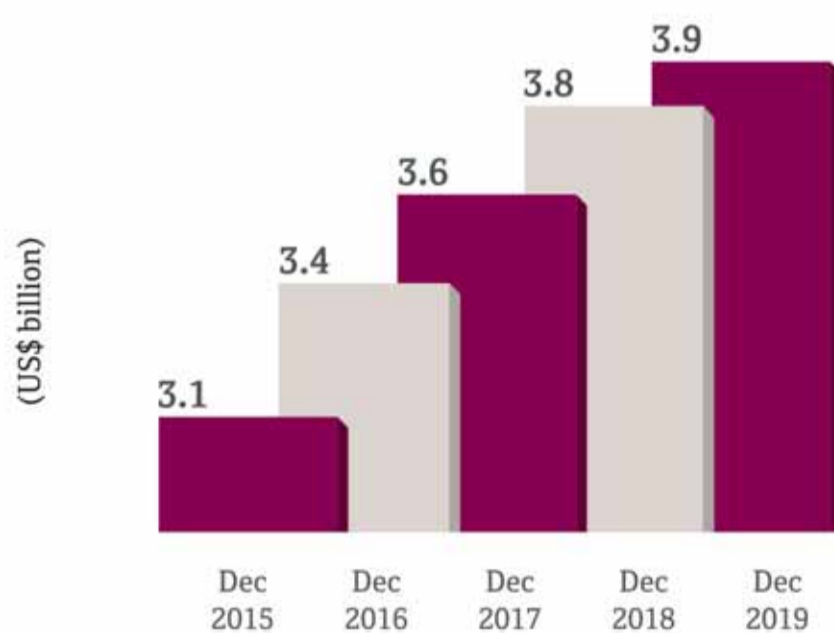
Officials warned yesterday the strain could mutate and spread. However, Chinese mainland

shares performed a U-turn to end the day with gains. Tourism-linked firms—which had been hit by concerns about the impact on the global economy just as it shows signs of a tentative recovery from a long-running slowdown—also enjoyed a reverse.

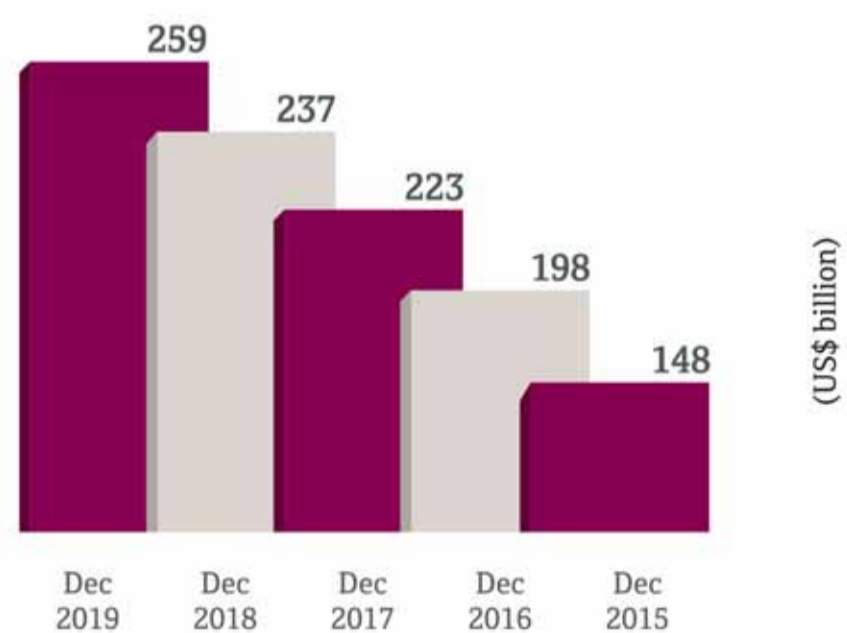
After a sell-off in Asia on Tuesday, news that the US had reported its first case of the new virus hit Wall Street, the Dow and S&P 500 sinking from record highs. Fears of a bigger outbreak rose on Monday after a prominent expert from China's National Health Commission confirmed that the virus can be passed between people. The World Health Organization will hold an emergency meeting later yesterday to determine whether to declare a global public health emergency over the disease, which has also been detected in Thailand, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. —Reuters

QNB Group, the largest financial institution in the MEA region, delivers record results in 2019

Net Profit US\$3.9 billion, up by 4% from last year



Total Assets US\$259 billion, up by 10% from last year



QNB Group delivers record results for the year ended 31 December 2019.

- QNB Group, the largest financial institution in the MEA region, is currently present in more than 31 countries across three continents
- QNB Group is supported by 29,000 staff serving approximately 25 million customers through more than 1,100 locations and 4,300 ATMs
- QNB Group credit rating is one of the highest among top tier banks: Capital Intelligence AA-, Fitch A+, Moody's Aa3, Standard & Poor's A

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Business

Audi Kuwait displays latest models at the annual Kuwait Motor Show

This year's line-up includes all-new Audi A6 sedan and A7 Sportback models



KUWAIT: Audi Kuwait, represented by Fouad Alghanim & Sons Automotive showcases its latest lineup of models at The Kuwait Motor Show taking place in the 360 Mall. The Audi range on display includes both sedans and SUVs that are equipped with the brand's most premium and technologically-advanced features.

Speaking of Audi Kuwait's participation Tarek Al-Shafie, General Manager & Dealer Principal of Fouad Alghanim & Sons Automotive Company, said: "We are very enthusiastic to showcase the newest Audi models of multiple segments with the latest technology, in[HJ(I] both sedan and SUV versions. This year's line-up includes the all-new Audi A6 sedan and A7 Sportback models with their combination of practical sedan with sleek coupe styling and both of which are now available with a new 2.0 TFSI engine with 245 HP. Additionally, our SUV offering includes the all-new and youthful Audi Q3, family-friendly Q5 and diversely dynamic Q8, which brings together the design of a sporty coupe in a highly functional SUV body. We are delighted to be at the Kuwait Motor Show and we look forward to welcoming all of our customers and guests here and at our showroom."

The range of Audi and Audi Sport models are available for test-drives 6 days a week at the Audi Kuwait showroom, located in Shuwaikh Industrial Area - Al-Jahra Road (Pepsi Cola Street) during working hours



from 9:00am to 8:30pm, Saturday to Thursday.

The Audi Group, with its brands Audi, Ducati and Lamborghini, is one of the most successful manufacturers of automobiles and motorcycles in the premium segment. It is present in more than 100 markets worldwide and produces at 18 locations in 13 countries. 100

percent subsidiaries of AUDI AG include Audi Sport GmbH (Neckarsulm), Automobili Lamborghini S.p.A. (Sant'Agata Bolognese, Italy) and Ducati Motor Holding S.p.A. (Bologna, Italy). In 2019, the Audi Group delivered to customers about 1.845 million automobiles of the Audi brand. In the 2018 fiscal year,

AUDI AG achieved total revenue of euro 59.2 billion and an operating profit before special items of euro 4.7 billion. At present, approximately 90,000 people work for the company all over the world, more than 60,000 of them in Germany. Audi focuses on sustainable products and technologies for the future of mobility.

Australian consumer gloom worsens amid bushfires

SYDNEY: Australian consumer pessimism deepened in January as households fretted about the economic impact of devastating bushfires that killed 29 people, millions of animals and destroyed thousands of homes in recent months. The Melbourne Institute and Westpac Bank index of consumer sentiment, released yesterday, fell 1.8 percent in January to the lowest since last October. It declined 1.9 percent in December.

The index was down a hefty 6.2 percent from a year earlier, and at 93.4 indicated pessimists continued to outnumber optimists. The free-fall in sentiment bodes poorly for consumer spending and could hit growth in Australia's \$1.9 trillion (\$1.30 trillion) economy in coming quarters.

Economists generally expect the bushfires to drag on gross domestic product by 0.25 percent-0.4 percent per quarter through March 2020, with agriculture, retail, tourism and construction the hardest hit. Westpac chief economist Bill Evans said the index could have fallen further but the survey was conducted in the week where there was widespread rain, which somewhat cushioned the hit from the bushfires.

Wildfires are common in Australia but the current season was unprecedented in its scale of destruction and duration. Scores of fires continue to burn on the east coast despite recent rain. "If the survey had been conducted a few weeks earlier than the index is likely to have fallen by even more, notwithstanding the very low starting point," Evans said in a statement.

"This low level of confidence is consistent with the generally lackluster reports on consumer spending."

All the economic components of the index recorded declines in January. The "economy, next five years" sub-index fell 3.7 percent in while the "economy, next 12 months" sub-index slipped 5.4 percent. Both are down 8.9 percent and 11.9 percent respectively. The direct impact of the fires has so far been felt mainly in rural townships though hazardous smoke haze hung over the biggest cities of Sydney and Melbourne, hitting tourism and spending. Businesses are also feeling the heat with fashion retailers and food & beverage makers reporting a slowdown in sales.

The Australian Tourism Export Council has estimated international tourism revenue in 2020 could fall by 10 percent to 20 percent. "Overall, we think that the bushfires increase the likelihood of a rate cut from the RBA in February," UBS analysts wrote in a note on Tuesday. The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) slashed interest rates three times last year to an all-time low of 0.75 percent and has expressed intentions to do more if needed. —Reuters

Gulf Bank's Wealth Management clients enjoy exclusive benefits

KUWAIT: Since 2010, Gulf Bank has offered its Priority and Private Banking clientele access to a suite of banking and investment products and services designed specifically around their banking needs. As Wealth Management clients, Gulf Bank's Private and Priority Banking clients benefit from exclusive offerings designed to add even more ease and comfort to daily banking transactions.

Wealth Management services are available to Gulf Bank's Priority Banking clients, i.e. clients with an account balance of KD 50,000 up to KD 500,000 in cash or investable assets, or a monthly salary transfer of KD 3,500 and more. Wealth Management services are also available to Gulf Bank's Private Banking clients, i.e. clients with an account balance of KD 500,000 in cash or investable assets.

Commenting on Gulf Bank's Wealth Management services, Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager of External Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "At Gulf Bank, we are constantly striving to create new levels of comfort and convenience for our customers' daily banking transactions. This is especially true for

our Wealth Management clients, who often have unique banking and investment needs that require tailor-made services and solutions. As a part of the Priority Banking experience, Gulf Bank assigns clients experienced and dedicated Relationship Managers, who take the time to understand their clients' financial needs and manage all their banking requirements. Relationship Managers also offer clients banking and investment solutions with the aim of protecting and growing their wealth. Clients also have the option of scheduling meetings with their Gulf Bank Relationship Manager at home or at the office, depending on the timings that suit them best."

As part of the Wealth Management experience, Gulf Bank's Private and Priority Banking clients also receive a number of benefits, including a debit card that allows access to airport lounges, offers discounts when booking tickets and hotels from cleartrip.com, offers discounts when using the Careem transportation service, and offers a more secure online shopping experience designed to protect cardholders' online purchases from fraud. Clients are also eligible to apply for a Gulf Bank credit card (Visa Infinite or World Mastercard), granting them a host of benefits including: comprehensive accident and travel insurance, complimentary access to airport lounges worldwide, discounts at over 200 restaurants globally as part of the Dine & Fly service, a local concierge service, Gulf Bank discounts, access to the Gulf Points program, and more.

Wealth Management clients also enjoy access to exclusive events and services throughout the year. Recently, Gulf Bank organized several events at the Mercedes-Benz showroom at The Avenues, in which

Wealth Management clients got to experience the new GLE and GT AMG vehicles first-hand, in addition to having the opportunity to test-drive the vehicles for two days. Wealth Management clients also had the opportunity to attend several of the newest shows and latest productions at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, including Cirque du Soleil's CIRCUS 1903 and operatic concert, "The Ruins." Additionally, clients enjoyed an exclusive premiere of the movie "Joker" at THEATRE by Rhodes at VOX Cinemas. Clients also attended an event hosted by Ferrari at Kuwait Motor City, and enjoyed an exclusive Ferrari F8 tributo driving experience, in addition to an event hosted by Lotus to test drive different models of Lotus cars. Gulf Bank also organized a number of events and offers tailored for women, including an exposition hosted by Passions Arabia at the Four Seasons Hotel, a private cooking course by Sawzan Matbaki, and exclusive offers at Al-Fares Jewellery.

As for what 2020 has in store, Gulf Bank is currently developing even more banking solutions and investment products for their Wealth Management clients. The new features, which Gulf Bank will be announcing soon, aim to add even more ease and convenience to the Wealth Management banking experience.



Ahmad Al-Amir

Huawei Mate 30 Pro 5G has stolen attention of Kuwait consumers



KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer Business Group (CBG) has welcomed 2020 in an exceptional way by creating, growing and sustaining efficient innovation every time. Huawei (CBG) Kuwait has announced the launch of its latest long waited Huawei Mate 30 Pro 5G, the "king of 5G smartphones" on Thursday, 16 January 2020, at the Huawei Experience Store (HES), in the Avenues, Phase IV, Electra.

In the age of digital, technology and digital products such as smartphones have impacted people's lives in a smart way which has created new ways of communication, understood the consumers'

needs, and influenced their lifestyle and routine. And Huawei has proven to be a leader in enriching consumers' experience with every product it creates, in fact, it creates an environment to create emotions, experiences, and fun by developing new features.

The Huawei Mate 30 Pro 5G is the world's first second generation 5G smartphone, using Kirin 990 5G chipset that allows support for 2G/3G/4G as well as 5G NSA (non-standalone network) and 5G SA (standalone network), which allows users to be prepared for the eventual seamless transition of 5G



networks from NSA to the faster and more efficient SA networks. Additionally, the Huawei Mate 30 Pro 5G also supports (5G+4G) dual SIM in addition to FDD and TDD covering a wide range of 5G frequency bands.

Huawei is known for bringing unique looks to its devices. The Huawei Mate 30 Pro 5G follows the tradition by being a device that's just as unique as you! Featuring a new Halo Ring design and a sweeping 88-degree ultra-curve. Consumers can experience Videography like never before with the world's first 40MP Super-sensing cine Camera, Ultra

slow-motion, and the highest video light sensitivity in smartphone ever. Moreover, with a 4500mAh battery, Huawei Mate30 Pro 5G will last and last till 2 days of usage.

During the launching event, Huawei (CBG) has announced that preorders for the Huawei Mate 30 Pro 5G has started from 16th January 2020 which comes in unique tones of Emerald Green and a variant with Vegan Leather Orange. The high-end 5G smartphone is available for pre-order across Huawei stores, selected retailers and online platforms for a price of KD 299.900.

What's On

Horeca Kuwait 2020 successfully concludes with record visitors



Horeca Kuwait 2020 9th exhibition successfully concluded its third and last day with a big ceremony to distribute the cooking competition awards to winners and attracting record numbers of specialized visitors that were way beyond organizers' expectations. The ceremony was attended by participating and sponsoring companies' executives, guests and participants.

A statement issued by Leaders Group said that exhibitors booths and sections witnessed several meetings and discussions that resulted in making some extra partnerships and honoring participants by Horeca organizing committee headed by Leaders Group general manager, Nabila Al-Anjeri, and the exhibition's executive manager, Mohammed Najia and Hospitality Services manager, Joumana Dammous.

Yesterday's competitions included the best burger meal, the best fruits & vegetable platter, the best meat dish, the best Kuwaiti dessert and making Nespresso Coffee.

The third day also witnessed holding a number of specialized seminars on the advantages of using online delivery ordering apps for restaurants presented by speakers Hamad Al-Jedai; founder and chairman of Zyda company, Seham Al-Husseini, general manager of Deliveroo App, Waseem Makarem; TALABAT App general manager and Ahmed Salamah; partner in Bilbaty.

Notably, a seminar was held Tuesday evening on "Ideas & Trends In Today's Catering Industry" to be presented by Ibrahim Al-Houtti; MMC Catering company CEO, Edmond Barakat; Barakat Foods Company deputy manager and Bibi Hayat; founder and owner of Bibi Hayat Events.

All seminars were moderated by Nada Alameddine, Partner - "Hodema Consulting Services."

Speakers in all seminars focused on creativity as the best means to develop business and expand them and noted that 20-25 per cent of catering equipment of Kuwaiti projects go to GCC states like KSA, which indicate growing demand on Kuwaiti cuisine and services. Some speakers also criticized government tendering process always adapting the lowest prices at the expense of quality.

The second day also witnessed a special ceremony organized by the French ambassador to Kuwait, Marie Masdupuy to honor the organizing committee represented by Nabila Al-Anjeri, Mohammed Najia and Joumana Dammous in addition to members of the jury panels including French chefs Mark Mubash; the head of the French Cooking Academy, Thomas Gugler; the head of the World Association of Chef Societies (WACS) and the founder of the world bakers competition-France, chef Francois Pozzoli.

Ambassador Masdupuy also threw a banquet on the occasion at the



French embassy headquarters in Jabriya, which was attended by members of the diplomatic corps in Kuwait and dignitaries.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Masdupuy hailed Horeca Kuwait and its organizers noting that it had been annually gaining more success ever since inception in 2012 with only 20 companies participating till participants reached 85 companies in 2020.

Nespresso launches Nespresso Momento

Nespresso Professional yesterday announced the launch of the first two coffee machines (single and double head) of the Nespresso Momento range, a new addition to its professional offering that has been developed for the office and business sector. Inspired by the evolution of new workplaces and new ways of working, the Nespresso Momento system is designed to deliver authentic, sustainable, and high-quality coffee experiences that

bring people together in office environments, and encourage the creation of meaningful relationships within teams.

"Today's office world is changing rapidly: less structured, more global, more diverse, with teams working from remote locations. This makes human interaction even more valuable as we all know that face-to-face discussions can trigger great creativity - often over a cup of coffee. We designed the Nespresso Momento range to be

at the heart of these exchanges, enhancing the meaningful employee relationships that create business value," said Francisco Nogueira, Global Head of Out-Of-Home (OOH) at Nestlé Nespresso.

Equipped with cutting-edge technology reflective of the increasingly connected world we live in, the Nespresso Momento system is the most intuitive machine in the Nespresso Professional range to date. Given people's ever-expanding coffee preferences, the machine recommends the optimal cup length and provides information of the aromatic coffee notes and intensity for all the 13 coffees in the Nespresso Professional range. The new Americano recipe now

meets the desire for longer and milder cups, ensuring everyone will find the right coffee for them and their office.

Nespresso believes in building strong and resilient coffee-farming communities through its AAA Sustainable Quality(tm) Program and is committed to making a positive impact with every cup of coffee, starting with the sourcing of beans. More than 75,000 coffee farmers in 12 countries participate in the program, ensuring coffee production is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable; more than 90% of the coffee Nespresso buys comes through the program. Nespresso is working to bring more farmers on

board in more countries around the world, with the aim of sourcing 100% of the permanent range of coffees through the AAA Program by 2020.

Machines also play an important role in this commitment, and the Nespresso Momento range has been built with sustainability at its core. With long lasting components and easily repairable or changeable elements, recyclable packaging and settings to preserve both water and energy, all steps have been taken to minimize the system's environmental impact. Employees can therefore enjoy a delicious cup of coffee with the knowledge that it has been crafted with Nespresso's Positive Cup principles in mind.



Grand Hyper to open its 19th store in Kuwait



Grand Hyper, the retail wing of Regency group has announced the opening of their 61st outlet as a part of their aggressive expansion in the GCC region. Grand currently has 18 outlets in Kuwait and Salmiya Hypermarket is set to be the 19th store. Situated on Salem Al Mubarak street, Block 7, Salmiya with an area spread of 22,000 sqft, the store celebrated a grand opened yesterday at 4:00 pm.

On the date announcement of new outlet, Anvar Ameen, Managing Director said "It gives us much pleasure to announce the opening of our new store at Salmiya which is yet another milestone achievement of Grand Hyper. Kuwait has always been the favorite country for the group and the group has big plans of expansion just for this country there by recalled as the most preferred brand partner of any customer for their domestic purchase at any point of time."

AyyoobKachery, Regional Director said "With 19 stores in count, the vision and mission of the brand remain focused on unparalleled customer service and customer delight, there by yielding equal acceptance by both Kuwaiti nationals and expats. This has inspired Group to further expand its reach in Kuwait."

Mohammed Suneer, Chief Executive officer - Kuwait region said, "This new store at Salmiya is a new year's gift from the group to the people of Kuwait at a much-welcomed location that would cater a majority of expats who live in the country"

Rahil Bassim, Chief Operating Officer, said

"The new milestone achieved is just because of the focus we have in fetching the best products around the globe under one roof and making it available to the customers at a much competitive price"

Thehaseer Ali, General Manager, said "This is indeed a part of our expansion plan with a vision to have the store presence at every nook and corner of the country enabling customers to reach the Grand store for their convenient purchase"

The promoters conveyed their sincere gratitude and best wishes to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, generous Kuwaiti public and business friendly systems. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's wise leadership has steered Kuwait to self-sufficient and investor friendly destination, one of many reasons for promoters to favor Kuwait over other GCC countries.

Grand Hypermarket has a strong reputation and trust in Kuwait market as a brand, and has been working towards extending a strong presence across the GCC and continues striving towards being the most preferred retailer among customers. The foremost focus remains providing customers with a wide range of products including food stuffs, world-class electronic appliances, home appliances, footwear, health and beauty items and fashion wears and accessories from leading European designers among others. Perishable goods, farm produces and meat are shipped by air on a daily basis to ensure they are available fresh to the end

users. These are procured from internationally-recognized farms to ensure world-class standards. Making high quality products affordable for the everyday consumer is what sets Grand Hypermarket apart from the rest. The wide network of stores helps the brands stays close to its valued customers in Kuwait. The new store at Salmiya, delivers a delightful shopping environment by providing a wide range of high-quality products at much competitive price, further entrenching Grand Hypermart's position as one of the finest and most preferred brands for purchase among the expats and locals in the State of Kuwait.

The press meet was attended by

1. HE Shaikh Dawood Dawood Salman Al Sabah, Chief Patron, Kuwait
2. Dr. Anvar Ameen, Managing Director, Kuwait
3. Jassim Mohamed Al Sharrah, Chairman, Grand Hyper Kuwait
4. AyyoobKachery, Regional Director, Kuwait;
5. Ahmed NV, Director, Regency Group Dubai;
6. Abdul Fathah, Director, Grand Hyper Kuwait
7. Mohammed Suneer, Chief Executive Officer, Kuwait
8. Rahil Bassim K, Chief Operating Officer - Kuwait
9. Thehaseer Ali, General Manager, Kuwait,
10. Sanin Mannil, Business Development Manager, Kuwait.

LAPA's new board members

Fareah Al Saqqaf, LOYAC board's chairperson and LAPA's Managing Director, stated that LOYAC's Board of Directors has recently adopted her recommendation to include artist Amira Behbehani and Dr Khalifa Al-Hajri as LAPA executive board members as a token of appreciation for their valuable contributions and services in developing LAPA's work.

Al-Saqqaf also expressed her sincere happiness to the news saying: "Lately, LAPA has greatly grown and expanded to an extent in which artist Amira Behbehani and Dr Khalifa Al Hajri had played major roles, precisely in the past two years."

Al Saqqaf added: "Here, in LOYAC, we are very selective when choosing our top-level managers, in order to maintain the development of our institutions, especially since we take upon ourselves the responsibility of contributing to advancing the cultural and artistic activities in the country, on the one hand, and accumulating positive change in the field of human resources development and promoting human awareness to the need for community services, on the other hand. This national humane responsibility requires very careful search before selecting our staff members from individuals who strongly believe in our vision and are willing to help us efficiently construct our institutions, because creativity and experience on the one hand, and awareness of societal and human responsibility on the other hand, is a difficult equation that is not readily available."

Al-Saqqaf also noted that: "Amira Behbehani is a creative renowned artist, who has a rich and lengthy experience in volunteering. She is also an active contributor to empowering women, as well as, spreading peace. The relationship between LOYAC and



Dr Khalifa Al-Hajri



Amira Behbehani

Behbehani goes back to 2013, when she participated in various voluntary programs with us, after which she voluntarily and officially established LAPA's Fine-Arts Department in 2016. We consider artist Amira Behbehani a great addition to LAPA."

In addition, Al Saqqaf emphasized that: "Dr Khalifa Al Hajri needs no introduction, for he is a very well-known academic figure in the Arab World. His status as a Scenographer is tremendous. He has profound cultural sense and a human depth that goes way beyond his academic knowledge. Dr Al Hajri is also known for his theatrical knowledge and his ability to evaluate and criticize theatrical works."

Al Saqqaf concluded that artist Amira Behbehani and Dr Khalifa Al Hajri are a great addition to LAPA's executive members, which would surely result in a qualitative leap for the Academy towards its achieving its ambitious future plans. She added that the coming years would witness enormous quality services for children and youth, contributing to enhancing the importance of art in raising fully aware and confident generations and, ultimately, in the cultural development of Kuwait.

Masks, disinfectants in low supply as China virus spreads



YICHANG, CHINA: This photo taken on January 21, 2020 shows commuters wearing face masks arriving the Yichang East Railway Station, in China's central Hubei province. — AFP photos



A staff member screens arriving passengers with thermal scanners at Hankou railway station in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province on January 21, 2020.

BEIJING: Pharmacies in Beijing and Shanghai were running low on surgical masks and disinfectants yesterday as a deadly new SARS-like virus spread ahead of the busy Lunar New Year travel period. More people than usual were seen wearing masks on the streets and several stores AFP visited had run out of stock — to the dismay of customers.

The rush to step up protective measures against the new coronavirus came after it infected more than 400 people across China. The illness, first discovered in the central city of Wuhan, is spreading just as hundreds of millions of people take to packed trains, planes and buses around the country on their way to reunions with family and friends for the festive period.

An employee at a pharmacy in Beijing said it had run

out of surgical masks two days ago. "When it hit close to 300 cases, people realized it was serious," he said, adding that items such as thermometers had also been selling fast. "It happened so suddenly; we didn't prepare any back-up and existing stock was quickly depleted."

A batch of masks that arrived yesterday morning sold out in just half an hour, he added. The store still had other masks in stock but these were not designed for surgical purposes. At another pharmacy in Beijing, a sign on the door said they were also all out of the products. "We get some stock every day, but it is not enough to fulfill demand," said a staff member who did not want to be identified. "We have also run out of disinfectants," she said. "We are working hard to replenish stock but we don't know when it will come."

Not everyone nervous

Beijing's Market Supervision and Regulation Bureau issued a statement on its WeChat account yesterday with guidelines for businesses, to help "ensure the stability of prices for goods such as masks and other items related to the epidemic".

In Shanghai, supermarket staff continually restocked shelves as shoppers snapped up the available products. Some hospitals and clinics in the financial hub set up stations at the entrances to their emergency units to screen people with flu symptoms.

The coronavirus has caused concern due to its genetic similarities with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which killed nearly 650 people across mainland

China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003. But not everyone is nervous. "The situation doesn't seem as serious as in 2003 during the SARS outbreak. Having experienced that outbreak, people are less panicky," said a 40-year-old woman surnamed Zhou in Beijing. "We know how to protect ourselves and ventilate our homes. It's close to the Spring Festival too, and we have to go house-visiting. If relatives are worried, we will wear masks in their houses."

Wang Suping, 50, who works at an arts school, said: "These days, I wear masks even in places that are not too crowded although I wouldn't have done so in the past." She was not anxious as she had medicine and masks at home, she added. "When you can't contain the virus, we have to do what we can to protect ourselves." — AFP

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- VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fistuloscope)
- Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- Stomach Balloon insertion & removal
- Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
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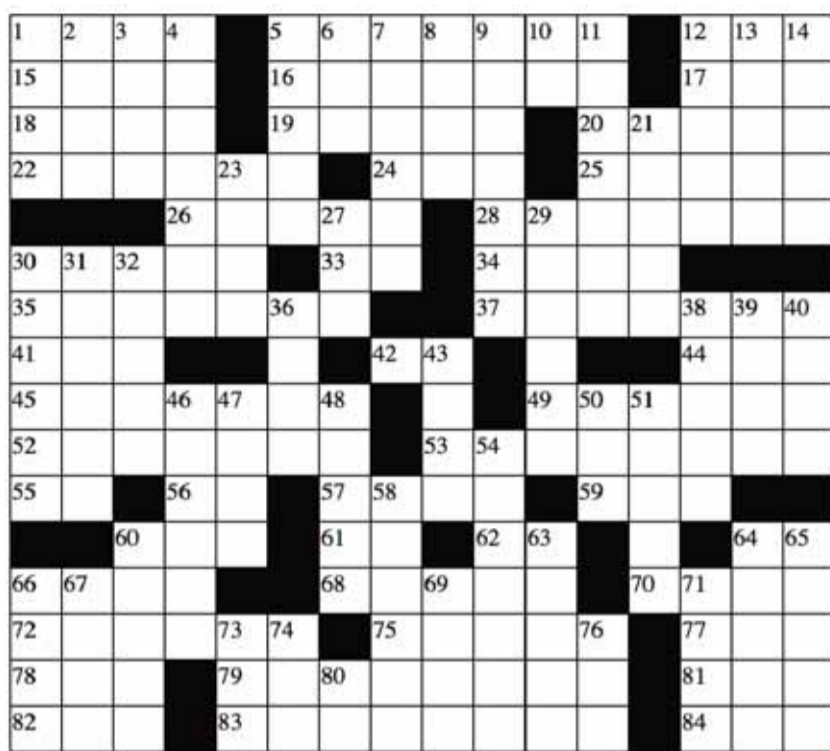
Scope of clinical Practice.

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

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Stars

CROSSWORD 2417



ACROSS

- Precipitation of ice pellets when there are strong rising air currents.
- Type and genus of the Isoetaceae and sole extant genus of the order Isoetales.
- The most common computer memory which can be used by programs to perform necessary tasks while the computer is on.
- Type genus of the family Arcidae.
- A Russian soup usually containing beet juice as a foundation.
- An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- Salty fluid secreted by sweat glands.
- An Oscan-speaking member of an ancient people of Campania.
- The cardinal number that is the sum of four and one.
- Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
- An effortful attempt to attain a goal.
- An island of central Hawaii.
- The capital and largest city of Greece.
- An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
- An associate degree in nursing.
- Two items of the same kind.
- A bar of sand.
- Being definitely out of the ordinary and unexpected.
- Food of a ruminant regurgitated to be chewed again.
- A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
- A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
- Large genus of Australian evergreen shrubs or small trees with large daisylike flowers.
- A supply of food especially for a household.
- The computer-based telephone system of the U.S. National Library of Medicine that provides rapid linkage to MEDLARS.
- Lacking gonads.
- A colorless and odorless inert gas.
- A radioactive element of the actinide series.
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- A defensive missile designed to shoot down incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles.
- Half the width of an em.
- A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- A broken piece of a brittle artifact.
- The content of cognition.
- A percussion instrument consisting of a pair of hollow pieces of wood or bone (usually held between the thumb and fingers) that are made to click together (as by Spanish dancers) in rhythm with the dance.
- The craniometric point that is the most prominent point at the back of the head (at the occipital protuberance).
- The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
- A sweetened beverage of diluted fruit juice.
- Deciduous shrubs and trees of tropical America having branches like candelabra and fragrant white or pink flowers.
- (British) A waterproof raincoat made of rubberized fabric.
- Headress that protects the head from bad weather.
- Struck with fear, dread, or consternation.

DOWN

- A fastener for a door or lid.
- (of persons) Highest in rank or authority or office.
- The United Nations agency concerned with civil aviation.
- Bearing or marked with a label or tag.
- Realistic Norwegian author who wrote plays on social and political themes (1828-1906).
- A former French coin of low denomination.
- Order by virtue of superior authority.
- A program under which employees regularly accumulate shares and may ultimately assume control of the company.
- Informal terms for clothing.
- An international organization of European countries formed after World War II to reduce trade barriers and increase cooperation among its members.
- An ancient musical horn made from the horn of a ram.
- A toxic protein extracted from castor beans.
- A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
- A member of a nomadic people of the northern Ural mountains.
- The main city of ancient Phoenicia.
- An aggressive remark directed at a person like a missile and intended to have a telling effect.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- A member of the Siouan people of Virginia and North Carolina.
- A fighter who batters the opponent.
- Having come or been brought to a conclusion.
- Similar or related in quality or character.
- Mild form of diabetes mellitus that develops gradually in adults.
- (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
- A British peer ranking below a Marquess and above a Viscount.
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- Type genus of the Alaudidae.
- Grains used as food either unpolished or more often polished.
- Yellow-fever mosquitos.
- (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation.
- (Bible) The archangel who was the messenger of God.
- Type genus of the Anhimidae.
- A mark used by an author or editor to indicate where something is to be inserted into a text.
- Love intensely.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
- An informal term for a father.
- A blue dye obtained from plants or made synthetically.
- Fallow deer.
- A accountant certified by the state.
- Any high mountain.
- A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.
- Being or moving higher in position or greater in some value.

Yesterday's Solution

S	T	A	B	A	B	A	N	D	O	N	P	C	T
T	O	G	A	L	A	M	E	L	L	A	E	R	A
I	R	A	N	I	A	N	V	D	I	A	P	E	R
L	A	Z	A	R	G	U	T	I	L	I	S	E	D
T	H	E	N	A	L	C	S	E	E	R	I	L	Y
A	Q	A	B	A	R	B							
A	B	A	C	L	E	F	S	U	G	L	I		
K	E	B	A	B	A	S	E	Q	S	A	I	D	
A	R	A	B	D	E	A	N	U	K	U	R	D	
B	E	S	E	T	R	I	G	A	A	D	A	M	
A	T	E	L	E	S	N	A	B	O	B			
I	M	B	I	B	E	R	S	C	A	L	D		
R	A	J	A	B	A	T	O	P	S	H	I	A	
A	G	A	L	E	S	S	E	N	E	D	E	A	T
N	R	C	O	P	U	L	E	N	C	E	A	N	E
D	A	K	R	A	R	E	N	E	S	S	D	A	D

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Romantic relationships take on a fairytale aura, Aries, bringing up the kind of desire, passion, and sense of unity associated with Lancelot and Guinevere. Therefore, this should be a wonderful day to schedule an intimate evening with a romantic partner. You could feel so much in tune with your friend that you may come with the same words at the same time. Enjoy this wonderful feeling, but don't lose sight of reality.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today you might attend more than one group activity or social event involving spiritual or metaphysical matters. Your sense of intuition is very high, Taurus, and your level of understanding is especially acute. Therefore, concepts that could be confusing at other times could seem as clear as a bell today. You might form strong bonds with others who are also present, and you might make plans to meet with them again in the future. Enjoy!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Intellectual or artistic work could take up a lot of your time today, Gemini. Your level of inspiration is high, and you're apt to be full of ideas that others would find beneficial. You're also likely to sense the thoughts and feelings of those around you before they themselves are consciously aware of them. This not only increases your career standing, it can help you in the love department. Enjoy your day!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Study of religion and spiritual matters could well be of particular interest for you today, Cancer. You're likely to discuss your knowledge and beliefs regarding such matters with a close friend, which could prove rather enlightening for both of you. Whatever you learn will prove to be artistically inspiring, so don't be surprised if you find yourself spending some time writing down your thoughts or turning them into pictures. Don't limit yourself!



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Today communication with others is more likely to be on a subtle rather than verbal level, Leo. When the phone rings, you might already know who's on the other end of the line before you pick it up. You could also pick up telepathically on the thoughts of others. Books and articles about people who have had similar experiences could increase your understanding of them. Don't fight it! Go with the flow.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Inspiration drawn from recent religious or spiritual occurrences could have you writing down accounts of your experiences, Virgo, perhaps with the idea of someday publishing them. Your concentration could well be intense, as writing for you today may not be only creative but therapeutic as well. It will also help to attend classes or workshops or simply to discuss the subject with a friend. Knowledge is essential.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You should be feeling especially strong and healthy today, Libra. The drive to exercise, particularly if you do it alone and outdoors, is likely to get the endorphins going and thus give you a natural high, which could lead to an increased level of inspiration and intuition. After you finish, it might be a good idea to sit in a park, preferably near water, to allow yourself to come down. Meditate and take a close look at your inner state.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Today, Scorpio, you might find yourself picking up uncanny telepathic messages from a friend who lives some distance from you. A telephone call might reveal that this person has just received some good news, and that they were just thinking of calling you! This probably won't be the only ESP experience you have today. Your level of intuition is very high, so be prepared for some unusually strong psychic messages.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Creative inspiration flows freely today, Sagittarius, enabling you to channel it in more than one way. An opportunity to earn a sizable fee doing something artistic could come your way. Spiritual or metaphysical studies may be involved. This might represent the attainment of a long-term goal you've been striving to reach, and therefore you're apt to be rather excited about it. Tonight, go out and celebrate your success with your friends.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Usually you prefer to approach events with a practical and scientific attitude, Capricorn, but today you're feeling especially intuitive and more aware of the other worlds, so it might be difficult to hang on to your usual mindset. Some uncomfortable feelings you've had about events in the news could prove to be accurate, which might be a bit disconcerting. Remember that there is so much in the Universe that can't be explained through logic or science!



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

If you've been thinking about taking up the study of astrology, numerology, alchemy, or any other occult science, this is the day to get started, Aquarius. Scientific adherence to facts and rules combines with enhanced telepathic abilities to bring about a burgeoning skill in such fields. Look up some friends who share your interest and arrange to attend a class or workshop on whatever subject appeals to you the most. At day's end your mind could be spinning!



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Some rather intense and vivid dreams could inspire you to embark on some in-depth study of a subject that specifically interests you, Pisces. This could involve the arts, philosophy, or metaphysics. Travel plans to one of the world's great spiritual centers, such as Jerusalem, Glastonbury or Vrindavana, might be on your mind as a result. Your level of intuition is very high today, so whatever you dream of doing, give it some serious thought. It might be just what you need!

Wordsearch Puzzle

Valentine's Day

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a popular Valentine's Day item.

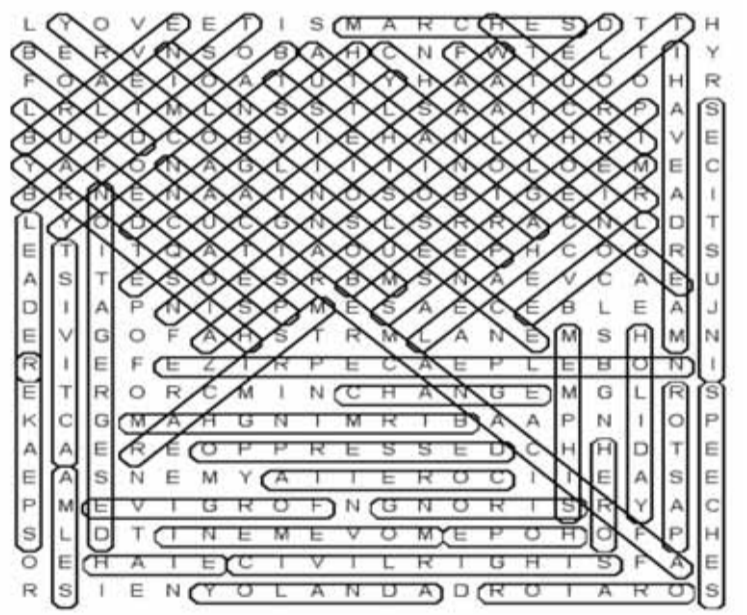


- | | | | |
|------------|----------|------------|------------|
| ADMIRER | COUPLE | FLOWERS | LOVERS |
| ADORE | CRUSH | FONDNESS | PARTNER |
| AFFECTION | CUPID | FOREVER | PROPOSAL |
| ATTRACTION | DARLING | FRIENDSHIP | RESTAURANT |
| BEAU | DATE | GIFT | ROMANCE |
| BELOVED | DEAR | GIRLFRIEND | ROSES |
| BOYFRIEND | DEVOTION | HEARTS | SENTIMENT |
| CANDLES | FANCY | JEWELRY | SUITOR |
| CANDY | FEBRUARY | LIKE | SWEETHEART |
| CHOCOLATES | FLAME | LOVEBIRDS | |

Yesterday's Solution

Martin Luther King Jr.

This is the solution to the puzzle located [here](#).



- | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------------|--------------|---------|---------|---------|------------|----------|-------------------|--------------|------------|----------------|--------------|
| ACTIVIST | AFRICAN AMERICAN | ASSASSINATED | ATLANTA | BALCONY | BAPTIST | BIRMINGHAM | BOLD | BRAVE | BUS BOYCOTT | CHALLENGE | CHANGE | CIVIL RIGHTS |
| CORETTA | DESEGREGATION | EQUALITY | FATHER | FORGIVE | HATE | HERO | HISTORY | HOLIDAY | HOPE | HUSBAND | I HAVE A DREAM | |
| INJUSTICES | LEADER | LOVE | MARCHES | MEMPHIS | MICHAEL | MONTGOMERY | MOVEMENT | NOBEL PEACE PRIZE | NON VIOLENCE | OPPRESSED | ORATOR | |
| PASTOR | PEACEFUL | PROGRESS | PROTEST | RACISM | SELMA | SPEAKER | SPEECHES | STRONG | TRUTH | WASHINGTON | YOLANDA | |

Hidden sentence: Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.

Daily SuDoku

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6		7			9			
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Yesterday's Solution

3	6	4	5	9	8	2	7	1
7	2	5	1	6	3	9	4	8
8	1	9	4	2	7	6	5	3
5	4	3	7	8	6	1	9	2
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6	9	2	3	4	1	5	8	7
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Lifestyle

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2020



This photograph shows hot air balloons flying during sun rise over Bagan, an ancient city and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. — AFP

Malaysia's hand-made incense craftwork a declining art



A man selling giant incense sticks and other decorations ahead of the Lunar New Year celebrations. — AFP photos



A worker decorating a giant incense sticks at a factory ahead of the Lunar New Year celebrations.



A worker preparing dragon figure decorations for giant incense sticks at a factory.



This picture shows a worker decorating a giant incense sticks at a factory ahead of the Lunar New Year celebrations in Kubang Semang, Malaysia's northern village of Penang.



A worker arranging giant incense sticks at a factory.

Thousands of giant incense sticks, many decorated with dragon heads, line the walls at a Malaysian business where they are made by hand ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday. In the rural town of Kubang Semang, workers spend months using a traditional method to craft the sticks—some as tall as two meters (6.5 feet) — before sending them to stores. Business is brisk ahead of Lunar New Year celebrations towards the end of this month, when people of Chinese descent worldwide burn incense in temples and at traditional ceremonies.

Malaysia is a Muslim-majority country but is home to a substantial ethnic Chinese population, and the holiday is marked in many places. Ong Chin Chye, who runs the business in a series of wood and corrugated iron buildings, said his colorful hand-made sticks look a lot better than those churned out by machines. "With machines, can you make the dragon head like this?" the 60-year-old asked AFP, pointing to his intricately carved creations. Ong's sticks are primarily made from sawdust, using a mix of locally-grown "meranti" timber—a common hardwood in Southeast Asia—and aromatic agarwood. These are combined with water to make a sticky paste that forms the sticks.

The next 12 months will be the Year of the Rat—the first creature in the Chinese zodiac's 12-year cycle—but Ong said his buyers weren't keen on depictions of the whiskered rodent. "People don't want rats. They steal food, and that's not good," he laughed. On the other hand, dragons—also one of the zodiac animals—are ever-popular symbols of power, strength and



A worker painting giant incense sticks at a factory ahead of the Lunar New Year celebrations.

good luck in Asian culture. Ong said his sticks typically sell for between eight and 80 ringgit (\$2 to \$20) apiece, depending on quality and size. As well as Lunar New Year, he makes them for other major Chinese festivities.

He estimated there were at most 30 incense-making businesses like his across Malaysia, adding the industry had been declining in recent years. Young people

"don't want to work these jobs, it's hard work... there is no air-conditioning", he said. Many incense sticks sold nowadays in Southeast Asia come from overseas, particularly China. More than 60 percent of Malaysia's 32 million people are ethnic Malay Muslims while around a quarter are ethnic Chinese, and the country is also home to a sizeable minority of people of Indian descent. — AFP



Nun story: Chanel rediscovers its convent girl chic

Virginie Viard finally put her mark on Chanel on Tuesday with a beautifully restrained Paris haute couture show that summoned up the convent girl childhood of the fabled French label's founder. The discreet designer, Karl Lagerfeld's righthand woman in his twilight years, shook the Kaiser's ghost from her shoulder to produce some of the most subtle and refined clothes seen on a Chanel catwalk in quite some time. With white sheets hung on washing lines around the spare set of a convent cloister evoking the orphanage where Coco Chanel grew up, this was a thorough spring clean.

Viard quite literally went back to the source, travelling deep into rural southwest



France on a pilgrimage to the abbey at Aubazine where Chanel learned to sew, and where her little black dress had its genesis in the nuns' habits. "It was a very touching and inspiring place. I felt good there," said Viard of her time communing with Chanel's spirit. While Lagerfeld felled forests, reproduced rockets, ocean liners and the Eiffel Tower almost to scale inside the vast Grand Palais for

his legendary Paris shows, Viard recreated the convent's humble little garden gone wild.

Chicly unshowy

Rather than Cecil B DeMille sets, her clothes did the talking. With models in sensibly heeled loafers with built-in white ankle socks, the early looks—almost entirely white—had an Edwardian schoolgirl elegance about them. Chanel tweed suits in black and white,





dresses and pinafores with bertha collars. All appeared terribly simple, ascetic even, until you saw the cut and sparkly sophistication of the flower detailing. Then there was Gigi Hadid, discipline personified, as a kind of

mother superior enforcer in a killer black but-toned-up habit dress with a claudine collar.

The American supermodel seemed to lap up the role, having confronted a gatecrasher who slipped onto the runway at the last Chanel show. Then came the couture dresses assembled with a rare and restrained ethereal beauty, their fine embroidery carrying echoes of stained glass and filtered ecclesiastical light. Even the Paris weather seemed to have caught some of the chill of Chanel's convent rigour, with Kaia Gerber and other models swaddled in thermal foil blankets backstage against the biting winter cold.

But that did not deter a front row jammed with celebrities, from French actress Eva Green to Japanese and Thai stars Nana Komatsu and Nittha Jirayungyorn to singers Pharrell Williams and South Korean rapper G-Dragon.

Austere glamour

"The idea of a boarding school, of school-girls, of the children's clothes from long ago appealed to me," Viard said of her spring summer wardrobe. Gabrielle Chanel—who would later restyle herself Coco—was sent to a former Cistercian abbey at Aubazine after her mother's death in 1895. "In that place outside



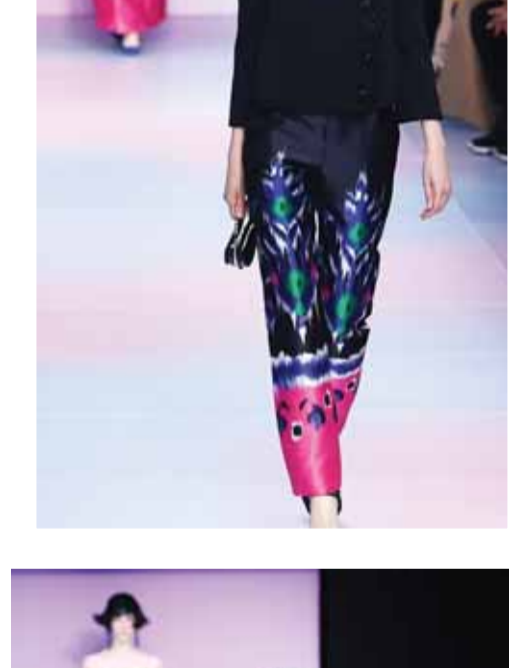
time, the young Gabrielle was marked for life by a rigour, a sense of purity and a whole aesthetic that never left her, and was one of the major sources of her inspiration," Viard added.

Indeed the wedding dress that traditionally finishes haute couture shows had more than a hint of a bride of Christ about it. Haute cou-

ture shows happen only in Paris and are regarded as the pinnacle of fashion, with hundreds of hours of work going into every piece painstakingly handmade. Only the world's richest women can usually afford dresses from the little more than a dozen permanent haute couture houses allowed to use the label under French law. — AFP



Models present creations by Georges Hobeika during the Women's Spring-Summer 2020/2021 Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos



Models present creations by Giorgio Armani Prive during the Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.

Pamela Anderson weds for fifth time to Hollywood mogul

Former "Baywatch" star Pamela Anderson has tied the knot for a fifth time, to hairdresser-turned-Hollywood mogul Jon Peters. The actress and animal rights activist wed "Batman" producer Peters on Monday, more than three decades after the pair first dated. "They were married yesterday in a private ceremony in Malibu. They love each other very much," a source connected to the couple told AFP.

Penning a lovestruck statement in the form of a poem after the nuptials, Anderson dubbed Peters "the original 'bad boy' of Hollywood." "No one compares-I love him deeply like family," Anderson wrote to The Hollywood Reporter. Canadian-born Anderson, 52, has previously been married to rockers Tommy Lee and Kid Rock. She twice wed professional poker player Rick Salomon.

More recently she dated French soccer star Adil Rami, with whom she lived in France. Peters, 74, a former hair stylist, rose to Hollywood prominence after a high-profile romance with Barbra Streisand, going on to produce her 1976 version of "A Star Is Born." He subsequently oversaw the Tim Burton "Batman" films in the 1980s and 1990s, and brought another DC comic books icon back to the screen in 2006's "Superman Returns." He was co-chairman of Columbia Pictures for a stint in the 1990s.

Peters told THR: "There are beautiful girls everywhere. I could have my pick, but-for 35 years-I've only wanted Pamela." Peters reportedly first met Anderson at the Playboy Mansion in the 1980s, and proposed to her shortly after. But until recently the pair had grown apart-when asked about their relationship in an interview with THR in 2017, Peters said: "You'll have to do your research. I can't even remember anymore." The wedding is also Peters' fifth time at the altar, with his most recent marriage ending in 2004.



In this file photo US-Canadian actress Pamela Anderson poses during a photocall prior to the Chanel Spring-Summer 2019 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show at the Grand Palais in Paris. —AFP

"His life used to scare me. So much for a girl like me," wrote Anderson. "Now I've seen more of life and realize... He's been there all along." Anderson, a prolific social media user, has yet to mention the wedding on those platforms. But on Monday she posted a series of black-and-white photo portraits on Instagram captioned with romance-themed quotes. One read: "Love is in the air." —AFP

Osbourne reveals battle with Parkinson's disease

Legendary British rocker Ozzy Osbourne revealed he has Parkinson's disease Tuesday, describing his "shocking" physical state over the past year. The former Black Sabbath frontman said he was diagnosed after suffering a fall in early 2019 which prompted neck surgery—an operation that also led to nerve damage. "It has been terribly challenging for us all," Osbourne told Good Morning America, before adding that he wanted to dispel rumors he was on his deathbed. "I'm far from it," he said. "I feel better now I've owned up to the fact that I have Parkinson's. And I just hope they (fans) hang in there for me because I need them." he added.

Osbourne, 71, said he was on a "host of medications" for both the surgery damage and Parkinson's, but was looking forward to going on tour again. He currently has North American tour dates scheduled from May. Osbourne also tweeted Tuesday lyrics to a track from his upcoming album including the words: "Don't forget me as the colors fade." The musician postponed all upcoming tour dates in April 2019. A statement at the time said he was recovering from "an injury sustained while dealing with his recent bout of pneumonia."

"A year ago next month, I was in a shocking state," said Osbourne. Parkinson's is a disease of the nervous system which can cause trembling, stiffness, slowing of movement and slurred speech. It is non-fatal but complications can be life-threatening, and there is no cure for the condition. Osbourne's wife Sharon said they would go to Switzerland in April to seek further treatment options. —AFP



In this file photo British rock star Ozzy Osbourne gestures during a Thames Valley Police press conference in Gerrards Cross, Britain, after his house was broken into late 22 November. —AFP

Weinstein rape trial set for opening arguments

Opening arguments in Harvey Weinstein's rape and sexual assault trial are due today, with the defense expected to detail "loving" emails between the once-mighty movie producer and his accusers. Weinstein, 67, faces life in prison if convicted of predatory sexual assault charges related to two women in the high-profile New York proceedings seen as key to the #MeToo movement.

Prosecutors will argue that the former Miramax Films boss was a sexual predator who made a career out of abusing women who were trying to make their way in Hollywood. Weinstein's attorneys will try to convince the court that his two accusers engaged in consensual relationships with the defendant and only claimed the incidents were forced years later. Lawyer Damon Cheronis said Tuesday the defense had "dozens" of emails sent

by the women to Weinstein which undermine claims of non-consensual sex, according to journalists in the courtroom. Justice James Burke ruled that the defense team could cite these emails in its opening arguments, dealing a blow to the prosecution which had objected to their inclusion.

"What we will counter with are their own words, their own words where they described loving relationships," Cheronis told the court, US media reported. Weinstein is accused of forcibly performing o**i sex on former production assistant Mimi Haley in his New York apartment in July 2006. An unidentified woman says Weinstein raped her in a New York hotel room in March 2013. The prosecution will call four other accusers to the stand as it tries to convince the 12-member jury that Weinstein engaged in a pattern of predatory sexual behavior. —AFP



In this file photo Harvey Weinstein enters Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City. —AFP

Ousted Grammy CEO files explosive discrimination complaint



In this file photo Recording Academy president and CEO Deborah Dugan speaks during the 62nd Grammy Awards Nominations Conference at CBS Broadcast Center in New York City. —AFP

The ousted chief of the organization behind the Grammys filed a complaint on Tuesday accusing the Recording Academy of putting her on leave after she raised concerns about sexual harassment, voting irregularities and other misconduct. Deborah Dugan says in her 44-page complaint before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Los Angeles that the Academy retaliated against her after she detailed the misconduct in December.

In her most explosive charge against the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, Dugan says that she was asked to hire her predecessor, Neil Portnow, as a consultant despite allegations that he had raped a foreign female recording artist, "which was, upon information and belief, the real reason his contract was not renewed." Dugan's sexual harassment and discrimination allegation comes just days before the Grammy Award ceremony is set to be held in Los Angeles on Sunday. The complaint states that on December 22, she sent an email to the head of the Academy's human resources department saying she had been sexually harassed by Joel Katz, an attorney who is general counsel to the Academy.

"The email also detailed egregious conflicts of interest, improper self-dealing by Board members and voting irregularities with respect to nominations for Grammy Awards, all made possible by the 'boys club' mentality and approach to governance at the Academy," the complaint states. It adds that after sending the email, Dugan put the Academy on notice that she planned to take legal action. Dugan alleges that the Academy retaliated against her by putting her on leave on trumped-up charges of misconduct. Dugan replaced Portnow last May, becoming the first woman to lead the Recording Academy. —AFP

'Bad Boys' do well, leading N American box office

It took Sony 17 years, but the latest "Bad Boys" sequel appears to be paying off, taking in \$73 million over the long US holiday weekend, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Tuesday. "Bad Boys for Life" stars Will Smith and Martin Lawrence as wise-cracking detectives who reunite after years apart to take on a murderous Miami drug cartel. The previous installment, "Bad Boys II" dates from 2003, eight years after the original "Bad Boys." In second place was the critically acclaimed Oscar heavyweight "1917," last weekend's box office leader from Universal. The World War I drama booked \$26.9 million in ticket sales over the Friday-to-Monday period.

Despite a lack of big stars, it has won both the Golden Globe and the Producers Guild of America awards for best drama. Another new release, Universal's "Dolittle," starring Robert Downey Jr., placed third with \$28.3 million over the four days. Based on a beloved children's book about a veterinarian who can talk to ani-

mals, the film has been savaged by critics-who have called it "utterly lifeless," "a quagmire of a movie" and "shockingly unfunny."

The presence of Downey, hugely popular in the Marvel superhero films, and of an all-star voice cast including Emma Thompson, Ralph Fiennes, Antonio Banderas, Rami Malek, Octavia Spencer and Marion Cotillard, may have helped boost its fortunes. Sony's "Jumanji: The Next Level," slid one spot from last weekend to fourth, taking in \$12.7 million. The action sequel stars Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and Kevin Hart. Fifth spot went to Disney's "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker," at \$10.6 million. Globally, the finale of the nine-film "Skywalker Saga" has now surpassed the \$1 billion mark.

Rounding out the top 10 were:
"Little Women" (\$8.2 million)
"Just Mercy" (\$7.5 million)
"Knives Out" (\$5.3 million)
"Like a Boss" (\$4.8 million)
"Frozen II" (\$5.3 million) —AFP



(From left) Will Smith and Martin Lawrence attend the premiere of Columbia Pictures' "Bad Boys for Life" at TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. —AFP

British royal satire featuring 'modern Aunt Meghan' coming to HBO Max

A British royal family satire featuring a cartoon Prince George and his "modern Aunt Meghan" is coming to HBO Max, the streaming platform announced Tuesday. The animated comedy will be based on a popular Instagram parody account which imagines a young George's scathing reactions to news stories about Meghan and the wider royal family. It will portray the Windsors through "the eyes of a young Prince George," and feature notable characters in his life including "his modern Aunt Meghan and Uncle Harry."

The announcement comes days after Harry and Meghan's shock exit from life as working royals. Prince Harry jetted out from Britain to join Meghan in Canada on Monday, as they start their new life at a luxury house outside Victoria on Vancouver Island. Gary Janetti, whose credits include "Family Guy" and "Will & Grace," will write and executive produce "The Prince." Janetti's Instagram account, which regularly features memes of Prince George, has more than 880,000 followers.

A recent post linked to an article about Harry and Meghan losing their royal titles featured a shocked-looking George with the caption: "Oh my God, they'll be... people." Another written soon after "Megxit" featuring a photo of George with his parents and sister had the caption: "Also, that wedding sucked." The show will feature the voices of Orlando Bloom, Alan Cumming and Tom Hollander. "We're so excited to bring the world Gary's created on Instagram over to HBO Max, where our viewers can discover what his Instagram fans already know-that George can be hilarious, shocking, and surprisingly sweet," said HBO Max original content head Sarah Aubrey.

The show is billed as "a biting, satirical look at the life of Prince George," following him "from the 775 rooms of Buckingham Palace to his family's sea of organic to primary school with commoners." It will air on



In this file photo Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex (left) and Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex (right) return to Buckingham Palace after the Queen's Birthday Parade, 'Trooping the Color', in London. —AFP

upcoming streaming platform HBO Max, which is set to be launched by WarnerMedia in May, and will also feature the new prequel to "Game of Thrones." "I'm thrilled to be working at HBO Max and bringing them yet another series about a family ruthlessly fighting for the throne," said Janetti. No launch date for "The Prince"-produced by 20th Century Fox Television-has been announced. —AFP

Monty Python star Terry Jones dies aged 77

Monty Python star Terry Jones has died at the age of 77, his family said yesterday, after a long battle with a rare form of dementia. He died late Tuesday with his wife Anna Soderstrom at his side at his home in north London. "We have all lost a kind, funny, warm, creative and truly loving man whose uncompromising individuality, relentless intellect and extraordinary humor has given pleasure to countless millions across six decades," his family said in a statement. "His work with Monty Python, his books, films, television programs, poems and other work will live on forever, a fitting legacy to a true polymath."

Jones directed some of the comedy troupe's most-loved works, including the 1979 movie "Life of Brian", about a man mistaken for the Son of God, which sparked criticism from the Church. Playing Brian's mother, Mandy Cohen, he memorably delivered the line "Now, you listen here! He's not the Messiah. He's a very naughty boy!" He appeared as a variety of characters in the television series "Monty Python's Flying Circus", and was known for his performances in drag. —AFP



In this file photo British actor Terry Jones poses on the red carpet as he arrives to attend the premiere of the film 'A Liar's Autobiography' during the 56th BFI London Film Festival in London. —AFP



Chief Executive Officer of Amazon Jeff Bezos poses for a picture during his visit at the Taj Mahal in Agra on Tuesday. — AFP

Mumbai bets on night shopping to lift economy

MUMBAI: Residents of Mumbai will be able to shop and dine out until dawn from late this month as the Indian city plans to lift restrictions on retail trading hours in order to boost the local economy. With India's economy growing at its slowest pace in 11 years, the government of Maharashtra state believes the move will boost spending and create jobs.

Malls, shops and eateries in commercial districts of Mumbai such as Bandra Kurla Complex and Nariman Point will be able to remain open 24 hours, seven days a week from Jan 27 if they choose to, Anil Deshmukh, home minister in the Maharashtra state government, told reporters yesterday after the state cabinet approved the plan.

Currently, all stores are required to shut by 10 pm, while restaurants have to shut by 1:30 am, at the latest.

China virus toll hits 17; call to...

Continued from Page 1

declare a rare global public health emergency over the disease, which has now been detected in the United States, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, South Korea and Macau. The Chinese government has classified the outbreak in the same category as the SARS epidemic, meaning compulsory isolation for those diagnosed with the illness and the potential to implement quarantine measures.

But they still have not been able to confirm the exact source of the virus. "We will step up research efforts to identify the source and transmission of the disease," Li said, adding that "the cases are mostly linked to Wuhan". Countries have intensified efforts to stop the spread of the pathogen - known by its technical name 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV). Passengers are facing screening measures at five US airports and a host of transport hubs across Asia. Britain and Italy yesterday also announced enhanced monitoring of passengers from Wuhan.

A prominent expert from China's National Health Commission confirmed this week that the virus can be passed between people. However, animals are suspected

Macron loses cool with Israeli...

Continued from Page 1

The 42-year-old head of state had seen his visit to St Anne as a symbolic stop underscoring Paris' historical influence in the region. Before heading to the church, Macron walked through the Old City, speaking to shopkeepers and stopping by the Church of the Holy

Assembly ratifies neutral zone...

Continued from Page 1

MP Ali Al-Deqbasli hinted during the Assembly session yesterday that expatriate spies may have been

The new law will exclude pubs and bars, which will still be required to shut down at 1:30 am, the state government said. "We are hopeful that this move will provide jobs and revenue to our youth," Aadiya Thackeray, tourism and environment minister in the state government, told reporters after the cabinet meeting.

The city is home to 20 million people and attracts millions of visitors each year. Whether shops take up the option and extra cost involved in staying open through the night remains to be seen, although local media quoted the National Restaurant Association of India as saying malls and restaurant owners had expressed interest in operating 24 hours a day.

Thackeray dismissed concerns that the plan would lead to a law and order problem in the city. Some smaller Indian cities have scrapped retail trading hour limits but Mumbai will be the first major city to allow 24-hour trading. India officially forecasts 5 percent economic growth for the current financial year, the slowest pace since 2008/09, and analysts expect the government to announce tax concessions in its annual budget next month that will leave many individuals with more money in their pockets. — Reuters

to be the primary source of the outbreak. A Wuhan market is believed to be the epicenter of the outbreak. A price list circulating online in China for a business there lists a menagerie of animals or animal-based products including live foxes, crocodiles, wolf puppies and rats. It also offered civets, the animal linked to SARS.

"We already know that the disease originated from a market which conducted illegal transaction of wild animals," said Gao Fu, director of the Chinese center for disease control and prevention. He said it was clear "this virus is adapting and mutating". Hong Kong and British scientists have estimated that between 1,300 and 1,700 people in Wuhan may have been infected.

Health authorities are urging people to wash their hands regularly, avoid crowded places, get plenty of fresh air and wear a mask if they have a cough. Anyone with a cough or fever was urged to go to hospital. In Wuhan, city authorities made it mandatory to wear a mask in public places yesterday, according to state-run People's Daily.

In response to skyrocketing demand for masks - which were starting to sell out at pharmacies and on some popular websites - China's industry and information technology ministry said it would "spare no effort in increasing supply", state media reported. "These days, I wear masks even in places that are not too crowded, although I wouldn't have done so in the past," said Wang Suping, 50, who works at a Beijing arts school. At the capital's main international airport, the majority of people were wearing masks. — AFP

Sepulcher. He later visited the Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem that houses the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Macron will today attend a ceremony to commemorate the liberation 75 years ago of Nazi Germany's Auschwitz death camp in what was then occupied Poland. Yesterday's tense scenes recalled a 1996 Jerusalem visit by late former president Chirac during which he also lost his cool with Israeli security agents who were pressing him to move on. Chirac heatedly told them their actions were a "provocation" and angrily asked: "What do you want? Me to go back to my plane and go back to France, is that what you want?" — Agencies

responsible for the hacking last month of Kuwait News Agency's Twitter account. He said that the hacking was not the first one and was the result of the administration's failure to employ more Kuwaitis in KUNA and dependence on expatriates. He said that the hacking could have been done by spies. He said that it is no longer acceptable that expatriates continue to work in the political news section at KUNA, adding that many spies are normally planted in the media and other sensitive places.

'No doubt' e-cigs harmful: WHO

GENEVA: Electronic cigarettes are harmful both to users and bystanders exposed to the fumes, the World Health Organization says in a report warning they can damage growing fetuses and impact teenagers' brains. So-called electronic nicotine delivery systems, or ENDS, have been pushed by producers as well as some governments as a safer alternative to smoking, and as a path to kicking the habit.

But in a strongly-worded series of questions and answers about such e-cigarettes, the UN health agency said there was not enough evidence to say they help smokers quit, but that there was clear evidence they are dangerous. "There is no doubt that they are harmful to health and are not safe," WHO said in one answer, stressing though that "it is too early to provide a clear answer on the long-term impact of using them or being exposed to them."

The battery-powered devices that enable users to inhale addictive nicotine liquids and exhale vapor "are particularly risky when used by adolescents," WHO said, strengthening initial warnings it made in 2019. "Nicotine is highly addictive and young people's brains develop up to their mid-twenties," it said in a document published Tuesday, stressing that "exposure to nicotine can have long-lasting, damaging effects."

This is of high concern amid skyrocketing popularity of vaping among young people in many countries. At the same time, there is little indication that using e-cigarettes is keeping teens away from more harmful products, with the WHO pointing out that

those using ENDS are more likely to smoke conventional cigarettes. And it said that "for pregnant women, ENDS pose significant risks as they can damage the growing fetus." Amid growing fears over serious health consequences linked to e-cigarette use, WHO warned that so-called vaping increases the risk of heart disease and lung disorders. The United States especially has seen a major health crisis tied to vaping: An acute lung illness epidemic that has killed more than 50 people and sickened more than 2,500 in the United States.

The illness was later linked to a substance called vitamin E acetate, which is used as a thickening agent for vaping products containing the main psychoactive substance of cannabis - THC - that are often sold on the black market. At least five other countries have initiated investigations to identify cases of lung injuries related to e-cigarette use, WHO said.

The UN health agency also said second-hand exposure to e-cigarette fumes was harmful, pointing out that the aerosols "typically contain toxic substances, including glycol which is used to make antifreeze." "ENDS pose risks to users and non-users," it said, demanding tight regulation of the products, including bans on marketing to young people and on use in indoor workplaces and public spaces.

The WHO document drew ire from some experts, with Peter Hajek, the head of the Tobacco Dependence Research Unit at Queen Mary University of London, accusing it of "anti-vaping activism". In a comment re-tweeted by Philip Morris, he charged that the document was filled with errors and that the authors "should take responsibility for using blatant misinformation to prevent smokers from switching to a much less risky alternative". — AFP

New PM says Lebanon faces...

Continued from Page 1

its blessing to Diab's designation last month. Western sanctions on the Iranian-backed organization are stacking up and economists have argued the new government might struggle to secure the aid it so badly needs. But French President Emmanuel Macron, one of the first leaders to react to the formation of the new government, said he would "do everything, during this deep crisis that they are going through, to help".

Hezbollah and its allies dominated the talks that produced the new line-up, from which Hariri and some of his allies were absent. The millionaire was one of the symbols of the kind of hereditary and sectarian-driven politics that protesters who have been in the streets since mid-October want to end. He and his government resigned less than two weeks into the non-sectarian protests demanding the complete overhaul of the political system and celebrating the emergence of a new national civic identity.

Protesters from across Lebanon's geographical and confessional divides had demanded a cabinet of independent technocrats as a first step to root out endemic government corruption and incompetence. Diab is a career academic from the prestigious American University of Beirut and he insisted Tuesday in his first comments that the government just unveiled was a technocratic one. "This is a government that represents the aspirations of the demonstrators who have been mobilized nationwide for more than three months," he said.

Yet the horsetrading between traditional political factions during lengthy government formation talks was all too familiar to many Lebanese who met the break-

through with distrust at best. "Instead of the corrupt politicians, we got the corrupt politicians' friends," said Ahmad Zaid, a 21-year-old student who joined a few hundred protesters in central Beirut after the announcement. Clusters of demonstrators burned tyres and briefly blocked roads to express their displeasure at the new line-up late Tuesday and they started gathering in front of parliament again by mid-afternoon yesterday.

The new cabinet is mostly made up of new faces, many of them academics and former ministry advisers. It comprises 20 ministers and among its six women is Zeina Akar, Lebanon's first-ever female defense minister. To downsize the cabinet, some portfolios were merged, resulting in at times baffling combinations such as a single ministry for culture and agriculture. Anger at what protesters see as a kleptocratic oligarchy was initially fuelled by youth unemployment that stands at more than 30 percent and the abysmal delivery of public services such as water and electricity.

The long-brewing discontent was compounded by fears of a total economic collapse in recent weeks, with a liquidity crunch leading banks to impose crippling capital controls. Lebanon has one of the world's highest debt-to-GDP ratios and economists have argued it is hard to see how the near-bankrupt country could repay its foreign debt. "Regarding the economic situation, I repeat that this is one of our priorities," Diab said on Tuesday night. "We need to be given a little time," he added.

A looming default on Lebanon's debt, which has been steadily downgraded deeper into junk status by rating agencies, has sent the dollar soaring on the parallel exchange market. In a country where many transactions are carried out in dollars and most goods are imported, consumers and businesses alike have been hit hard by the national currency's free fall. Every morning, queues of people hoping to withdraw their weekly cap of \$100 or \$200 from outside banks. — AFP

Sports

Tiger Woods not thinking about titles record ahead of 2020 bow

Woods improved his tally to 15 last year

SAN DIEGO: Tiger Woods says he is not thinking about breaking the record for PGA Tour victories as he prepares to tee off his 2020 campaign at the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines today.

The 44-year-old former world number one drew level with Sam Snead's long-time mark of 82 wins with victory at the Zozo Championship in October, and could set a new record this week at a course where he was won eight times before.

But a relaxed-looking Woods, who finished 2019 on a high after leading the United States to victory in the Presidents Cup in Melbourne, said Tuesday pulling clear of Snead is the last thing on his mind at Torrey Pines this week.

"That number, just trying to get to 83, I really don't think about it," Woods told a press conference.

"Because I still have to think about all the things I need to do to win the golf tournament. There's so many different shots I have to play. Strategy, thinking my way around the golf course. I'm more consumed in that."

Woods is similarly unmoved by the possibility of matching or bettering Jack Nicklaus's haul of 18 Majors.

Woods improved his tally to 15 last year with a sensational victory at the Masters in Augusta.

"Even to get to the number I'm at right now, 15, is a lot," Woods said.

"Not too many guys who are around have seen that kind of number before. It's just going to take time. It took Jack about 26 years to get to his number, it's taken me 20-odd years to get to my mine."

'JUST TAKES TIME'

"It just takes time to accumulate wins. There were a number of years where I didn't play so there were some missed opportunities. But I'm playing again now so

these are blessed opportunities and I didn't think I'd have these." Woods, who spent nearly two years out of the game between 2016 and 2017 as he battled a long-standing back injury, said that his biggest challenge was maintaining consistency over four rounds of a tournament. "When I was younger I had more good days than bad, feeling-wise," Woods said.

"Now I'm 44 I feel more bad days than good days. I think all of you who are my age or older can relate to that. That's the hardest part about being an older athlete. You see it all the time at the Masters, every single year. Either Fred (Couples), (Bernhard) Langer or someone is up there for two days and then they fade. It's hard to put it together for all four days."

"That's one of the things I've noticed — it's harder to do. But I've been able to win a few tournaments since I made my comeback and hopefully I can win a few more." Woods said the legacy of his back problems continued to affect his preparations for each tournament. Spinal fusion surgery in 2017 has left

him needing to undergo lengthy stretching every time he picks up a club.

OLYMPIC BID

"If you and I wanted to go and hit balls right now, I couldn't go right to the first tee," Woods said.

"I couldn't play a big golf shot. I'd have to only chip it 100 yards. It's hard. I need to get worked on, I need to stretch, I need to get loosened up, and then start the process on the range to get moving."

"I have a fixed point in my lower back that's not moving. So I have to loosen everything else around it."

Woods meanwhile said he remains realistic about his dream of representing the United States in the Olympics this year.



Tiger Woods

To qualify for a place in Tokyo, Woods must be one of the top four ranked American players inside the world top 15 by June 22. He is currently the fourth ranked American player in the world, sixth overall, with world number one Brooks Koepka, Justin Thomas (4), and Dustin Johnson (5) ahead of him.

"I think the US guys are going to have to play well (to qualify)," Woods said. "There's a lot of us in the top 15. There's so much golf to be played, a lot of big events, a lot of major championships. There'll be some pretty good fluctuating over the next six months." — AFP



Kuwait handball team exits championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Handball exited the Asian Championship from the second round of the main draw following a heavy loss to South Korea with the score of 27-34 Tuesday evening. The Blue team will face Qatar today in an important match for the Qataris which is looking for top place.

QATAR AND JAPAN QUALIFY

Qatar's national team qualified for world cup finals and the semi-finals by two consecutive wins against Korea and Iran collecting four points in the process, and one match remaining against Kuwait. Japan qualified by beating Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, also collecting four points.

HEAVY LOSS

None of those following the championship expected Kuwait to suffer such a heavy loss to South Korea, rather

Kuwait national team could not keep up with its opponent in attacking or defending, and seemed to give up when the score difference reached five goals. Players committed basic attacking mistakes several times, having the ball go to the Koreans who easily carried out counter attacks. Things became worse when coach Aamen Al-Qafsi insisted on attacking with seven years, and this gave the opponents to benefit from not having a goalkeeper in place, and scored three times in an empty net, and this removed any hope of drawing since the start of the second half.

AL-QAFSI: WE COMMITTED SEVERAL TECHNICAL MISTAKES

Kuwait coach, Tunisian Aamen Al-Qafsi admitted that several technical mistakes and lack of concentration were among the main reasons behind losing to South Korea and be out of competing for the championship and not reach the world cup finals in Egypt 2021. Al-Qafsi said "we presented a weak level in front of Korea, because the defeat to Iran placed us under the pressure of having to win in two very difficult matches".

He added that Korea made it difficult by leading by six goals at the end of first half, so "we committed many mistakes". Al-Qafsi apologized once again to Kuwait fans and took responsibility, despite the fact that handball

federation provided all that is necessary to win, and asked all not be hard on the players who gave all they got, bearing in mind that their opponents are professionals, particularly the Iranians who have six players who play in Europe and compete in its champions league.

Al-Qafsi thanked the fans for their presence and supported us. He also thanked player for their efforts to the last minute in all matches and "I am proud of them".

MUBARAK: SORRY FOR THE EARLY EXIT

Kuwait team assistant coach Mohammad Mubarak said players gave it all they got, while expressing regret for the exit. He said "we should not forget the circumstances we went through after a freeze of 4 years without any contact, training a official competition due to suspension."

IL: WE DID NOT FACE ANY PRESSURE FROM KUWAIT ATTACKS

South Korea coach said the Kuwait team problem during the match is its lack of attacking pressure against the opponent, and its weak execution of the fast break.

He said "we did not notice any pressure from Kuwait players, and when they were carrying the fast break, we noticed that the two wingers were doing that, while the rest were absent especially deep".

Froome set for return at UAE Tour next month

LONDON: Chris Froome will make his competitive return to the peloton at next month's UAE Tour after a coming through a rigorous training block in the Canary Islands, the four-time Tour de France winner said yesterday.

The UAE Tour, the only WorldTour race in the Middle East, takes place from Feb. 23-29. Froome has not raced since a horrific crash while training for the Criterium du Dauphin last June which left him in intensive care with multiple fractures to his sternum, spine, femur, elbow and ribs.

"I'm really excited about getting back to racing at the UAE Tour," the Team Ineos rider said. "I've come off a good block of training in Gran Canaria and look forward to taking the next step in my recovery and getting back to full strength."

Kenya-born Briton Froome, 34, needs one more Tour de France victory to match the record shared by fellow greats Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Indurain. Team Ineos boss Dave Brailsford last week named reigning champion Egan Bernal of Colombia and 2018 winner Geraint Thomas as their likely co-leaders for the Tour, although he said Froome was hungry to be back to full fitness in time for the race.

The UAE Tour would be a useful gauge of Froome's recovery and boasts a strong lineup this year including 2018 world champion Alejandro Valverde, Froome's new Ineos team mate Rohan Dennis and Giro d'Italia king of the mountains Giulio Ciccone.

British sprint king Mark Cavendish, who has won 30 Tour de France stages and is now racing for the re-branded Bahrain-McLaren outfit, is also taking part, as are Italian road champion Davide Formolo, Adam Yates, Wout Poels and Colombian sprinter Fernando Gaviria. —Reuters



Chris Froome

Saracens scandal could 'galvanise' England

LONDON: Ireland coach Andy Farrell said yesterday that he believes Eddie Jones will use the Saracens' salary cap scandal to "galvanise" England in the upcoming Six Nations Championship.

Farrell has a unique perspective given he is also the father of Saracens star and England captain Owen Farrell. Premiership champions Saracens accepted relegation to the second-tier Championship last week following breaches of salary cap rules, with seven members of the England squad currently playing for the London club.

"Obviously I spoke to him, I've just had a protein bowl with him," said Andy Farrell when asked by AFP at the Six Nations launch in London if he had talked to Owen since Saracens' demotion was confirmed. "Honestly, as far as players are concerned, they have a lot of ups and downs that they need to deal with every week. This is something that players need to deal with. When you make the change into another environment, I think that's going to be really refreshing," added Farrell, promoted from within the Ireland set-up after Joe Schmidt's tenure ended with a World Cup quarter-final thrashing by New Zealand in Japan in October.

"You become certainly in national camp in a little bit of a bubble. I see Eddie using it to galvanise England a little bit as well." Although World Cup losing finalists England have confirmed that Championship players will remain eligible for Test selection, there is speculation the likes of fly-half Farrell, fullback Elliot Daly, lock Maro Itoje and hooker Jamie George may have to leave Saracens if they are to remain in contention for next year's British and Irish Lions tour of South Africa.

Andy Farrell, asked what advice he would give Owen, said: "I've not got an opinion. You understand as a parent it's sensitive anyway. There's a lot of questions still to be asked and answered. I don't think they've got all the facts together of what that future looks like."

"I'm sure that will come out in the not too distant future and I suppose I'll have an opinion then." Meanwhile Owen Farrell insisted: "I don't think it will be difficult for me at all. We're excited to get into camp and get on with the rugby. We'll be honest and up-front about it but we'll come through it."

Jones was in no doubt about the effect of joining up with England would have on the Saracens in the squad ahead of his side's Six Nations opener away to France in Paris on February 2.

"It's a massive opportunity. For the Saracens players, coming to England is the best thing for them," he said. "They love playing rugby. They love playing for their club and they love playing for England. For the rest of the squad it's an opportunity to get tighter," the Australian added.

Scotland coach Gregor Townsend, whose squad includes Saracens wing Sean Maitland, said the fallout from the scandal could yet bolster England.

"Who knows? Sometimes things like this bring a group closer together — as you saw in the second half at the weekend of the Saracens-Racing game, it brought them closer together," said Townsend.

"A lot of those players will be in the England team and going through adversity, coming up against certain challenges, it can make you stronger, or it can go the other way. We'll see over the next few weeks." Charles Ollivon, the new France captain, added: "You have to remember that England is the second best team in the world, so I'm not sure whether it is the best time to play against them or not." — AFP

Sports

Mathews hits double hundred to pile pressure on Zimbabwe

Mudzinganyama fourth Zimbabwean to make Test debut in this match

HARARE: Angelo Mathews struck his highest Test score with an unbeaten double century yesterday as Sri Lanka left Zimbabwe battling to save the series opener going into the final day at Harare.

Former skipper Mathews eclipsed his previous Test best of 160 and finished 200 not out after a marathon knock spanning 468 balls, as Sri Lanka declared their first innings on 515 for nine.

Zimbabwe, playing their first Test since November 2018, ended the fourth day on 30 without loss and trailing by 127 runs after Brian Mudzinganyama was drafted in as a concussion substitute for opener Kevin Kasuza.

Debutant Kasuza, who made 63 in the first innings, suffered a delayed concussion after he took a blow to the helmet while fielding at short leg on Tuesday.

Mudzinganyama became the fourth Zimbabwean to make his Test debut in this match. He was unbeaten on 14 with Prince Masvaure 15 not out at stumps.

The 32-year-old Mathews brought up his 10th Test century, his first since December 2018, in the morning session and steadily added to his total with considerable support from Dhananjaya de Silva and Niroshan Dickwella.

He was dropped shortly after reaching his ton when wicketkeeper Regis Chakabva was unable to hold a difficult chance off left-arm spinner Ainsley Ndlovu.

De Silva and Dickwella both scored 63 but two quick wickets for Sikandar Raza, who finished with three for 62, hastened the declaration as Mathews

reached 200 with a sweep to the square leg boundary.

With one day remaining, the visitors appear the only team capable of victory although the pitch looks likely to have the final say.

The two-Test tour was only announced by the Sri Lankan cricket board last week. Zimbabwe were readmitted as an ICC member in October following a three-month suspension over political interference.

The Sri Lanka games represent their first Tests since a 1-1 series draw in Bangladesh in November 2018. Zimbabwe last played a Test at home against the West Indies in October 2017. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Brief scores at close of play on the fourth day of the first Test between Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka at Harare yesterday:

Zimbabwe 358 and 30-0
Sri Lanka 515-9 declared (A. Mathews 200 not out, K. Mendis 80, D. de Silva 63, N. Dickwella 63; Sikandar Raza 3-62, V. Nyauchi 3-69).
 Match situation: Zimbabwe trail by 127 runs with 10 wickets remaining in the second innings
Toss: Zimbabwe.



HARARE: Sri Lanka batsman Angelo Mathews (C) is in action as slip fielder Craig Ervine looks on during the third day of the first Test cricket match played between Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka at the Harare Sports Club in Harare yesterday. — AFP

Bangladesh appoint Gibson as new pace bowling coach

DHAKA: Bangladesh have appointed Ottis Gibson as their new pace bowling coach, replacing South African Charl Langeveldt who resigned in December. The 50-year old former West Indies fast bowler signed a two-year agreement, the Bangladesh Cricket Board said in a statement late Tuesday.

Gibson, who has enjoyed two successful stints as bowling coach with England and has served as head coach of the West Indies and South Africa, will join the squad for the Pakistan tour which begins in Lahore on Friday.

"He brings in tremendous experience and has coached or played all over the world. He has also had the opportunity to observe Bangladesh cricket from close," BCB chief executive Nizamuddin Chowdhury said.

"I am sure he will be a very valuable addition to the Bangladesh team's coaching group." Gibson has also worked with Bangladesh Premier League side Cumilla Warriors. Bangladesh were due to depart on Wednesday evening for a three-match Twenty20 series in Lahore from January 24-27.

They will return to Pakistan in February for the first of two Tests. The second will be in April, and two days before that they will play a one-day international. Several coaching staff, including spin bowling coach Daniel Vettori, batting coach Neil McKenzie and fielding coach Ryan Cook have refused to tour Pakistan along with senior cricketer Mushfiqur Rahim on safety grounds. — AFP

Olympic boxing qualifier in China scrapped over virus

TOKYO: A boxing qualifier for the Tokyo Olympics scheduled for next month in China's Wuhan will be cancelled over the outbreak of a new virus, Japan's Kyodo news agency said yesterday.

Citing organisers, Kyodo said the qualifiers would be rescheduled and moved from Wuhan, where the outbreak of the new strain of coronavirus is believed to have begun. There was no independent confirmation from the organisers, and Japan's boxing federation said it was waiting to hear from the International Olympic Committee on the reported cancellation.

Kyodo said the IOC was expected to announce a new host and schedule for the qualifiers. Boxing has struggled in the run-up to the 2020 Games, and was almost excluded from the Olympic programme after a series of scandals. The amateur boxing body AIBA was stripped of the right to organise the Olympic competition and replaced with a special taskforce. Other measures have been introduced to rebuild trust in the sport, including a more transparent judging system.

The reported cancellation comes as China said the new strain of coronavirus has killed nine people and infected at least 440 others in the country. Cases have also been reported outside China, in countries including the United States, South Korea, Japan and Thailand.

The coronavirus has caused alarm for its similarity to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed nearly 650 people across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003. Several countries have already stepped up monitoring measures for visitors coming from China, and the World Health Organisation will hold an emergency meeting today on whether to declare a rare global public health emergency over the virus. — AFP

England face difficult choices as they chase series victory

JOHANNESBURG: England face a selection dilemma as they look to beat South Africa in the fourth and final test to complete a 3-1 series win at The Wanderers. After losing the opening test, England have turned around their fortunes with back-to-back victories in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

Coach Chris Silverwood and captain Joe Root must make tough choices in the bowling department before Friday's start with Jofra Archer and Chris Woakes knocking to get into the side.

Injured Dhawan out of India's ODI, T20 squad for NZ

NEW DELHI: Shikhar Dhawan has been ruled out of India's limited-overs teams for their tour of New Zealand after injuring his shoulder in their series-clinching one-day international with Australia, the country's cricket board said yesterday.

Opening batsman Dhawan, who hurt his left shoulder while fielding in Sunday's seven-wicket victory in Bangalore, will be replaced by youngster Prithvi Shaw in the 16-man one-day international squad.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Sanju Samson will take Dhawan's place in the T20 team that is in New Zealand for the five matches starting January 24. The T20s will be followed by three ODI matches starting February 5 and two Tests beginning on February 21.

"An MRI of his (Dhawan's) shoulder was conducted, and the results have confirmed a grade II injury of his acromio-clavicular joint," said Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). "His hand will be in a sling and he has been advised rest for some time. He will start his active rehab management in the first week of February at the National Cricket Academy." The left-handed opener suffered a fall after trying to stop the ball in the fifth over of the Australian innings and left the field in pain. He did not come out to bat as India chased down their target of 287 to clinch the three-match ODI series 2-1 after their 10-wicket drubbing in the opening game.

It was one of the many injuries that the 34-year-old Dhawan sustained in the last eight months starting with a broken thumb that cut short his World Cup campaign in England in June. Dhawan was ruled out of the ODIs against the West Indies after sustaining a "deep cut" to

his left knee in a domestic game in December. He was also hit on his rib cage by a Pat Cummins bouncer in the second ODI with Australia last week and did not take field. Meanwhile the 20-year-old Shaw, who returned from a doping ban in November 2019 and is already in New Zealand with the India A team, will be in line for an ODI debut.

Archer's pace will be valuable but does come at the expense of runs. England have ensured success against South Africa by being miserly with the runs, which flustered the hosts. Mark Wood made an impressive comeback in the last game with genuine pace to rattle the home batsmen, who fell like nine pins in an innings and 53-run defeat. It would be hard to leave him out.

Silverwood also said Woakes had been impressive in the nets. "We've got options available to us again, so that's superb," he told reporters. In contrast, the home side look rather lightweight as top bowler Kagiso Rabada is banned.

His over-the-top celebration after picking up Root's wicket last week earned him a demerit point and trig-

gered a one-match suspension as he had accumulated four demerit points over a 24-month period.

His absence is a serious blow for South Africa as it leaves their attack thin on a ground, where usually their bowlers strike fear into the opposition with a non-stop barrage of pace.

They must choose either Dwaine Pretorius, with only two previous test appearances, or uncapped left-arm seamer Beuran Hendricks. The hosts are also expected to drop batsman Zubayr Hamza and bring back Temba Bavuma, who was axed at the start of the series because of a lack of runs but responded with 180 in domestic competition last week.

The match is likely to be the last home game in charge for captain Faf du Plessis, who said he would reconsider his role after two away tests in the West Indies in mid-year. It will also be the last for Vernon Philander, who is retiring from test cricket to join Somerset. — Reuters



BANGALORE: India's Shikhar Dhawan, wearing an arm sling post his onfield injury, speaks with a match official after India won the third and last one day international (ODI) cricket match of a three-match series between India and Australia. — AFP

his left knee in a domestic game in December.

He was also hit on his rib cage by a Pat Cummins bouncer in the second ODI with Australia last week and did not take field. Meanwhile the 20-year-old Shaw, who returned from a doping ban in November 2019 and is already in New Zealand with the India A team, will be in line for an ODI debut.

Teams

T20I squad: Virat Kohli (capt), Rohit Sharma, Sanju

Samson, KL Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rishabh Pant, Shivam Dube, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Navdeep Saini, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur

ODI squad: Virat Kohli (capt), Rohit Sharma, Prithvi Shaw, KL Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rishabh Pant, Shivam Dube, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Ravindra Jadeja, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Navdeep Saini, Shardul Thakur, Kedar Jadhav. — AFP

Farah to face Bekele in Big Half race

LONDON: Four-time Olympic champion Mo Farah will begin his Tokyo Games preparations by going head-to-head with Kenenisa Bekele at the Big Half race in March, organisers said yesterday.

Farah, who has won the previous two editions of the half marathon event in London, faces a tough battle to keep his streak intact against Ethiopian Bekele — the second-fastest marathon runner of all-time.

After competing as a marathon runner for the last two years, Farah has decided to return to the track in a bid to complete an Olympic hat-trick in the 10,000m race in Tokyo.

He has not featured on the track since the

2017 world championships, but confirmed he will begin his season by continuing on the road at the Big Half on March 1.

"I am really looking forward to coming back to the Big Half and kicking off my 2020 season," said Farah.

"Everyone knows how much I enjoy racing in London. It's my home city and it always gives me a buzz to come back and race here."

Bekele, the world record holder for both 5,000 metres and 10,000 metres, produced a stunning 2:01:41 run in Berlin last September but missed the marathon world record by two seconds. The 37-year-old believes the Big Half gives him an opportunity to compete against a strong field before he takes on world record holder Eliud Kipchoge at April's London Marathon.

"This will be my first time racing at the Big Half and it will be a good test for me as I prepare for the London Marathon," Bekele added.

Farah and Bekele will lead the field that also includes Kenyan Marius Kipsere, who set a new course record to win the Rotterdam Marathon last year. — Reuters



Mo Farah

Sports

Ten-man Arsenal hold Chelsea in torrent of late Premier League goals

Southampton climb to ninth in the table with win over Palace

LONDON: Ten-man Arsenal slowed Chelsea's charge for a Champions League place on Tuesday as Manchester City kept up their distant pursuit of Liverpool with victory at Sheffield United on a dramatic evening of Premier League football.

Newcastle improbably came back from 2-0 down to draw against Everton, with substitute Florian Lejeune netting twice in stoppage time, and Aston Villa found a last-gasp winner against in-form Watford.

Elsewhere, Southampton climbed to ninth in the table with victory against Crystal Palace while Bournemouth gave themselves hope with a 3-1 win over fellow-strugglers Brighton.

Fourth-placed Chelsea twice took the lead against Arsenal, who were reduced to 10 men after former Blues defender David Luiz took out Tammy Abraham when he was through on goal. Jorginho put Chelsea 1-0 ahead from the penalty spot in the 28th minute but Gabriel Martinelli equalised for Arsenal in the second half. Cesar Azpilicueta put Chelsea 2-1 up with just six minutes remaining but Arsenal levelled only three minutes later through Hector Bellerin.

The 2-2 draw leaves Chelsea six points ahead of fifth-placed Manchester United having played a game extra while Arsenal are in 10th spot, seemingly out of the running for a place in the top four. Chelsea boss Frank Lampard was frustrated that his team had not been more clinical in front of goal.

"We could have had three or four goals today," he told the BBC. "Having shots, crosses and lots of 'ooh' moments. We have to be clinical."

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta hailed his side's reaction. "To do that against this kind of opponent in this stadium, I really value," he said. "The way they have done it, with the spirit they have done it, that's great."

Pep Guardiola's City, with defender Aymeric Laporte back in the side, looked as though they might rue

Gabriel Jesus's squandered first-half penalty but their Argentine hitman Sergio Aguero came to the rescue.

Despite the 1-0 win, second-placed City remain 13 points behind runaway leaders Liverpool, having played two games more, and their bid to defend their title appears hopeless. City's French central defender Laporte has been out of action since suffering a knee injury at the end of August and he was a surprise inclusion at Bramall Lane. Sheffield United goalkeeper Dean Henderson denied Jesus from the penalty spot about 10 minutes from half-time after a foul on Riyad Mahrez.

But City made amends when substitute Sergio Aguero, on for Jesus, tapped in from Kevin De Bruyne's cross in the 73rd minute. "We knew it would be a difficult place to come," Guardiola said. "We concede one or two clear chances, nothing more than that."

"In the first half the 'keeper was excellent with the penalty and two incredible saves. It was an incredibly good victory for us to take a step towards securing Champions League football next season."

Southampton's 2-0 victory against Crystal Palace, thanks to goals from Nathan Redmond and Stuart Armstrong, continued a remarkable turnaround for the club, who hit rock bottom earlier this season in a 9-0 defeat by Leicester. "Throughout the team — the behaviour, belief — everyone is absolutely committed," said Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuetl.

"They know what they have to do and the atmosphere is fantastic. Everyone enjoys to play."

Watford took the lead against Villa when Troy Deeney headed in Gerard Deulofeu's cross but the home side hit back in the second half through Douglas Luiz. Tyrone Mings scored a dramatic late winner for Villa deep into stoppage time to end Watford's recent revival under Nigel Pearson.

Moise Kean scored his first goal for Everton since his arrival from Juventus in the 30th minute of their



LONDON: Arsenal's English defender Rob Holding (centre R) heads the ball during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Arsenal at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

match against Newcastle and Dominic Calvert-Lewin doubled the lead in the second half.

Everton were cruising deep into stoppage time but threw away the three points, with Lejeune striking twice. Bournemouth, who had lost their previous four matches, all against relegation rivals, beat Brighton 3-1

thanks to goals from Harry Wilson, an own goal from Pascal Gross and a second-half Callum Wilson effort.

Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool are in action on Thursday at Wolves after Manchester United take on Burnley without Marcus Rashford, who could be out for three months with a back injury. — AFP

Favre play down Haaland hype after dream Dortmund debut

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund coach Lucien Favre yesterday attempted to dampen the hype surrounding Norwegian wunderkind Erling Braut Haaland as his side prepares for Friday's Bundesliga clash with Cologne.

Haaland, 19, became the first player in Bundesliga history to score a debut hat-trick as a substitute when he came off the bench to inspire Dortmund to a sensational 5-3 comeback win at Augsburg on Saturday.

His jaw-dropping treble — scored with his first three shots — showcased the lethal finishing which saw Dortmund pay Salzburg 20 million euros (\$22 million) last month for the exciting teen talent.

It was his sixth hat-trick of a phenomenal season that had already seen him net 28 goals in 22 games for Salzburg before joining Dortmund.

The rising star could make his home debut for fourth-placed Dortmund against mid-table Cologne on Friday, but Favre insists a knee knock Haaland picked up last month means he is not yet ready to play over 90 minutes. "He's only 19 years old," Favre told reporters on Wednesday, refusing to say whether Haaland will start on Friday.

"He makes a great impression in training. He always

gives his all and wants to win. "But he didn't train from December 10 until the end of the month and missed four and a half days at our training camp. "He has to work on his base fitness — we must not forget that."

Haaland's heroics last weekend saw him hit the headlines all around Europe. Former Germany and Liverpool midfielder Dietmar Hamann sees Haaland as "a real weapon for Dortmund because he brings a new dimension to their game".

Former Norway international and TV pundit Jan Age Fjortoft says back home the nation is "incredibly proud" of the youngster. However, Cologne hope to pour cold water on the Haaland hype.

"I hope the great story of Haaland will not continue on Friday and that we can keep him in check," said Cologne goalkeeper Timo Horn. "Dortmund are of course more than just about Haaland and it is a huge task which awaits us."

If his stunning form continues, Haaland's signing could lead to former Barcelona striker Paco Alcacer heading back to Spain after falling out of favour.

Haaland's treble saw him follow in the footsteps of Dortmund strikers Robert Lewandowski, Pierre-



Lucien Favre

Emerick Aubameyang and Alcacer, who all claimed their first hat-trick for the club against Augsburg, with Aubameyang's also coming on his Bundesliga debut.

After arriving on loan from Barcelona last season Alcacer made an explosive start with seven goals in his first four games. Dortmund made the transfer permanent in October 2018 for 23 million euros, but Alcacer has proven to be injury prone and was left out of the squad last weekend.

He has not played more than 45 minutes since the start of November and has been linked to a move to Valencia. — AFP

Solskjaer hits back after criticism over Rashford injury

MANCHESTER: Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has strongly defended himself against claims he put himself first with his ill-fated decision to play Marcus Rashford against Wolves in the FA Cup.

The United and England striker could be out for three months after suffering a back injury in last week's third-round match, which United won 1-0.

Former England and Arsenal striker Ian Wright said this week that Solskjaer, under intense pressure to improve the club's fortunes, prioritised his own needs over those of his player.

United are in fifth place in the Premier League, five points behind fourth-placed Chelsea in the race for the Champions League qualification spots. But the Norwegian boss insisted that Rashford was fit enough to play in the 1-0 win for United, in which the 22-year-old substitute lasted just 16 minutes.

"I never put myself before the team," Solskjaer said on Tuesday. "I always put the team and the club before anything else. "Marcus has had minor discomfort in his back since the Burnley game, two weeks before this game (Wolves)."

"We've had scans, we've monitored him, there was no injury there, just complaints," Solskjaer, whose team host Burnley in the Premier League on Wednesday, said he had spoken to Rashford in the build-up to the match.

"I had a conversation with him two days before and told him I was going to rest him," he said. "He felt fine and was very adamant that if needed, he could do at least half an hour as we wanted to go through in the cup."

"That shows you Marcus's attitude," Solskjaer said he did not regret throwing his star striker into the fray. "That is part of what you do for Man Utd," he said. "Every time you play, you put your body on the line."

"I've suffered some injuries for the club and that is what you are proud to do when you are a Man Utd player," Solskjaer's biggest headache now is how to cope without his leading scorer and talisman as he battles to finish in the Premier League's top four.

United's attack looked weak without him in the 2-0 defeat against Liverpool on Sunday and Anthony Martial and Mason Greenwood are the only striking options for the Burnley game. "That is the million-dollar question for us because Marcus has been fantastic," Solskjaer said.

"Someone has got to step up. If we find something in the transfer market, that might be one solution."

"But the best solution is the players stepping up and making sure they are ready and taking the chance." — AFP

S Korea, Saudi seal Tokyo Olympics football spots

BANGKOK: South Korea and Saudi Arabia sealed qualification for the 2020 Olympic men's football tournament yesterday when they reached the final of the Asian under-23 Championship in Thailand.

The competition acts as the Asian Football Confederation's Olympic qualifiers, with places in Japan going to the top three teams.

The top two were confirmed in yesterday's semi-finals as South Korea defeated Australia 2-0, while Saudi Arabia beat Uzbekistan 1-0. Kim Dae-won's 56th-minute strike put the Koreans ahead at Thammasat Stadium on the outskirts of Bangkok. Lee Dong-kyeong added a second 14 minutes from time to earn a deserved victory over Australia.

South Korea's reward is a spot at their ninth consecutive Olympics — a run that includes a bronze medal at London 2012. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia took until the 87th minute to find the goal that saw off the challenge of defending champions Uzbekistan at Bangkok's Rajamangala Stadium.

Substitute Nasser Al Omran's shot from the edge of the box was deflected into the Uzbek goal by Abdullah Al-Hamdan, sparking wild celebrations as the Saudis ended a 24-year wait since their last appearance at an Olympic Games.

The two teams will meet in the final on Bangkok on Sunday. Olympic hosts Japan — who were eliminated at the group stage of this competition — qualify automatically for the 2020 Games.

The fourth and final Asian team will be the winner of the third place playoff between Australia and Uzbekistan on Saturday evening. The Aussies are seeking a first Olympic appearance since 2008, while Uzbekistan would be making their debut in the competition. — AFP



DECINES-CHARPIEU: Lille's French forward Jonathan Ikone (L) fights for the ball with Lyon's Brazilian defender Marçal during the French League Cup semifinal football match between Olympique Lyonnais and Lille LOSC at the Groupama stadium in Decines-Charpieu near Lyon, central eastern France. — AFP

Lyon down Lille on penalties to reach final

LYON: Lyon beat Lille on penalties after a dramatic 2-2 draw at the Groupama Stadium on Tuesday to reach their sixth French League Cup final, setting up a possible clash with record eight-time winners Paris Saint-Germain.

Renato Sanches dragged what proved to be the last penalty of the shootout wide to send Lyon through. This is the final season of the League Cup after the French league voted to suspend the competition from next term to ease fixture congestion.

Lille have never won the tournament, losing once in the final in 2016. Lyon will bid to lift the trophy for the second time when they take on the winner of today's second semi-final between Reims and PSG on April 4 at the Stade de

France. Portugal midfielder Sanches gave visitors Lille a 13th-minute lead with a low left-footed strike from outside the area to score his second goal for the club since joining from Bayern last August.

But the hosts were gifted a way back into the game four minutes later when centre-back Gabriel handled inside the area. Moussa Dembele, who missed a penalty in the 4-3 French Cup win at Nantes on Saturday, drilled the spot-kick into the top corner to grab his sixth goal in five games. Neither side created many chances either side of half-time, but Houssein Aouar appeared to have fired Lyon into the final with a fine long-range strike with five minutes remaining.

There was another twist in the tale, though, as despite a lengthy delay for a VAR review, Lille were awarded an injury-time penalty for what appeared to be an excellent tackle by former Manchester United full-back Rafael on Jonathan Bamba. Loic Remy, on as a 78th-minute substitute, stepped up with a cool 'Panenka' finish down the middle of the goal to force more spot-kicks. But Ciprian Tatarusanu, playing in place of usual Lyon goalkeeper Anthony Lopes, saved Bamba's opening penalty before Sanches' miss sealed Lille's fate. — AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Wolverhampton Wanderers FC v Liverpool 23:00
beIN SPORTS

25 Froome set for return at UAE Tour next month

26 Mathews hits double hundred to pile pressure on Zimbabwe

27 Ten-man Arsenal hold Chelsea in torrent of late Premier League goals



Serena, Federer into third round

Osaka sets up Coco crunch



MELBOURNE: Japan's Naomi Osaka hits a return against China's Zheng Saisai during their women's singles match on day three of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Fifteen-year-old prodigy Coco Gauff set up an Australian Open blockbuster with defending champion Naomi Osaka yesterday, as a pumped-up Serena Williams took another step towards a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title.

On a day when men's seeds tumbled, Serbia's Novak Djokovic strode into the third round to be joined by Roger Federer, who dismissed Filip Krajinovic 6-1, 6-4, 6-1. American teenager Gauff, showing a tenacity which is becoming her trademark, clawed her way back from a set down to beat the experienced Sorana Cirstea 4-6, 6-3, 7-5.

Gauff, who screamed and pumped her fists as she completed her victory, said her "will to win" had got her through the tough second-round match at a windswept Melbourne Park. "My parents always told me you can always come back — no matter what the score is," said Gauff, who beat seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams in round one.

Gauff also beat Williams on her Grand Slam debut last year at Wimbledon, and in another quirk, she faced Osaka in the US Open third round, going down meekly in straight sets. Japan's Osaka, 22, beat China's Zheng Saisai 6-2, 6-4 but briefly lost her cool mid-match, hurling and kicking her racquet when she gave up a break in the second set.

"I was thinking that I really don't want to play a third set this time," explained Osaka, who is defending a Grand Slam title for the second time. Former world number one Wozniacki, playing her final tournament before retiring, came from behind in both sets for a 7-5, 7-5 win over Dayana Yastremska of Ukraine.

Serena Williams shouted at the top of her voice during a testing second set against 70th-ranked Tamara Zidasek, before seeing off break points to win 6-2, 6-3. "She was a really good fighter — she did not just let me win," said Williams, who can equal Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Grand Slams if she lifts the trophy.

Earlier, Australia's world number one Ashleigh Barty raced through 6-1, 6-4 against Polona Hercog, buoying hopes of a first home winner since 1978. "It was very different end to end, I think the wind was a massive factor particularly with the new ball," she said.

Djokovic also weathered the breeze — which followed heavy rain on Monday, and smog from bushfires last week — to beat Japanese wildcard Tatsuma Ito 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 in 95 minutes. "They were tough conditions, pretty windy and it was hard to know where the balls were going. My serve helped a lot to get me out of trouble," said the Serb.

Federer was barely detained by Krajinovic, the world number 41, as he moved smoothly through in 92 minutes in the night match on Rod Laver Arena. In other results, Petra Kvitova, last year's runner-up, came through 7-5, 7-5 against Paula Badosa of Spain, and China's Zhang Shuai ousted American Caty McNally 6-2, 6-4.

Former US Open champion Marin Cilic won a five-

setter against French seed Benoit Paire, and one-time semi-finalist Milos Raonic beat Chile's Christian Garin in straights. Tennis Sandgren, engulfed in controversy over his political views and right-wing links during his run to the 2018 quarter-finals, took the biggest scalp so far when he ousted eighth seed Matteo Berrettini in five sets. Sandgren's fellow American Tommy Paul also pulled off a five-set upset when he beat Bulgarian 18th seed Grigor Dimitrov 6-4, 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (10/3). And Australia's John Millman further trimmed the number of high-ranked players when he ended the campaign of Polish 31st seed Hubert Hurkacz.

But Greek sixth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas was handed a slice of fortune when Philipp Kohlschreiber withdrew injured. Among eight first-round matches held over from Tuesday, after rain wiped out half of Monday's schedule, Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro, also retiring this year, upset Belarusian 11th seed Aryna Sabalenka in straight sets. — AFP

Vatrano's hat trick lifts Panthers

CHICAGO: Frank Vatrano tallied his second career hat trick, and the Florida Panthers held on for a 4-3 win over the host Chicago Blackhawks on Tuesday night. Evgenii Dadonov also scored for Florida, which won its sixth game in a row. The hat trick for Vatrano was his first since Dec. 18, 2015, when he was a rookie with the Boston Bruins. The victory capped an emotional evening for Panthers head coach Joel Quenneville, who won three Stanley Cup championships with the Blackhawks before he was fired early last season. Quenneville received a standing ovation and video tribute in his first return to Chicago as an opposing coach. Kirby Dach, Drake Caggiola and Patrick Kane each scored for Chicago, whose five-game winning streak ended. Panthers goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky made 32 saves to earn his second win in as many nights. Blackhawks goaltender Robin

Lehner allowed four goals on 26 shots.

BRUINS 3, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 2

David Krejci scored the game-winning goal midway through the third period and also had an assist, and Jaroslav Halak finished with 27 saves as Boston rallied for a victory over visiting Vegas. Jeremy Lauzon, recalled earlier Tuesday from Providence of the AHL, and Jake DeBrusk also scored goals for Boston, which improved to 17-2-9 at home and increased its Atlantic Division lead to eight points over the Tampa Bay Lightning heading into the All-Star break. Mark Stone and Nicolas Hague scored goals for Vegas, which lost for the sixth time in its past seven games (1-5-1). Nate Schmidt added two assists, and Marc-Andre Fleury finished with 34 saves while allowing at least three goals for the seventh time in his past eight starts.

HURRICANES 4, JETS 1

Justin Williams produced two goals in just his second game since returning from an abbreviated retirement as Carolina defeated Winnipeg in Raleigh, N.C. Williams, a former team captain, scored in the first and third periods. The right winger had provided the winning tally in a shootout in his first game back. Martin Necas and

Teuvo Teravainen also scored for the Hurricanes. Patrik Laine scored in the first period for Winnipeg, cutting his team's deficit to 2-1. Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek made 16 saves while Winnipeg netminder Connor Hellebuyck stopped 25 shots.

ISLANDERS 4, RANGERS 2

Josh Bailey collected a power-play goal and two assists for a career-high three points as the visiting Islanders snapped a three-game losing streak at the expense of their New York City rival. Bailey scored the first of two Islanders power-play goals in the final 6:25 of the first period, then had the primary assist on tallies by Anthony Beauvillier and Brock Nelson. Anders Lee scored in the second period for the Islanders, and Thomas Greiss stopped a season-high 40 shots and improved to 5-0-1 in his career against the Rangers. Pavel Buchnevich and Chris Kreider scored in a span of 1:47 during a four-minute power play in the third period for the Rangers. Alexandar Georgiev started for the third straight time against the Islanders and allowed four goals on 18 shots after stopping 70 of 74 in the Rangers' two wins last week.

FLYERS 3, PENGUINS 0

James van Riemsdyk, Jake Voracek and Justin Braun each scored a goal, and host



CHICAGO: Brandon Saad #20 of the Chicago Blackhawks shoots between Anton Stralman #6 and Mike Matheson #19 of the Florida Panthers at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois. The Panthers defeated the Blackhawks 4-3. — AFP

Philadelphia won its final game before the All-Star break, blanking Pittsburgh. The Flyers improved to 17-4-4 at home while winning for the fourth time in five games. Philadelphia goaltender Brian Elliott made 19 saves on his way to his

first shutout of the season and the 39th of his career. Tristan Jarry stopped 27 shots for the Penguins, who had been one of the hottest teams in the league with six wins in their previous seven games. — AFP