

Friday Times

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— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Baking Kuwait's favorite 'Iranian' bread

'1,500 pieces of bread made daily'

By Nawara Fattahova

What does the life of a baker in Kuwait look like? Kuwait Times spoke to Naamatullah Pirmohammed, a 59-year-old Afghan, who has been working in local Iranian bakeries for the past 22 years. The wide, flat bread known as 'Iranian bread' is a local favorite.

As a baker, Naamatullah works daily on the traditional oven (tandoor) from 6:00 am till 10:00 am, then from 11:30 am till 2:00 pm, then from 5:00 pm till 10:00 pm. So Naamatullah actually remains at the bakery from 6:00 am till 10:00 pm, as he is still at the place during breaks when the oven is turned off.

He arrives early in the morning and gets to work. "I prepare the dough and bake the bread. I work in this bakery along with two colleagues. We produce around 1,500 pieces of bread every day," he told Kuwait Times. He learnt this profession in Afghanistan, where he also worked as a baker. "The shape of the bread is different in Afghanistan, where it's oval or elliptical, while here in Kuwait it's round," he said.

Naamatullah is married with six children. "I have three girls and three boys, who are all in Afghanistan. I travel every two years to see them, but once I couldn't travel for seven years," he



said. His work is dangerous. "I like my work although I face many problems. The most dangerous thing about my work is the fire. I have got burned many times by the fire from the oven. But I

have got used to it, as all my work is with fire. I haven't faced any problem with customers, as the people here are good," he remarked.

Naamatullah's other problem is financial. "Since I came to Kuwait 22 years ago, the price of bread hasn't changed. It still costs 20 fils, although the prices of all the ingredients including yeast, flour, salt and sesame have hiked many times in these 22 years. So the bakery is negatively affected by this difference," he pointed out.

This situation led the co-op to relieve the bakery from paying rent. "Five years back, we were paying KD 50 in rent, but fortunately now we don't have to pay anything. But even the rent that we used to pay in the past was symbolic compared to other areas, where the rent ranges between KD 150 in Mishref to KD 250 in Jahra, for instance. Also in Salwa it used to be KD 240, but they shut the bakery there a few years back," Naamatullah said.

He has previously worked in bakeries in various areas. "I have worked in Jahra, Sabah Al-Salem, Fahaheel and Salwa, where I was working before coming to this bakery in Bayan. I'm satisfied at this place, and I don't know to do anything else other than baking," concluded Naamatullah.

Ready for the Beach ??



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A trip to remember



The AISK MUN team stand proudly together under the United Nations symbol on stage in the General Assembly Hall after the closing ceremony. — Photo by Adrian Kassissia

By Faisal Boodai

A pioneer in international unity, the United Nations stands as the only route to resolving issues that plague global society. Through its Model United Nations (MUN) programs, it allows youth to join the global conversation by engaging with current real-world issues, empowering change-making, bridge-building and dream-forging sentiments that will undeniably propel us to a brighter tomorrow.



Chair Nouran Abdellatif gives the closing remarks for her commission on stage in the General. — Photo by Kate Bowler

This year, the American International School of Kuwait was proud to take 16 students from a multitude of nationalities to this prestigious event hosted in Geneva, Switzerland. On Jan 5, eleven grade 12 students (Jawa Al-Wahaib, Rianna Sarbajna, Fatma Al-Attar, Jassem Al-Sanea, David Gadelkarim, Mauricio Landin, Adam Musfi, Beata Romanova, Nouran Abdellatif, Rayanne Berrahmoun and myself), two grade 11 students (Maryam Abdal and Rea Alba Mehra) and three grade 10 students (David Hasler, Marcus Gurney and Reina Abo Chakra), accompanied by our dedicated direc-

tors, Rebecca Wyant, Kate Bowler and Adrian Kassissia, journeyed to the epicenter of diplomacy to seize this wonderful opportunity. Hosted at the United Nations Human Rights Commission Assembly Hall, the opening ceremony emphasized the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and the need now, more than ever, for international cooperation. The combination of excited delegates and thought-provoking speeches was made especially spectacular by the artwork of Spanish artist Miquel Barcelo, whose magnificent creation be-decks the roof of the room.

Resembling colorful seafoam, it symbolizes the flowing, constantly moving waves of change that begin in this austere room.

The structure we followed for our three days of the conference was dependent on our roles and committees. Each delegate is paired up with another delegate to represent a specific country (this year we represented Kuwait and France), thus also representing the country's stance on a specific issue. This year, the issues selected were centered around modern technological implications in various contexts. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) committees, for example, tackled the issue of the negative effects of 5G and how they could be resolved within respective countries.

The role of the delegate is to lobby for resolutions related to specific issues on the first day and debate them amongst their committees on the second and third days. Through debating two resolutions, the committee comes to a final consensus on each resolution, either passing it or rejecting it. At our closing ceremony, we discovered that the resolutions passed would be sent to the actual United Nations to guide future decisions regarding these same issues.

Part of why the concept of MUN works is how it chooses to tackle daunting issues in a uniquely civil and orderly manner that allows all insights to be voiced without fear of hostile response. As our MUN President Rianna Sarbajna puts it, "At first, the nuances of such debate are perceived as tedious, yet as a student exiting their fourth year of MUN, it has taught me valuable lessons



President of the MUN team and delegate for the security council, Rianna Sarbajna participates ardently in debate mid-conference. — Photo by Sephora Gagoula

in communication, diplomacy and the critical need for cooperation and understanding a society like ours needs".

As the MUN conference is a trilingual program (French, English and Spanish), there are interpreters who are responsible for ensuring that delegates who do not share a common language can communicate in real time during debates, and translators who are tasked with translating resolution documents prior to debates in order for all delegates to access them. This role is integral to the diplomatic debates that are characteristic of the UN.

One of our own interpreters, Mauricio Landin Mestre, explains: "This experience expanded my vocabulary in all languages. I also realized how difficult interpretation is and how important it is to truly master a language." Additionally, members of the press (such as myself) were tasked with reporting on the progress of committees, filming events and interviewing delegates in order to contribute to the MUN magazine at the commencement of the conference.

As we travelled internationally, we wanted to indulge in and learn more about Swiss culture. Thus, in addition to our time at the UN conference, we visited Geneva landmarks, took a day trip to Chamonix, (including Mont Blanc and the Mer de Glace glaciers), and took a tour of the United Nations. We also had our fair share of cheese fondue and Swiss chocolate! A unanimous favorite for us all was ice skating while surrounded by the beauty of European architecture and indulging in hot chocolate in the crisp Swiss air.

Experiences such as MUN are fundamental in today's world, as they empower current youth and future leaders to initiate changes they want to see. MUN prepares youth to engage in and become more educated about the world around them, and thus more poised to take action.



The AISK MUN team and directors huddle together for warmth in cold Chamonix, France. — Photo by Niels Velema



KUWAIT: This file photo shows solar panels used for Al-Shagaya renewable energy complex. — KUNA

Oil-rich Kuwait generates 'green energy' to stimulate economy

The annual World Future Energy Summit recently held in Abu Dhabi brought together tens of thousands of participants from 170 States and representatives of hundreds of companies. The conferees are particularly concerned with renewable energy and investment in emerging Middle East markets, at a time future energy has become a main stimulant for economic growth, in the shadow of billions of dollars' worth of prospected investments - promoted by the summit.

Kuwait, a country situated in the northern Arabian Gulf, is quite qualified for harnessing 'green energy,' with available solar and wind energy for long times throughout the year. Such abundant resources make it prepared to meet mounting energy demand and establishing a more sustainable and diversified economy. Given these raw potentials came His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visionary strategy, designed to diversify used energy in Kuwait, where renewable resources should constitute 15 percent.

Local stakeholders had already scrambled into action to materialize His Highness the Amir's vision, inaugurating, last year, the mega power Al-Shagaya complex to cover some of the local energy needs. The venture, located in the region of Al-Dibdibah and launched by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) to generate 1,500 MW of energy, envisages securing 23 percent of the oil sector energy needs from solar power, in the first year of opera-

tions-sparing more than five million of the fossil fuel-as part of the oil sector approach to secure 20 percent of its energy needs from renewable resources.

'Sedra 500' project

Kuwait took first steps for harnessing the solar energy in 2016, when Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) kick started the 'Sedra 500' project to generate energy for electrical pumps in Umm Qadir field, West Kuwait, where half a million barrels of oil will be reserved in the next two decades. In March, the KOC, a subsidiary



**Solar energy
available
throughout
the year**

of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), declared a plan to employ the solar energy for extracting 60,000 barrels of oil per day, as a first phase-prospected to jump to 350,000 bpd. In this vein, the (consultancy company) Oxford Business Group had advised that Kuwait should build more renewable energy stations noting that its needs for power would jump from 30,000 MW to much higher levels.

Billy Fitzherbert of the Middle East Editor

at Oxford Business Group (OBG) said in an interview that Kuwait's development blueprint, the New Kuwait Vision 2035, has set a 15 percent contribution target of renewable energies to the country's energy mix by 2030. This target is broadly in line with those set out by other countries in the region. He added, "These efforts are set to significantly alter the balance of inputs that currently goes into generating electricity in the country." Expanding Kuwait's renewable energy projects will help the country achieve multiple policy targets, which in turn will feed into future economic growth. By successfully reducing the amount of oil currently used to power electricity generation plants more resources will be made available for downstream added value processes in the energy sector.

Moreover developing the downstream and renewable segments falls in with the country's goals to diversify the economy away from an over-reliance on hydrocarbons. Finally, and as mentioned above, significant employment opportunities are set to arise for Kuwait's large youth population as a result of a successful expansion into renewable energies. Nick Butler of King's College in London & FT Energy policy commentator said, "There is great potential to develop a new industry and to substitute renewables for existing energy supplies, which could be exported."

Readily available

"The technology is readily available and

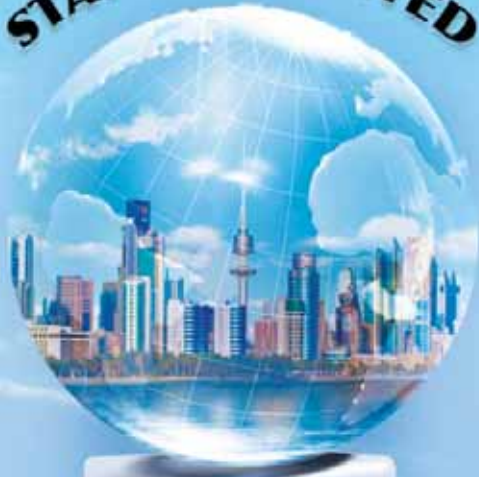
local skills could easily be developed," Butler said. "Kuwait clearly has the financial resources. Low oil prices make some people think that switching to renewables would be costly for consumers. But the costs of renewables have fallen dramatically and switching makes economic sense. Kuwait needs to think about the longer term future, to diversify its economy and to move beyond being a country completely dependent on exporting oil. The development of renewables is one important part of that process."

Robin Mills, CEO of Qamar Energy, said the key issue is to move ahead with the next phase of the Shagaya renewable energy park, "which are much larger than the first phase." "Renewables contribute to increasing power supply, saving oil that can be exported, lowering required gas imports, and creating local employment," he said. "Kuwait has good solar conditions and plenty of flat, unused land in reasonable proximity to the city. It also has reasonable sources for wind power. Electricity demand is growing fast, and power generated by oil or imported LNG is expensive compared to modern solar and wind power. Lower oil prices reduce economic growth and funds available for new projects. They also lower the cost of conventional oil/gas-fired generation although solar is still cheaper now. However, lower oil prices also make it more urgent to diversify the economy and improve efficiency." — KUNA

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Local

Kuwaiti, Turkish parliament speakers meet in Ankara

Regional developments on top lawmakers' table of discussion

ANKARA: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and his parliamentary delegation met in Ankara yesterday with Speaker of the Grand Turkish National Assembly Mustafa Sentop. The talks addressed means of strengthening bilateral relations and strategic partnership, as well as reviewing aspects of joint work in all areas of cooperation, particularly in parliamentary field. The two sides also held discussions on current developments at the regional and international levels and ways to unify positions by the two parliaments in at various continental and international parliamentary forums, especially in the conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to be held in Geneva next April. In addition, they stressed on importance of unifying and coordinating

positions among Islamic parliaments on pressing issues in Islamic world and international community.

The meeting was attended by Kuwaiti MP Osama Al-Shaheen, Abdullah Fahad Al-Enezi, Dr Hammoud Al-Khudair and Faraj Al-Arbeed, and members of Turkish-Kuwaiti Friendship Committee in the Turkish Parliament, MP Ayoub Osuye, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Turkey Ghassan Al-Zawawi and the Consul General of Kuwait in Istanbul, Mohammad Al-Mohammad. After the talks, the Turkish Parliament Speaker held a luncheon at the Parliament's headquarters in honor of Kuwaiti Speaker Ghanem and his accompanying delegation. Ghanem and his entourage arrived in Ankara on Wednesday for a two-day official visit at the invitation of his Turkish counterpart. — KUNA



ANKARA: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets with Speaker of the Grand Turkish National Assembly Mustafa Sentop. — KUNA

Defense Minister meets UK advisor



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with the UK's Senior Defense Advisor on the Middle East Lt Gen Sir John Lorimer. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met on Wednesday with the UK's Senior Defense Advisor on the Middle East Lt Gen Sir John Lorimer and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they discussed several issues and sub-

jects of mutual interest, primarily in the military domain, according to a statement by the Defense Ministry. The Kuwaiti defense minister lauded the deep relations between both friendly countries, pointing out their mutual willingness to bolster and develop them, it said. Several Kuwaiti high-ranking army offi-

cers, UK Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport and the British Defense Attache attended the meeting. Separately, Sheikh Ahmad met at his office yesterday with Director General of Kuwait Fire Service Directorate Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mikrad, as well as Jahra Governor Nasser Al-Hajraf. — KUNA

Kuwaitis urged to be cautious against China virus

BEIJING: Kuwait yesterday called on its nationals in China to be cautious as Coronavirus is spreading in a number of China's cities and districts. Kuwaiti citizens residing in Guangzhou and nearby cities should take all the needed precautions, Kuwait's Consul General in Guangzhou said in a statement yesterday. The precautionary procedures include wearing a medical mask, not attending

crowded places, as well as following up on instructions by the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China, it affirmed. Kuwait's Consulate General in Guangzhou provided a hotline to receive urgent calls and inquiries for Kuwaiti citizens (02038078070). China's National Health Commission announced earlier yesterday an increase in the cases of pneumonia resulting Coronavirus to 571 peo-

ple in various parts of China till Wednesday. The Commission announced that 393 other cases were suspected of being infected by the virus, while pneumonia infection caused death of 17 people in Hubei province in central China, since outbreak of Coronavirus in Wuhan city in the beginning of January. Ages of the deceased range between 48 and 89 years old, it added. — KUNA

Foreign Minister meets 'Somalia conference' chief



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Dr Ghanim Al-Najjar. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday received Dr Ghanim Al-Najjar, head of the organizing executive committee of an international conference due in Kuwait this year for promoting education in Somalia. During the encounter, they checked arrangements and preparations for the event and its agenda, in addition to existing coordination between concerned Kuwaiti bodies and international organizations over ongoing world efforts to promote security and stability in Somalia and to alleviate the humanitarian agony of its people. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Saleh Salem Al-Loughani, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocols Advisor Abdulmohsen Jaber Al-Zaid and several other senior ministry officials attended the meeting. — KUNA

Kuwait drops seven spots in Corruption Perceptions Index

Kuwaiti watchdog blames 'lack of legislations' for decline



By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait is ranked 85th out of 180 countries in the annual Corruption Perceptions Index issued by Transparency International, retreating seven spots with only 41 points out of a total of 100, after it was previously ranked 78th worldwide. Chairman of Kuwait Transparency Society Majed Al-Mutairi said the anti-corruption measures the government had taken over the past two years had been far below expectations and further legislations and real reform are needed to provide better services. "It is high time for governance in the public sector as per the bill the society has proposed," he underlined.

Meanwhile, parliamentary sources said the parliament had inquired from the government about executive procedures it intends to take on executing its agenda, which includes fighting corruption and achieving transparency. "The parliament wishes to draw attention to confirmations made by the anti-corruption authority chairman that the current measures taken by the government do not achieve the sought goals of fighting corruption and holding corrupt elements accountable," the sources remarked.

They added the Assembly might request holding a special session or allocate two hours of a session to review the government's measures in this regard, especially since the parliament had previously agreed to allocate two hours monthly to discuss certain topics as proposed by the government at the beginning of its tenure.

Speedy legislations

In the meantime, Kuwait's Public Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) said that the decline of Kuwait's ranking in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index was due to several reasons, namely delay of enacting relevant legislations. In a press release issued to comment on the Berlin-based international agency's report, the Kuwaiti authority said one of the main reasons of Kuwait's record at this level was delay of issuing legislations that could have served Kuwait's stance regarding the corruption perception index, most notably a law on conflicting interests, in addition to a law of the right to know, regulating information gathering, a legislation for regulating appointment of leaders and another on organizing electoral campaigns. It added, citing recommendations by International Transparency, "There have been circulated reports about many corruption cases thus undermining confidence between the society and the state, creating an impression about non-enforcement of the

law for executing verdicts against corruption and reclaiming (misappropriated) funds."

Nazaha called for speedy enactment of the legislations, namely the penal code to render bribing civil servants a penal crime, in addition to criminalizing bribes in the private sector, expanding scope of responsibility to cover independent entities (persons and institutions) in tandem with international treaties and accords on revamping precautions against corruption. In 2019, Kuwait posted improvement in several indices with respect of the corruption perception, such as the index of easy business, in addition to improving its status in the global competition index. It called for continuing efforts for sustainable development to maintain the achievements, through cooperation with all stakeholders for implementing the strategy for boosting integrity and combating corruption.

Most corrupt

Arab-wise, the Corruption Perception Index 2019 ranked Sudan, Libya, Yemen and Syria amongst the world's top 10 corruption-stricken countries showing that Syria has retreated 13 positions compared to 2012, while Yemen retreated by eight spots in the same period. On the other hand, the index showed UAE had the lowest corruption rate in the Arab world, followed by Qatar (with 9 points difference), while Saudi Arabia has achieved a four-point progress compared to the previous year.

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) report allocated a special paragraph for Tunisia, noting that with a score of 43, Tunisia remains at a standstill on the CPI despite advances in anti-corruption legislation over the past five years. Notably, the index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, according to experts and businesspeople. It uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. More than two-thirds of countries score below 50 on this year's CPI, with an average score of just 43.

The 180 countries were divided into six regions - North and South America, Western Europe and EU, Sub-Saharan Africa, MENA, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, East Asia and the Pacific Ocean. The CPI report also showed that Western Europe and European Union countries, Denmark, New Zealand, Finland, Singapore and Sweden respectively topped the list with least corruption rates. The CPI 2019 focuses on the relation between money, politics and corruption based on information provided about transparency in financing political campaigns.

Driving license replacement online on Sunday

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The online issuance of replacement lost or damaged driving licenses will start on Sunday, well-informed security sources announced, adding that the Interior Ministry's new decision to renew driving licenses online had largely contributed to reducing the number of people having to show up at traffic departments to do so. The sources said 31,884 licenses have been renewed over the past two months.

Full amnesty

With three votes to two, the parliamentary legislative affairs committee approved the proposals for a full amnesty after merging them in one report, said informed sources, noting that MPs Khaled Al-Shatti and Khalil Abul voted for the proposal while Faisal Al-Kandari and Ahmed Al-Fadhl voted against it, which made the committee chairman vote in favor after the withdrawal of MPs Khaled Al-Otaibi and Mohammed Al-Dallal in protest over the merger. Commenting on his withdrawal, Dallal justified it by some members' insistence on merging the proposals and including all those accused in the Abdali cell and breaking into the parliament cases and fugitive former-MP Abdulhameed Dashti in the amnesty. In the meantime, five MPs filed a motion asking for allocating two hours in the next session to debate the housing problem in the country, saying that the government has failed to resolve the housing problem.

Cold weather

Manager of the marine stations at the Meteorological Department Yasser Al-Bloushi said the coming days will witness cold weather by day and cold with low clouds and a chance of scattered rain by night. Bloushi added today's weather will be rather cold and partially cloudy with light to moderate southeasterly wind, high temperature of 18-20 Celsius and slight to moderate waves that can sometimes be rough at daytime.

Bloushi said the weather tonight will be rather cold with southeasterly to southwesterly moderate winds with a chance of rain and probably thunderstorms in some areas, with temperatures of 6-8 degrees C and moderate waves of 3 to 6 feet. Bloushi forecast tomorrow's weather to be considerably cold with fewer clouds and northwesterly moderate wind, high temperature of 14 to 16 degrees centigrade and moderate to high waves during daytime.

He added tomorrow night will be extremely cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind, a chance of frost in some desert and agricultural areas and a low temperature of 2-5 degrees C and moderate to high waves of 3 to 6 feet.

Sewage plant

The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) announced signing a project contract with Um Al-Haiman Holding Company yesterday to expand the Um Al-Haiman sewage plant. MPW explained that Um Al-Haiman Holding is a shareholding company in which the German investor WTE owns 40 percent of the shares, while the Kuwait government owns the remaining 60 percent, including 10 percent by MPW and 50 percent by the investment authority, which would be later offered for public bidding to citizens.

MPW explained that the plant will serve southern Kuwait in the area between the Sixth Ring Road till Sabah Al-Ahmad City - almost one third of Kuwait's total area - with a total capacity of 500,000 cu m of treated water per day that would be used for landscaping in southern areas. "The first phase of the project will be concluded in three years at a total cost of KD 382,131,000.



Cloud cooking land:
Indian housewives
become gig chefs

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China locks down cities to curb virus outbreak

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THE HAGUE: Tun Khin of the Burmese Rohingya Organization speaks to the press after the ruling of the International Court of Justice yesterday in the lawsuit filed by The Gambia against Myanmar in which Myanmar is accused of genocide against Rohingya Muslims. —AFP

ICJ to Myanmar: Prevent Rohingya genocide

THE HAGUE, Netherlands: The UN's highest court ordered Myanmar yesterday to do everything in its power to prevent the alleged genocide of Rohingya Muslims, as international justice stepped into the crisis for the first time. The International Court of Justice rejected arguments made by Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in The Hague in December and set out urgent steps for the majority Buddhist nation to end the violence.

The mainly Muslim African state of The Gambia had asked the court to impose emergency measures following a 2017 military crackdown by Myanmar that sent around 740,000 Rohingya fleeing into neighboring Bangladesh. Presiding judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf said that "the court was of the opinion that the Rohingya in Myanmar remain extremely vulnerable" and needed to be protected from further bloodshed.

Thousands are suspected to have been killed in the crackdown and refugees brought widespread reports of rape and arson by Myanmar's military and local Buddhist militias. The court ordered Myanmar to "take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts" described by the 1948 UN Genocide Convention, under which Gambia brought the case. These acts included "killing members of the group" and "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." The court ordered Myanmar to report back within four months, and then every six months after that. It also told Myanmar to prevent the destruction of any evidence of crimes against the Rohingya.

'Historic day'

The Gambia asked the court - set up after World War II as the UN's top judicial organ to rule in disputes between nations - for the measures pending a full case that could take years. Gambian justice minister Abubacarr Tambadou hailed the court's decision to uphold his country's case, which was supported by the 57-nation Organization for Islamic Cooperation, Canada and the Netherlands. "This is a historic day today, not just for international law, for the international community, but especially for the Rohingya," he told reporters outside the court.

Nobel peace laureate Suu Kyi - who was widely criticized for her defense of the same military that once locked her up for years - said yesterday that some Rohingya refugees may have "exaggerated" the extent of the abuses. "The international justice system may not yet be equipped to filter out misleading information before shadows of incrimination are cast over entire nations and governments," she wrote in an opinion piece in the Financial Times published ahead of the ruling.

Suu Kyi also said Myanmar should have time to act on the results of an internal investigation by the country, which this week admitted war crimes may have been committed but ruled out genocide. The military dodged questions in the capital Naypyidaw yesterday morning, with a spokesman telling reporters it would simply "follow the instructions of the government".

The result was also hailed in the Bangladeshi camps where some 600,000 people still remain. "It's a great day for us," Mayyu Ali, a Rohingya

author and poet, told AFP by telephone from Cox's Bazaar. "When the international court made its ruling today, I felt the gate of justice had been opened. I have the first taste of justice." Rights groups also hailed the ICJ ruling while calling on the international community to put pressure on Suu Kyi and Myanmar.

Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, who was dressed in traditional Rohingya clothing, said outside court: "The international community has to push to comply Burma with these provisional measures, otherwise (the) Rohingya will be much more destroyed." "Today's decision sends a message to

Myanmar's senior officials: the world will not tolerate their atrocities," Amnesty International's Regional Director Nicholas Bequelin said.

The ICJ's orders are binding but it has no power to enforce them. However the "significance... shouldn't be written off," said Cecily Rose, assistant professor in international law at Leiden University in the Netherlands. "The court's orders and judgments tend to carry relatively great authority or legitimacy. Even though the situation in Myanmar is highly political and fragile, international law still plays a role by informing decision-making among international actors," she said. — AFP

Indian FM: Nurse in Saudi infected with China virus

NEW DELHI: An Indian nurse working in Saudi Arabia has tested positive for the SARS-like virus that has infected hundreds in China, the Indian foreign ministry said yesterday. Indian media reports said that the nurse may have contracted the virus while caring for a colleague from the Philippines who had tested positive.

However, neither Riyadh nor Delhi have reported any cases of the virus in their respective countries. "About 100 Indian nurses... working at Al-Hayat hospital have been tested

and none except one nurse was found infected by coronavirus," said minister of state for foreign affairs, V Muraleedharan.

"Affected nurse is being treated at Aseer National Hospital and is recovering well," he tweeted. Muraleedharan confirmed to AFP that it was the same respiratory virus that has claimed 17 lives since emerging in Wuhan, infecting more than 570 of other people nationwide. It has since been detected in Japan, Hong Kong, Macau, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and the United States. — AFP

International

Friday, January 24, 2020

Al Jazeera charting digital course through choppy waters

Broadcaster has drawn ire of regional rulers

DOHA: Qatar-based broadcaster Al Jazeera has travelled a long and bumpy road from the early 2000s when it was best known for airing tapes of former Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. It now cultivates a loyal youth audience on social media alongside the satellite channels which have won it both acclaim and scorn. But it faces twin existential threats - targeted by regional power Saudi Arabia which demands its closure, and with the credibility of its digital expansion questioned by social media labelling its output state-controlled.

Al Jazeera's boss Mostefa Souag still has a cassette player in his office, though he foresees a future dominated by viral clips, animation and interactivity. "When people start talking about Al Jazeera and all the criticism, I say why don't you watch it," Souag said as his eyes darted across screens displaying its programs. The Arabic channel, the first to launch, revolutionized Middle Eastern news - broadcasting programs about social issues, taboos and politics to an audience previously offered only staid state television.

But it has drawn the ire of regional rulers from Rabat to Riyadh for allegedly fomenting unrest - a charge managers deny. Satellite news remains the heart of its operations, but an army of fashionable twenty-somethings also create GIFs, animations and short films purely for digital consumption, branded AJ+. "We have the values of Al Jazeera, but we are the cool millennial version," said AJ+ managing director Dima Khatib, leader of the on-line expansion.

AJ+'s Doha base is more trendy tech startup than newsroom, complete with exposed brick-work and Apple computers. Its Facebook page has 11 million followers. But Facebook notified Al Jazeera late last year it would be tagged as "state-controlled" as

part of the Silicon Valley giant's response to fake news. Al Jazeera has strongly objected, arguing that just because Qatari authorities pay its bills does not mean they exert undue influence.

Though Al Jazeera's YouTube output is already tagged Qatari-funded, executives expressed fears the new move would be a major blow to its credibility and the position of its journalists. "Its regional adversaries will, moreover, clearly seek to weaponize this labelling as part of their ongoing campaign to silence the network," Al Jazeera said in a legal letter to Facebook seen by AFP.

Demands for shutdown

"Nobody from the government is allowed to communicate with Al Jazeera on any editorial issue," said Souag forcefully. The network denies it fails to report critically on Qatar, insisting it covers controversies including workers' rights, a topic which human rights groups have repeatedly zeroed in on during the frenzy of building activity ahead of the 2022 World Cup.

But Mona Elswah, an Arab media researcher at the Oxford Internet Institute, said its Arabic channel had become a "mouthpiece for the Qatari government". "If the government changes its position, Al Jazeera would have to change its position no matter what," she told AFP. The network is also central to a dispute between Doha and its regional rivals led by Riyadh.

Together with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, Saudi Arabia cut bilateral ties with Qatar in June 2017 and launched an economic blockade, accusing it of supporting radical Islamist groups and Iran - which Doha refutes. These powers issued 13 demands - including Al Jazeera's closure.

Souag, 74, said that despite signs of a thaw between Qatar and the Saudi-led boycotters, he is confident the broadcaster would



DOHA: Acting director-general of Al Jazeera Media Network Mostefa Souag speaks during an interview with AFP at his office in the Qatari capital on Dec 5, 2019. — AFP

never be sacrificed for the cause of reconciliation. Globally, Al Jazeera operates hubs in Doha, Kuala Lumpur, London and Washington, with bureaus in more than 70 countries and a workforce of 3,500 to 4,000. In Souag's office, an Al Jazeera-branded bulletproof helmet is prominently displayed, a stark reminder of the risks facing crews. Since the Arabic channel's launch in 1996, followed by English in 2006 and Serbo-Croat in 2011, several staff have been killed or wounded, while some field offices have been shuttered by authorities. — AFP

Sudan vets scramble to save park's malnourished lions

KHARTOUM: Sudanese vets scrambled to save four surviving captive lions of five that were left sick and malnourished in a Khartoum park during months of political and economic turmoil. The fifth, a lioness, died on Monday of dehydration and lack of food despite receiving intravenous fluids for several days following the launch of an online campaign for veterinary help. The animals had lost as much as two-thirds of their body weight as a result of going unfed for weeks as Sudan's chronic cash shortage hit donations.

"It's so upsetting. These lions have been suffering for so long," said Osman Salih, a software engineer who launched the online campaign under the hashtag #Sudananimalrescue. "We were so late in rescuing them and were unable to save the one that died." A second lioness was also sick but her condition has improved, and AFP correspondent reported after touring Al-Qureshi Park in an upscale district of Khartoum.

Salih said a group of international wildlife conservationists had contacted him offering their help to save the lions. "They are specialists and are planning to come to Khartoum with their kits and resources," he told AFP. Al-



KHARTOUM: A malnourished lioness sits in its cage after receiving treatment at Al-Qureshi park in the Sudanese capital yesterday. — AFP

Qureshi Park is managed by Khartoum municipality but funded in part by private donors, which have dried up in the face of the economic crisis that triggered nationwide protests though much of last year.

The online campaign launched by Salih has grown over the past few days. It is not known how many lions survive in the wild in Sudan, but a population lives in Dinder National Park on the border with Ethiopia. African lions are classified as a "vulnerable" species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Their population dropped 43 percent between 1993 and 2014, with perhaps only 20,000 left in the wild. — AFP

Morocco adds West Sahara waters to its maritime territory

RABAT: Morocco on Wednesday integrated waters off the coast of Western Sahara into its maritime territory, adopting two laws that extend its legal jurisdiction over the disputed former Spanish colony. "These laws aim to update the national legal arsenal" in line with "the full sovereignty of the kingdom over its land and maritime borders," Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita said before parliament in Rabat passed the laws.

The laws, intended to establish Morocco's jurisdiction over territorial waters stretching from Tangiers on the northern coast as far as Lagouira, on the border with Mauritania, were unanimously backed by lawmakers and greeted with applause. The vast desert territory of Western Sahara lies north of Mauritania and is bordered to the west by around 1,000 km of Atlantic coastline. Morocco has controlled 80 percent of the territory since the 1970s and views it as an integral part of the kingdom.

That is disputed by the Polisario Front, an Algerian-backed independence movement. In

a written statement AFP received in Algiers, the Polisario Front said Morocco's decision would "have no legal effect" and threatened to take the case to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. "It amounts only to propaganda, devoid of any international judicial value," said Mhamed Khadad, a member of the Polisario Front's leadership.

The Polisario fought a war for independence from 1975 to 1991 and wants a referendum in which the people of Western Sahara choose between independence and integration with Morocco. Rabat has instead offered autonomy, but insists it will retain sovereignty. Supporters of the Polisario claim that 92 percent of Moroccan fishing is done in "pillaged" Western Saharan waters. In the works for years, the delimitation of the maritime territory, whose status is still unresolved, has in the past sparked tensions between Morocco and Spain, particularly after oil exploration in the area.

The issue will be addressed today during the first visit to Rabat by new Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez, according to Bourita. "We do not want to impose a fait accompli, but we are ready to engage in dialogue with Spain in the framework of our essential rights and sovereignty," he told parliament. In mid-December, the Spanish government reminded Morocco that the delimitation of maritime borders with neighboring countries was governed by "mutual agreement". — AFP

Angola ex-first daughter Isabel dos Santos charged with fraud

Portuguese banker named in probe found dead

LUANDA: Angola's billionaire former first daughter Isabel dos Santos has been charged with money laundering and mismanagement during her stewardship of state-owned oil firm Sonangol, as Luanda moves to try and bring her home to face trial for looting the country's coffers. Documents leaked this week alleged the daughter of ex-president Jose Eduardo dos Santos plundered state revenues to build her fortune, estimated at \$2.1 billion.

"Isabel dos Santos is accused of mismanagement and embezzlement of funds during her tenure at Sonangol and is thus charged in the first instance with the crimes of money laundering, influence peddling, harmful management ... forgery of documents, among other economic crimes," prosecutor general Helder Pitta Gros told a news conference late Wednesday.

Investigations into Isabel dos Santos's 18-month tenure as Sonangol head from June 2016 were opened after her successor Carlos Saturnino raised the alarm about "irregular money transfers" and other dodgy procedures. Dos Santos is accused of using her father's backing to steal money from the oil- and diamond-rich

but poor southern African country and moving it abroad with the help of Western firms.

The "Luanda Leaks" scoop, published on Sunday by some of the world's top media outlets, has put pressure on the government of Portugal, Angola's former colonial ruler, and some major corporations to explain what they know and what they did. Dubbed "the princess" by Angolans, Isabel dos Santos was named Africa's richest woman by Forbes in 2013. She stopped living in Angola after her father stepped down in 2017 for his anointed successor Joao Lourenco. Most of the ex-president's family have moved abroad since he stepped down, and jet between homes in London, Dubai and Portugal.

Meanwhile, a Portuguese banker targeted in an investigation of dos Santos has been found dead in his Lisbon home after apparently committing suicide, police said yesterday. The body of Nuno Ribeiro da Cunha "was found last evening and all indications point to a suicide", a Portuguese police spokesman told AFP. Da Cunha was cited in the "Luanda Leaks" documents. The Portuguese banker worked for Eurobic bank in which Isabel dos Santos is the main



Isabel dos Santos

shareholder. According to Portuguese media reports, da Cunha was the head of private banking at Eurobic and the account manager of Isabel dos Santos.

All suspects living abroad

Gros said dos Santos was among five suspects, all of whom were currently residing abroad. "At the moment, the concern is to notify and get them to voluntarily come to face justice,"

said Gros. Angola is still reeling from dos Santos's kleptocratic rule during which key positions were awarded to his cronies and wealth amassed in the hands of a select few. Lourenco has vowed to crack down on corruption and launched a large-scale purge of the dos Santos administration. He removed Isabel dos Santos from her top job at Sonangol shortly after he came to power.

Prosecutors last month froze bank accounts and assets owned by Isabel dos Santos and her husband Sindika Dokolo as part of the probe. Anti-corruption campaign group Global Witness alleged hundreds of companies, many based in tax havens such as the British Virgin Islands, helped her "to become Africa's richest woman while millions of Angolans live in extreme poverty".

She has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and claims her family has been unfairly targeted for political reasons. "Isabel dos Santos never directly expressed interest in collaborating with the Angolan authorities," said Gros, adding that nobody should be immune from facing justice. He has reportedly been working with his counterpart in Portugal on the case. — AFP

DR Congo struggles with 'cohabitation'

KINSHASA: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) today marks a year since it began its first peaceful transition of power, but the road to the future is proving a bumpy ride. On Jan 24 2019, after election results that rivals bitterly contested, opposition leader Felix Tshisekedi succeeded President Joseph Kabila, who stepped down after 18 iron-fisted years at the helm. To relief in the DRC and beyond, the handover defused fears that sub-Saharan Africa's biggest country would plunge once more into civil strife.

But Tshisekedi's promises of fast-track change, with radical reforms to ease poverty and tackle corruption, have also dimmed. Kabila remains a powerful figure in the background, with allies in the military and political supporters who wield a majority in the legislature. Creating a coalition took nine months of talks, leading to a sprawling government of 67 members, two-thirds dominated by Kabila allies.

The ardently-created hybrid remains a seething source of tension. Tshisekedi on Sunday even publicly aired the possibility of "firing" ministers - a warning aimed at the pro-Kabila Common Front for the Congo (FCC) party - or even dissolving the National Assembly to resolve persistent gridlock. The latter idea was bluntly rejected by one of his own allies, Jeanine Mabunda, the legislature's speaker, who warned "any person who is ignorant of our basic law can be prosecuted for high treason for deliberate violation of the constitution."

The National Assembly, elected on the same day as the presidential elections of December 30 2018, is mandated to stay in office until 2023. Dissolving it would have the impact of an "atomic bomb," warned Richard Moncrieff of the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank. "Tshisekedi has made threats, but his Plan A is to continue the coalition with Kabila." Among Congolese, Tshisekedi's move to end fees for primary education has earned high marks for some, but others voice frustration at the endless talk about a better life. — AFP

Libya's neighbors in talks in Algiers

ALGIERS: Libya's neighbors came together yesterday in Algiers as part of international efforts to find a political settlement to a crisis that threatens regional stability. The meeting, organized at Algeria's initiative, began mid-morning with statements from each of the participants and continued behind closed doors, an AFP journalist said. It brought together foreign ministers from Tunisia, Egypt and Chad, as well as diplomats from Sudan and Niger. Mali sent a representative while Morocco was absent from the talks.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who was set to brief the meeting on the results of Sunday's international summit in Berlin, is also attending. Several African countries had complained of being left out of the so-called Berlin process, during which world leaders committed to ending all foreign meddling in Libya and upholding a weapons embargo. But the outcome of the efforts remains uncertain. Fayeze Al-Sarraj, head of the Tripoli-based UN-recognized Government of National Accord, and his rival Khalifa Haftar, who controls eastern Libya, refused to meet in Berlin and are not participating in the Algeria talks.

"The current situation in Libya cannot withstand an escalation," Algeria's For-



ALGIERS: A group picture taken yesterday shows the ministers of Libya's neighboring states during a meeting held in the Algerian capital yesterday. — AFP

eign Minister Sabri Boukadoum told yesterday's meeting. He said neighboring countries had a role to play in fostering dialogue between the Libyan parties to "put an end to the bloody clashes and avoid leading the country towards the unknown". Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who attended the Berlin summit, said Wednesday: "There are statements from Sarraj, statements from Haftar's side, which indicate that the only power capable of settling the problem is Algeria."

The Algiers meeting came as the UN

Security Council urged Libya's warring parties to reach a long-term deal paving the way for a political process aimed at ending the conflict. Algeria shares a border of almost 1,000 km with Libya, which has been rocked by violence since the 2011 toppling of dictator Muammar Gaddafi by NATO-backed insurgents. Mitiga, the Libyan capital's only operational airport, closed again Wednesday evening after threats from pro-Haftar forces. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who supports Sarraj's GNA, is expected in Algiers Sunday. — AFP

British parliament ratifies Brexit divorce law, after years of debate

Royal assent only remaining hurdle to formal ratification

LONDON: After years of acrimonious debate, British lawmakers yesterday finally approved the terms of their country's historic departure from the European Union—due in just nine days' time.

MPs in the lower House of Commons had already backed the EU Withdrawal Agreement Bill, which ratifies the divorce deal that Prime Minister Boris Johnson struck with Brussels last year.

But the unelected upper House of Lords made some changes this week, including on the rights of EU citizens and child refugees after Brexit. In a series of votes yesterday, the Commons—where Johnson's Conservatives have a large majority—rejected all five amendments and sent the bill back to the Lords, who then reluctantly agreed to back down. The only hurdle left to formal ratification now is royal assent by Queen Elizabeth II, which could come as soon as Thursday, paving the way for Britain to leave the EU on January 31. The European Parliament still has to back the deal in a vote next week but its approval in London is a historic moment, as Britain edges closer to becoming the first country to leave the 28-member EU.

"At times it felt like we would never cross the Brexit finish line, but we've done it," Johnson said in a statement. "Now we can put the rancor and division of the past three years behind us and focus on delivering a bright, exciting future."

New dynamic

It is a huge personal achievement for Johnson, who took office last year promising to end several years of political wrangling that had divided the

country and paralyzed successive governments. His predecessor, Theresa May, negotiated a Brexit deal with Brussels in 2018 but the Commons rejected it three times, forcing her to resign. Johnson then agreed changes to the text with Brussels, only to be defeated again by MPs unable to agree on the timetable for turning his new deal into law.

He accused them of trying to frustrate the result of the landmark 2016 referendum vote for Brexit and forced a snap election last month. The result, with Johnson returned to office on a thumping majority, fundamentally upended the dynamic and MPs swiftly backed the agreement.

The Lords put up a minor fight this week. One amendment sought to alter the government's scheme to register around 3.6 million EU citizens living in Britain, to give them physical documents proving their right to stay. Another change would have required the government to negotiate the right of unaccompanied child refugees in the EU to join relatives in Britain.

'Tight timetable'

The Brexit deal protects the rights of EU citizens, makes special trading arrangements for the British province of Northern Ireland, and settles the UK's EU debts. It also paves the way for transition phase until December 31, in which UK-EU ties will remain largely the same while both sides try to agree a new trading and security partnership.

But the shape of that future relationship remains unresolved—and negotiating it could pose an even bigger challenge than agreeing the di-



LONDON: A handout photograph released by the UK Parliament shows Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking in the House of Commons in central London on Wednesday during the Prime Minister's Questions (PMQ) session. — AFP

voice. In a speech early next month, Johnson is expected to set out more detail of his hopes for a free trade agreement with Brussels along the lines of the EU's recent deal with Canada. "I'm absolutely confident that we can do that," Johnson said yesterday while taking questions online from members of the public. He wants to both preserve free-flowing commerce between Britain and its largest trading partner across the Channel, and strike agreements with other countries—namely

the United States. Brussels has warned that it is impossible to address all issues in that time, suggesting a more limited deal is now likely. But while UK finance minister Sajid Javid admitted yesterday that it was a "tight timetable", he agreed with Johnson that it could be done. The premier's office denied a row with Washington over London's proposed tax on tech giants would affect trade negotiations after Brexit, saying: "It's not part of the discussions." — AFP

Two children killed in school bus crash in Germany

BERLIN: Two children were killed and 20 more injured when a school bus slipped off an icy road into a ditch in central Germany, local authorities said yesterday. The driver of the bus was also injured, the district office of Wartburg reported. Citing local police, Bild daily said the bus was carrying more than 20 children to their elementary school when the accident happened near the town of Berka in the state of Thuringia.

According to Bild, driving conditions were made worse by "thick fog". In a statement on Twitter, Thuringian state president Bodo Ramelow said he was "dismayed" by the news.

Separately yesterday, nine children were injured in a similar incident near the Bavarian-Austrian border. A police spokesman in Rosenheim said that a school bus had crashed into a tree in nearby Traunstein, for still unknown reasons. He added that the driver had been seriously injured, while the children had sustained light to medium injuries. — AFP

Harry, Meghan, their new neighbors and the paparazzi

VICTORIA: In explaining his decision to give up his work as a senior member of Britain's royal family, Prince Harry laid part of the blame at the feet of the media, which he called a "powerful force."

Indeed, in a 2017 BBC documentary, Harry decried the paparazzi who hounded his mother Diana as a "pack of dogs." He surely hoped that with a move to Canada, the family could tame the tabloid scrum.

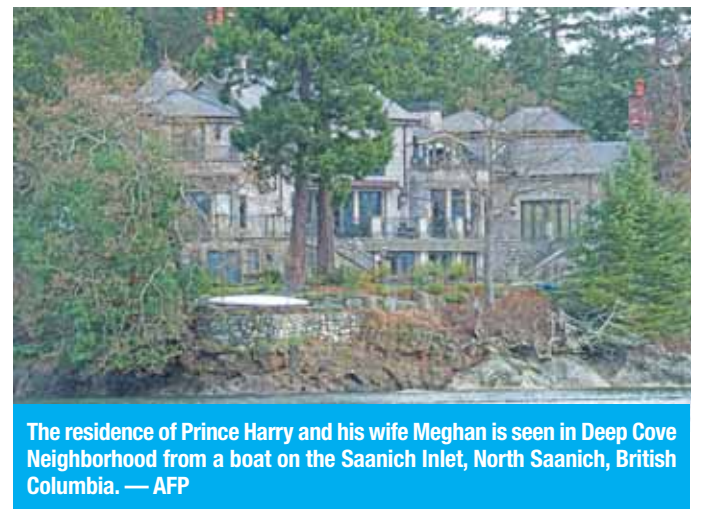
But sure enough, journalists from as far away as Australia have arrived on Vancouver Island, and pictures of Harry's wife Meghan walking the dogs, their son Archie strapped to her, quickly surfaced.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have threatened legal action over the pictures, but the photographers are also under fire from locals who say they are not going to tolerate invasions of privacy.

"It is a quiet place here," said Kathryn Sandberg, a long-time resident of North Saanich, the tiny seaside community where Harry, Meghan and son Archie are living, in the greater Victoria area.

"I think maybe one of the reasons why Meghan and Harry want to come here is because of this quiet, and because there are people who are respectful of privacy," Sandberg told AFP.

"And we wouldn't want to see that change," Meghan was snapped hiking in Horth Hill Regional Park—local news outlet Chek News published a video of locals confronting one photographer working on the story, Derek Shook. "Do you think a guy like you does anything for this community?" one resident says to Shook, who told a reporter:



The residence of Prince Harry and his wife Meghan is seen in Deep Cove Neighborhood from a boat on the Saanich Inlet, North Saanich, British Columbia. — AFP

"They don't get it. (...) They don't understand." Shook said he had been camped out for 11 days in the area.

"It's a worldwide story," Shook told Chek News, adding that he felt Meghan had not exactly made it difficult for the snappers. "If she wanted to, she could have put her head down. But she stood up tall and smiled and made sure that, you know, we were able to get the shot." Amelia Brace is the North America correspondent for Australia's Channel 7. She is normally based in Los Angeles but arrived on Vancouver Island late Monday. "The royals in Australia are huge. It's always one of our biggest stories," Brace told AFP from a vantage point near Harry and Meghan's temporary home, where she had just filmed her report. — AFP

Psychologist defends CIA’s ‘war on terror’ torture before Gitmo court

Man who ‘waterboarded’ for CIA ‘unapologetic’ during hearing

WASHINGTON: A psychologist who helped design the CIA’s “war on terror” torture program after the September 11, 2001 attacks defended the program this week before its victims at the US military prison in Guantanamo, Cuba.

James Mitchell was unapologetic Tuesday when he appeared at a hearing to answer questions about the waterboarding, stress position and sleep deprivation techniques applied to 9/11 plot suspects detained in secret prisons following the attacks.

“I’d get up today and do it again,” he said before five of those men, whose slow-moving cases at the Guantanamo military tribunals have them facing possible death sentences.

Mitchell was one of the architects of the so-called “enhanced interrogation” operations deployed against suspected Al-Qaeda extremists after the 2001 attacks, which left 2,976 dead. While the techniques he and another psychologist helped devise have now been banned as illegal torture, Mitchell said it had been his “moral duty,” to help protect the country.

“To protect American lives outweighed the feelings of discomfort of terrorists who voluntarily took up arms against us,” he told the court, according to The New York Times. “To me it just seemed like it would be dereliction of my moral

responsibilities.” Mitchell personally took part in some of the interrogations, including waterboarding Abu Zubaydah, one of the earliest CIA captives associated with Al-Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden.

Abu Zubaydah, who remains imprisoned in Guantanamo, was not among those in the courtroom facing Mitchell on Tuesday. Those present included Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was waterboarded 183 times by CIA interrogation teams which included Mitchell; Mohammed’s nephew Ammar al-Baluchi; Walid bin Attash; and two others, none of who had seen Mitchell since they were sent to Guantanamo in the early-mid 2000s. Mitchell had been called to testify as some of the prisoners in Guantanamo were challenging the use of evidence in their coming trials that was derived from the government’s interrogation programs.

Evidence garnered from the CIA’s interrogations already cannot be used in court; the defendants also want to exclude that from parallel FBI interrogations. All the defendants are still in the preliminary phases of their trials, which have been stalled for years by complex rules, poor administration and legal maneuvers from both sides.

“Mitchell is a big part of the reason why the victims’ families still don’t have any justice,” said



WASHINGTON: James Mitchell was unapologetic Tuesday when he appeared at a hearing to answer questions about the waterboarding, stress position and sleep deprivation techniques applied to 9/11 plot suspects. — AFP

Amnesty International’s Julia Hall. “Mitchell has said he is giving this testimony for the victims and families,” she said.

“However, it is in large measure because of the torture techniques that he himself created and used on the detainees that there has been delay after delay. Evidence extracted under torture can’t be used in these proceedings.” — AFP

Haiti pushes foster homes to ease problems in orphanages

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: Rose Boncoeur brought two emaciated little girls to live in her modest home in Haiti as part of a reform drive aimed at keeping children out of orphanages.

“People often asked me if I am crazy,” said Boncoeur, whose name means “good heart.” The government of the Americas’ poorest country is pushing to deinstitutionalize children so as to avoid the darkest sides of orphanage life-trafficking of kids or even worse abuse. So far, 120 homes in Haiti have opened their doors to children with nowhere else to go. Boncoeur gets no financial help to feed or clothe her two charges, and is forced to ask people for used clothing for her foster children-sisters, aged eight months and three years.

“Some people do not understand that I spend money on children who are not mine,” said Boncoeur, who is proud that her biological daughter treats those girls like siblings. Much of the problem goes back to the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, which left more than 250,000 people dead and largely demolished the capital city, Port-au-Prince. The number of orphanages and other care facilities for children more than doubled.

Of the 754 that now exist in Haiti, only around 50 are licensed or in the process of getting a license from IBESR, the government’s child social welfare agency. The government has now barred any more such institutions from opening.

Pedophilia, organ trafficking

The government has also finally signed an international convention designed to safeguard inter-country adoptions. Before, a for-



PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: The Haiti government has also signed an international convention designed to safeguard inter-country adoptions.— AFP

eigner could just go to an orphanage in Haiti, strike a deal with the director, and adopt a child, with IBESR only involved at the end of the process to act as a type of registrar of the match, said its director, Arielle Jeanty Villedrouin.

IBESR now heads the process, deciding who the children will go with, “which averts some excesses because there has been talk of pedophilia and organ trafficking,” she said. State intervention in matching children with people who want to adopt is also seen as a critical to avoiding heartbreak for parents who give up their kids to orphanages. “People would entrust their children to an orphanage and maybe sign a document without even knowing how to read,” said Villedrouin.

She said the child welfare agency often had to deal with weeping mothers who came looking for children who had been adopted and taken out of the country. Eighty percent of the estimated 27,000 children living in orphanages in Haiti have at least one parent alive. Child welfare advocates here say it is a shame that abject poverty can destroy families and strip children from their parents when some orphanages actually have a lot of money. — AFP

Mexico detained more than 2,000 after caravan border crossing

MEXICO CITY: Mexican migration authorities released Wednesday an official count of the number of people detained along the country’s southern border two days before, estimating that more than 2,000 people were “rescued” after they crossed the border with Guatemala.

National Institute of Migration (INM) officials explained that among the detained were not only members of the so-called “2020 Caravan” that left Honduras about a week ago, but also many who had entered the country through other spots. About 1,300 people were detained in Tabasco and another 800 in Chiapas, the INM said, including some minors.

On Wednesday, Mexico deported 460 Hondurans via official planes and buses from the two southern states, the ministry of the interior said. Several hundred caravan members had tried to cross the Suchiate River at dawn on Monday from Tecun Uman in Guatemala, demanding migration authorities let them continue their journey to the United States.

When authorities did not immediately respond, the migrants began wading across the river, which is shallow this time of year. Mexican National Guard troops fired tear gas to force them back, leading to scenes of chaos as huge crowds of people flailed across the river.

About 500 were able to enter the country illegally, though more than 400 of them were later arrested. Thousands of Central Americans have crossed Mexico toward the United States in caravans, fleeing chronic poverty and brutal gang violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. — AFP

International

Friday, January 24, 2020

Dems urge Republican 'courage' at Trump impeachment trial

President accused of seeking to cheat to ensure re-election in November

WASHINGTON: Democrats on Wednesday accused Donald Trump at his historic Senate impeachment trial of seeking to cheat to ensure re-election in November, and called for "courage" by the president's fellow Republicans while considering the case against him.

Adam Schiff, head of the House of Representatives' prosecution team, took to the Senate floor to deliver hours of methodical arguments to a hushed chamber hearing only the third-ever impeachment trial of a US president. The Democratic lawmaker described how Trump solicited foreign interference in domestic elections, "abusing the powers of his office to seek help from abroad to improve his re-election prospects at home."

"And when he was caught, he used the powers of that office to obstruct the investigation into his own misconduct," said Schiff, who headed the probe that led to Trump's December 18 impeachment by the Democratic-controlled House. Schiff shrugged off Republican arguments that American voters, and not the Senate, should decide whether Trump remains in the White House.

"The president's misconduct cannot be decided at the ballot box for we cannot be assured that the vote will be fairly won," Schiff said. Trump stands accused of withholding military aid from Ukraine to pressure his Ukrainian counterpart to announce an investigation into Democrat and potential election rival Joe Biden. "President Trump withheld hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid to a strategic partner at war with Russia to secure foreign help with his re-election," Schiff said at the nationally televised proceedings.

"In other words, to cheat. If this conduct is not impeachable, then nothing is." Interspersing

his remarks with video of House inquiry testimony, and clips of Trump himself, Schiff appealed to the Senate's 100 members to put aside partisanship in deciding Trump's fate. He encouraged them to use an open mind when evaluating the testimony of people like ambassadors Gordon Sondland and Marie Yovanovitch, and former National Security Council official Fiona Hill.

"They risked everything, their careers. And yes I know what you're asked to decide may risk yours too," Schiff told the senators. "But if they could show the courage, so can we," he said in concluding a nearly-nine-hour session.

'Fairly quickly'

Republicans, who hold a 53-47 edge, have shown little inclination, however, to break ranks with a president who has a history of lashing out ferociously at his perceived enemies. "I didn't hear anything new at all," Republican Senator John Barrasso said during a trial break. Sixty-seven senators, a two-thirds majority, are needed to remove Trump from office and a series of votes Tuesday on the trial's ground rules followed strict party lines.

Republicans defeated repeated efforts by Democrats to introduce White House witnesses and documents at the start of the trial. Trump called the proceedings a "hoax" and said he expected the Senate to clear him "fairly quickly."

The president defended the Republicans' rejection of Democratic efforts to force former national security advisor John Bolton and others to testify, saying of Bolton, for example, that it would present a "national security problem." Trump then went on a Twitter tear, firing off a record number of tweets and retweets in a single day of his presidency — 150 as of 10.30 pm.

With reports swirling that some Democrats

other ways of supporting her so far," Clinton said in a podcast that aired in October, adding that "Yeah, she's a Russian asset." The next day, CNN asked Clinton's spokesman if she was referring to Gabbard. He replied: "If the nesting doll fits." Gabbard, a 38-year-old Army veteran and Hawaii lawmaker who has criticized US involvement in Syria and received favorable coverage in Russian state media, said Clinton's accusation, which was widely repeated on social media, was "devastating" to her reputation.

"Clinton's peddling of this theory has harmed Tulsi, has harmed American voters, and has harmed American democracy," said Gabbard, who added that she has "spent her entire adult life serving this country." She said she had asked Clinton to retract the statement, to no avail. One of 11 Democratic candidates seeking the party's presidential nomination, Gabbard is polling at 1.3 percent among likely primary voters, according to an average compiled by Real Clear Politics.

Clinton, a former first lady, was the Democratic nominee in 2016 but lost to Donald Trump in the November elections. — AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: House impeachment managers (left to right) Rep Jason Crow (D-CO), Sen Adam Schiff (D-CA), Rep Sylvia Garcia (D-TX), Rep Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) and Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) talk to reporters before the second day of the Senate impeachment trial of President Donald Trump at the US Capitol on Wednesday. — AFP

were mulling pushing for Biden or his son Hunter to testify in exchange for key administration officials being called as witnesses, the top Democrat waived it off. Hunter Biden served on the board of a Ukrainian energy company when his father was vice president.

But a witness trade is "off the table," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said. House impeachment "managers"—the prosecutors—have 24 hours over three days to make their case that Trump is guilty of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. Yesterday's session focused on the legal and constitutional case for impeach-

ment, while Friday will address facts surrounding the president's misconduct, Schiff said. White House lawyers then have 24 hours, likely beginning tomorrow, to present their defense. Senators will then be able to ask written questions to be read out aloud by US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, who is presiding over the trial. Trump's personal attorney, Jay Sekulow, said the White House will "challenge aggressively the case that they're putting forward." And despite Schiff's appeal to Republican senators to support calling key witnesses, Sekulow gave a curt rationale for refusal. — AFP

Gabbard sues Hillary for calling her 'Russian asset'

NEW YORK: US presidential hopeful Tulsi Gabbard, who is in near last place among Democrats in primary polling, filed a defamation suit Wednesday against Hillary Clinton after the former secretary of state called her a "Russian asset." Gabbard alleges that Clinton made the comments in retaliation for her support of Bernie Sanders, the former secretary of state's rival in 2016 for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Clinton never mentioned Gabbard by name, stating only that she was referring to "somebody who is currently in the Democratic primary." "She's the favorite of the Russians. They have a bunch of sites and bots and

Biden, Sanders trade barbs as US primary race tightens

WASHINGTON: Democratic frontrunners Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders are trading barbs, each accusing the other of lying and having a smaller chance of defeating Donald Trump in November, as the race for the party's nomination tightens.

Biden holds the lead in national polling averages, but Sanders has been on the rise since December. A new CNN/SSRS poll puts Sanders in first place with 27 percent, within the margin of error but slipping ahead of Biden, who came in at 24 percent. Results from another survey Wednesday by Morning Consult were virtually the inverse: Barack Obama's former vice president scored 29 percent to 24 percent for the US senator from Vermont.

As the race has narrowed, the two septuagenarians—Biden the moderate, Sanders a self-de-

scribed "Democratic socialist"—have grown testy, accusing each other of dishonesty. The change in tone recalls the bitter 2016 primary battle between Sanders and Hillary Clinton, who in the end won the Democratic nomination but lost the election to Trump. "I find it amazing that we go back and look at statements, many of them, most of them, taken out of context of 10, 20, 30, 35 years ago," Biden said on MSNBC Wednesday.

The day before, Sanders had accused Biden in a tweet accompanied by a video of having long wanted to cut funding for Social Security, the US public pension system. "Let's be honest, Joe. One of us fought for decades to cut Social Security, and one of us didn't. But don't take it from me. Take it from you," he wrote. A Sanders spokeswoman, Briahna Joy Gray, piled on, posting a long video comparing the two candidates' positions, and concluding that Biden's record on foreign or trade policy would crumble under Trump's attacks if the two were to face off one-on-one. Then she called on the former vice president to "Tell the truth Joe," invoking a hashtag popular with Sanders supporters. In an ad posted on Twitter by his account, Biden had previously taken a shot at Sanders. "Bernie's negative attacks won't change the truth," a narrator says. "Joe Biden is still the strongest Democrat to beat Donald Trump." — Reuters

International

SARS lessons hang over China's fight against new virus outbreak

Beijing taking starkly different approach to contain new disease

BEIJING: China's lockdown of an entire city to contain a virus outbreak stands in contrast to its handling of the deadly SARS crisis two decades ago, when it was criticized for being secretive and indecisive. The new virus has killed 17 and infected more than 500 other people, with most cases found in Wuhan, the central city of 11 million people where outward flights and trains were indefinitely suspended yesterday.

Like SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), China's new disease is contagious between humans, and is part of the same family of coronaviruses. But unlike the 2003 SARS epidemic, when China drew international condemnation for covering up cases, Beijing is taking a starkly different approach to contain the new disease, experts say.

"Chinese authorities express the willingness to collaborate more transparently and more quickly than for (the) SARS outbreak," Antoine Flahault, deputy director of the Swiss School of Public Health, told AFP. "This is (a) tremendously different attitude from 2003, although there are some pending questions regarding the exact number of cases and potential for underreporting." The consequences of the information blackout during the SARS outbreak were keenly felt in China. Nearly 650 people died across the mainland and Hong Kong from the disease. During the SARS epidemic, the Chinese government took months to report the disease and initially denied World Health Organization (WHO) experts access to southern Guangdong province, where it originated.

But Beijing - well-aware its response will be compared with the legacy of SARS - seems determined not to repeat the mistakes of 2003 with the new coro-

navirus. Even state media has admitted that "government agencies cannot hide information even if they want to" in the age of social media. "The whole nation has sharpened its vigilance," said Zhong Nanshan, a renowned scientist at China's National Health Commission, state television reported Monday. "The SARS epidemic of 17 years ago will not be repeated." The disease has also spread to other countries, including the United States, South Korea, Thailand, and Japan.

'Effectively controlled'

The Chinese government has published regular updates of the new virus since announcing its appearance at the end of December, the exact opposite to its response in 2003. The country saw its first case of SARS in November 2002, but Beijing waited until February to officially acknowledge the disease, which it downplayed then as "effectively controlled". Chinese authorities also repeatedly failed to coordinate with the WHO, which urged "full and open" reporting of cases. In addition to Guangdong province, WHO experts were also blocked from accessing Beijing military hospitals with suspected SARS patients. By early June 2003, more than 300 people in China had died from the disease, while another 5,329 remained infected. In contrast, the head of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyes, on Wednesday hailed the "very, very strong measures" taken by China this time around. He praised its openness about the current outbreak as "commendable". Tedros spoke after the global body held a meeting on Wednesday to decide whether to classify the outbreak as a global health emergency.



NANCHANG, China: This photo taken on Wednesday shows staff members disinfecting the Yingtan North Railway Station in central Jiangxi province. —AFP

Transparency concerns

In Washington, a US State Department official said on condition of anonymity that there have been "encouraging signs that the Chinese government has understood the gravity of this problem". But the official added: "we're still concerned as far as transparency in the Chinese government." Prioritizing social stability over public health may have thwarted an earlier response to the Wuhan virus, said Dali Yang, a political science professor at the University of Chicago. At

the beginning of January, when Wuhan officials held an annual political meeting, the local government tried to "project this atmosphere of stability and calm in the region", he told AFP. The mayor of Wuhan has also faced scrutiny for allowing a massive Lunar New Year banquet - involving 40,000 families - to take place on Saturday. In an interview with CCTV Tuesday, he defended the decision by saying it was made before human-to-human transmission was officially confirmed on Monday. —AFP

Studies suggest role of bats, snakes in outbreak of virus

BEIJING: A new strain of coronavirus that emerged in China may have originated in bats or snakes, according to genetic analysis of the virus that has so far killed 17 people. The theories are based on examination of the genome sequence of the virus released by authorities in the wake of the outbreak, with two studies pointing to the likely role of bats in the outbreak. One study, published Tuesday in the journal *Science China Life Sciences*, which is sponsored by Beijing's Chinese Academy of Sciences, looked at the relations between the new strain and other viruses.

It found the coronavirus that emerged from China's Wuhan was closely related to a strain that exists in bats. "Bats being the native host of the Wuhan CoV (coronavirus) would be the logical and convenient reasoning, though it remains likely there was intermediate host(s) in the transmission cascade from bats to humans," the researchers from several institutions in China wrote in the paper.

That study did not speculate about which animal could have been an "intermediate host," but a second study published yesterday in the *Journal of*

Medical Virology identifies snakes as the possible culprit. "To search for (a) potential virus reservoir, we have carried out a comprehensive sequence analysis and comparison. Results from our analysis suggest that snake is the most probable wildlife animal reservoir," the paper says.

The researchers caution that their conclusions require "further validation by experimental studies in animal models". Neither study explained how the virus may have been transmitted from animals to humans. But they could offer clues to Chinese authorities as they hunt for the source of the outbreak that has sickened hundreds of people in the country and has been confirmed as far afield as the United States. The food market where the deadly virus surfaced offered a range of exotic wildlife for sale, including live foxes, crocodiles, wolf puppies, giant salamanders, snakes, rats, peacocks, porcupines, camel meat and other game. Gao Fu, director of the Chinese centre for disease control and prevention, said in Beijing on Wednesday that authorities believe the virus likely came from "wild animals at the seafood market" though the exact source remains undetermined.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS, was linked to Chinese consumption of civet meat. 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 un-

HK holiday camps become quarantine zones as fears spike

HONG KONG: Hong Kong has turned two holiday camps, including a former military barracks, into quarantine zones for people who may have come into contact with carriers of the Wuhan virus, officials announced yesterday. The international financial hub has been on high alert for the virus, which has killed 17 people since the outbreak started in central China. The same sites were used as quarantine facilities during the deadly Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak 17 years ago.

Nearly 300 people in Hong Kong were killed by SARS, a tragedy that left a profound psychological impact on one of the most densely populated places on earth. So far, two people in the city have tested positive for the new coronavirus - which is similar to the SARS pathogen. Both had visited Wuhan in recent days and are being treated on isolation wards in hospital. Yesterday evening Hong Kong officials cancelled a five-day Lunar New Year festival in a public park that had been due to open tomorrow.

The gambling hub of Macau - hugely popular with mainland tourists - also confirmed two cases this week, and earlier yesterday Macau's tourism bureau announced it was cancelling all official Lunar New Year celebrations in response. City officials also announced two parks usually used by campers and holidaymakers had been prepared to isolate any



HONG KONG: Commuters wearing face masks as a precautionary measure to protect against the possible spread of a SARS-like virus outbreak ride an escalator at an MTR subway station yesterday. —AFP

potential cases while they await test results.

"We will have a full team of staff to operate the quarantine camps," Wong Ka-hing, the director of the Centre for Health Protection, told reporters. Wong said three people who had come into close contact with the two confirmed cases would be taken to a camp in rural Sai Kung district. Another holiday camp, a former British military barracks on Hong Kong island, was being prepared to serve as a quarantine facility.

Local news network RTHK said one of the first people to be transported to the quarantine site in Sai Kung was an Australian visitor who had stayed at the same hotel as a man who tested positive for the virus. "I feel so good right now," RTHK quoted the unidentified man as saying. When asked what he had been told about why he was being placed in isolation, the visitor replied: "I have no idea why. I was just living in the hotel." —AFP

International

Friday, January 24 2020

China locks down two cities to curb coronavirus outbreak

WUHAN, China: China locked down nearly 20 million in two cities at the centre of a deadly virus outbreak yesterday, banning planes and trains from leaving in an unprecedented move aimed at containing the disease which has already spread to other countries. The respiratory virus has claimed 17 lives since emerging from a seafood and animal market in Wuhan, infected hundreds of other people nationwide and been detected as far away as the United States.

Streets and shopping centres in Wuhan, a major port city in central Hubei province with a population of 11 million people, were eerily quiet after authorities told residents not to leave town "without a special reason". Trains and planes out of Wuhan were indefinitely suspended, tollways on roads out the city were closed, leading to fear and panic for those who were trapped.

Hours later, authorities in neighboring Huanggang announced that public transport and train services would be suspended at midnight, while people were told to not leave the city of 7.5 million. All of Huanggang's cinemas, Internet cafes, and the central market will close. A third city, 1.1 million-population Ezhou, announced the train station had been temporarily closed earlier in the day.

'End of the world': Wuhan residents react to quarantine

WUHAN, China: Wuhan residents called for help and shared worries of food shortages yesterday, with streets in the virus-hit central Chinese city left deserted after it was put on lockdown. Planes and trains out of the city - the epicentre of a new SARS-like virus - were cancelled, with public transport suspended and residents ordered not to leave in a bid to control the spread of the disease. Streets decorated for Chinese New Year festivities in the city of 11 million were empty, with the few who ventured outside wearing masks as ordered by authorities.

"I try my best to stay home and only come out to buy the necessary goods when needed," a man surnamed Sun told AFP from a small supermarket, which already had a few empty shelves. The neighboring city of Huanggang was also placed on lockdown from yesterday night, while the train station was closed at another nearby city, Ezhou.

But near-empty trains and planes still headed into Wuhan, with hardy passengers donning surgical masks and gloves to brave the journey. The lockdown comes on the eve of the

"We are feeling as though it is the end of the world," said one Wuhan resident on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform, voicing concerns about shortages of food and disinfectant. Another described being on the "verge of tears" when the de facto quarantine was announced, with the misery compounded by it coming on the eve of the Lunar New Year holiday.

Large-scale Lunar New Year events in Beijing have been cancelled as part of national efforts to control the spread of the virus. Chinese authorities have been telling people to avoid crowded places over the busy Spring Festival holiday. The city government said it would call off events including temple fairs - which have attracted massive crowds of tourists in past years - urging citizens "to strengthen prevention and support". In a post on China's Twitter-like platform Weibo, city authorities added that the move was to help epidemic prevention and control. Beijing's city government said they would provide more information "as the epidemic situation evolves".

Empty streets

Wuhan's train station and airport, which should have been packed with people coming travelling for holiday

family reunions, were almost empty except for workers yesterday afternoon. The few people wandering in the streets of the city were wearing masks as mandated by police. At a shopping centre that would have been packed in normal times, a man who works there said he understood the government's measures. "Even if we can't celebrate the New Year this year, there's always next year," said the man surnamed Sun. Taxis in Wuhan tripled their fares, a driver admitted. "It's very dangerous to be outside at this moment but we need to earn money," the driver told AFP.

Confusion, alarm

More than 570 people have been infected with the virus across China - with most cases found in Wuhan, where a seafood market that illegally sold wild animals has been identified as the epicentre 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. Like SARS, it can be passed among people through the respiratory tract.

The first case of the new virus was confirmed on Dec 31, and it has since been detected in Japan, Hong Kong,



BEIJING: Hairdressers wear protective masks as they cut the hair of customers yesterday. — AFP

Macau, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the United States. The 17 people who died in China were aged from 48 to 89, and had pre-existing health conditions, Chinese health authorities said yesterday. The World Health Organization on Wednesday delayed a decision on whether to declare a global health emergency - a rare instrument used only for the worst outbreaks.

The emergency committee was to meet again yesterday, after experts were split over declaring a public health emergency. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said "more information" was needed but he also praised China's "very, very strong measures" that will help control the epidemic and "minimize the chances of this outbreak spreading internationally".—AFP



WUHAN, China: This photo taken on Wednesday shows medical staff members wearing protective suits at Zhongnan Hospital. — AFP

Lunar New Year holiday, when hundreds of millions of Chinese take to planes, trains and roads to visit relatives in what is the world's biggest annual movement of people.

The search term "Wuhan is sealed off" had been read over 1.2 billion times on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform by yesterday evening with some 376,000 discussion posts. "We consciously avoid going out, disinfect diligently and wear masks," wrote one Wuhan resident in a Weibo post. "But there is a lack of food and disinfectants, and we need more resources. We hope everyone can understand that we are feeling as though it is the end of the world."

The number of confirmed deaths has risen to 17, with more than 570 confirmed infected, officials said. — AFP

Fear, uncertainty on last flights from Wuhan

TOKYO: Passengers who made it out of epidemic-hit Wuhan just before quarantine measures effectively sealed off the Chinese city of 11 million spoke yesterday of shuttered stores and empty streets. Authorities have banned planes and trains in or out of the major transport hub in a bid to contain the coronavirus that has already claimed 17 lives, infected hundreds and spread beyond China.

One Japanese traveller arriving at Tokyo's Narita Airport described a deserted city in lockdown and said he did not know how he would get back in. "All stores have been shut since yesterday and no-one is in the streets. All the people are wearing masks," said Minoru Okada, a Japanese auto industry businessman in his 50s, who was returning for the Lunar New Year holidays.

"Buses and subways have all stopped services," he added, voicing concerns for his compatriots now stranded in the city. "I'm supposed to return (to Wuhan) after the Lunar New Year but I don't know how it will actually turn out." He said everyone on the three-and-a-half-hour flight was, like himself, wearing masks to avoid

becoming infected. Asked what he had been doing to prevent infection, he said: "I wear masks and gargle."

Kazuyuki Kamei, 60, also in the car manufacturing industry, said he had been in Wuhan for three weeks, and travels to and from the Chinese city for business. "I'm supposed to go back there next month but I have no idea if it will be possible," he said. He told AFP his family were concerned about him staying in the epicentre of the virus. "They've been worried about me. It wasn't a big issue when I went there," he said. Kamei said his firm had given staff instructions on hygiene and avoiding infection. "We are being careful... I have a lot of masks!"

Passengers arriving into Sydney on one of the last flights out of Wuhan were greeted by biosecurity officials, as a global effort to contain the outbreak ramps up. The mask-wearing travellers were briefed on the symptoms of the novel coronavirus and handed leaflets explaining how to respond if they noticed symptoms of the contagious disease. "They suggested (that) everyone wear their masks, and actually everyone was (already) wearing their masks... even the flight crew," said Kevin Ouyang, a 40-year-old father-of-two who was returning to his Sydney home after a business trip to China.

Australia's chief medical officer, Brendan Murphy, said no ill passengers had been found on the flight, which left Wuhan shortly before Chinese authorities placed the city under quarantine and barred all departing aircraft. —AFP

International

Cloud cooking land: Indian housewives become chefs

Gig economy flourishing in the country

MUMBAI: Rashmi Sahijwala never expected to start working at the age of 59, let alone join India's gig economy - now she is part of an army of housewives turning their homes into "cloud kitchens" to feed time-starved millennials. Asia's third-largest economy is battling a slowdown so sharp it is creating a drag on global growth, the International Monetary Fund said Monday, but there are some bright spots.

The gig economy, aided by cheap mobile data and abundant labor, has flourished in India, opening up new markets across the vast nation. Although Indian women have long battled for access to education and employment opportunities, the biggest hurdle for many is convincing conservative families to let them leave home. But new apps like Curryful, Homefoodi, and Nanighar are tapping the skills of housewives to slice, dice and prepare meals for hungry urbanites from the comfort of their homes.

The so-called cloud kitchens - restaurants that have no physical presence and a delivery-only model - are rising in popularity as there is a boom in food delivery apps such as Swiggy and Zomato. "We want to be the Uber of home-cooked food," said Ben Mathew, who launched Curryful in 2018, convinced that housewives were a huge untapped resource. His company - which employs five people for the app's daily operations - works with 52 women and three men, and the 31-year-old web entrepreneur hopes to get one million female chefs on-board by 2022.

"We usually train them in processes of sanitization, cooking, prep time and packaging... and then launch them on the platform," Mathew told AFP. One of the first housewives to join Curryful in November 2018 shortly after its launch, Sahijwala was initially apprehensive, despite having

four decades of experience in the kitchen. But backed by her children, including her son who gave her regular feedback about her proposed dishes, she took the plunge.

Since then, she's undergone a crash course in how to run a business, from creating weekly menus to buying supplies from wholesale markets to cut costs. The learning curve was steep and Sahijwala switched from cooking everything from scratch to preparing curries and batters for breads in advance to save time and limit leftovers. She even bought a massive freezer to store fruits and vegetables despite her husband's reservations about the cost. "I told him that I am a professional now," she told AFP.

'Internet restaurants'

Kallol Banerjee, co-founder of Rebel Foods which runs 301 cloud kitchens backing up 2,200 "internet restaurants", was among the first entrepreneurs to embrace the concept in 2012. "We could do more brands from one kitchen and cater to different customer requirements at multiple price points," Banerjee told AFP. The chefs buy the ingredients, supply the cookware and pay the utility bills. The apps - which make their money through charging commission, such as more than 18 percent per order for Curryful - offer training and supply the chefs with containers and bags to pack the food in.

Curryful chef Chand Vyas, 55, spent years trying to set up a lunch delivery business but finally gave up after failing to compete with dab-bawalas, Mumbai's famously efficient food porters. Today Vyas works seven hours a day, five days a week in her kitchen, serving up a bevy of Indian vegetarian staples, from street food favorites to lentils and rice according to the



MUMBAI: In this photo taken on Jan 8, 2020, home chef Rashmi Sahijwala, 59, works to prepare a dish in her kitchen. — AFP

app's weekly set menus. "I don't understand marketing or how to run a business but I know how to cook. So, the current partnership helps me focus on just that while Curryful takes care of the rest," Vyas told AFP. She pockets up to \$150 a month after accounting for the commissions and costs, but hopes to earn more as the orders increase.

In contrast, a chef at a bricks-and-mortar restaurant takes home a monthly wage of between \$300 and \$1,000 for working six days a week. With India's cloud kitchen sector ex-

pected to reach \$1.05 billion by 2023, according to data platform Inc42, other companies are also keen to get a slice of the action. Swiggy, for example, has invested 2.5 billion rupees (\$35.3 million) in opening 1,000 cloud kitchens across the nation. Back in her Mumbai kitchen, Sahijwala is elated to have embarked on a career at an age when her contemporaries are eyeing retirement. Over the past year, she has seen her profit grow to \$200 a month, but more importantly, she said, "my passion has finally found an outlet. "I am just glad life has given me this chance." — AFP

Black 'rock' from Italy eruption part of exploded brain



ERCOLANO, Italy: This undated handout photo shows a vitrified brain fragment from a victim of the volcanic eruption of Italy's Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. — AFP

ROME: It looks like a piece of rock - black, shiny and unexceptional. But Italian anthropologists say the fragment is actually part of an exploded brain from an unfortunate victim of the volcanic eruption of Italy's Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. The gory discovery - published yesterday in The New England Journal of Medicine - is a rarity in archaeology, and researchers called the find from the ruins of Herculaneum near Pompeii "sensational".

Scholars who for years have studied the grisly remains of those trapped by ash, lava and toxic gasses when the volcano erupted in southern Italy were intrigued by a curious glassy material found inside one victim's skull. "In October 2018, I was able to look at these remnants and I saw that something was shimmering in the shattered skull," Pier Paolo Petrone,

one of the researchers, told AFP. Petrone, a forensic anthropologist from the University of Naples Federico II, said he was "pretty sure this material was human brain". Further analysis by Piero Pucci from the CEINGE advanced biotech centre in Naples confirmed that it did indeed contain bits of proteins and fatty acids from hair and brain tissue. Herculaneum, named after the Greek god Hercules, was a popular resort town for the rich northwest of Pompeii when Vesuvius erupted. — AFP

3 US crew killed as firefighting plane crashes in Australia

SYDNEY: Three American crew helping to battle Australia's devastating bushfires were killed yesterday when their water-bombing plane crashed in mountainous terrain during a sortie to tackle another outbreak of the deadly blazes. Officials said the Hercules C-130 plane erupted in a large fireball on impact in a national park the Snowy Mountains shortly before 1:30 pm (0230 GMT).

The cause of the crash was not immediately known, but New South Wales Rural Fire Service commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons had said earlier in the day that high winds were making flying the water tankers "very difficult". "We've got a number of firefighters and a number of crew that are in the area and working to contain and work around the fire," Fitzsimmons said. The incident brought the death toll in Australia's bushfires to at least 32 since the crisis began in September. The highly experienced US firefighting trio was working for Canadian firm Coulson Aviation, which had been contracted

to help fight the fires. State Premier Gladys Berejiklian said the crash highlighted the danger faced by firefighters as they attempted to extinguish massive blazes across Australia's southeast.

"There are in excess of 70 aircraft that have been used today alone and today is a stark and horrible reminder of the dangerous conditions that our volunteers, (and) our emergency services personnel... (face) on a daily basis," she said. The crash happened as at least seven fires, whipped up by scorching temperatures and strong winds, flared to emergency status following a brief lull brought by rain and cooler temperatures. Bushfires also forced the closure of Canberra Airport yesterday, with all flights in and out of the country's capital suspended to allow the deployment of aerial firefighting crews to battle the approaching flames. Temperatures soared to 40 degrees Celsius in Sydney, where a bushfire also broke out in a northwestern suburb of Australia's biggest city.

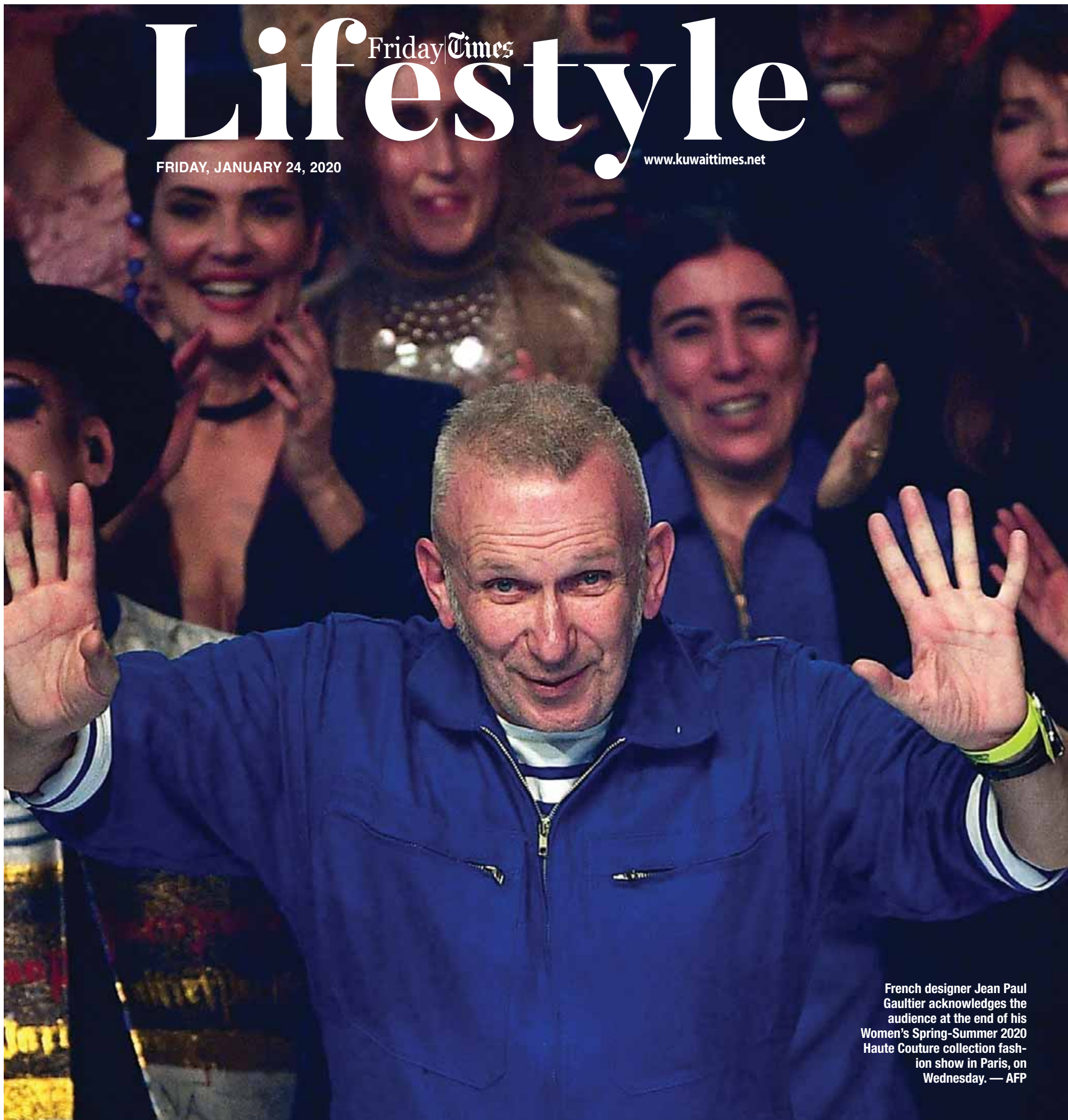
Wind gusts had been forecast to reach 90 km per hour in some areas, but Fitzsimmons said the winds were stronger than expected, especially in the fire-ravaged southeast. Unprecedented bushfires fuelled by climate change have devastated vast swathes of the country since September, destroying more than 2,000 homes and burning 10 million hectares (100,000 sq km) of land - an area larger than South Korea or Portugal. — AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 2020

www.kuwaittimes.net



French designer Jean Paul Gaultier acknowledges the audience at the end of his Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris, on Wednesday. — AFP

Fashion legend Jean-Paul Gaultier bows out in style

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Rapper Juice WRLD died of accidental opioid overdose

The rapper Juice WRLD died of an accidental opioid overdose, Chicago's medical examiner said Wednesday, one month after the rising artist suffered a seizure at one of the city's airports. "The manner of death is accident," the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office said of the December 8th death of the 21-year-old, who was born Jarad Higgins.

"The Office determined that Higgins died as a result of oxycodone and codeine toxicity"—powerful painkillers in the same drug family as morphine and heroin. Authorities reportedly had been waiting for the artist's private plane to land at Midway International Airport on suspicion he had contraband. They discovered drugs, guns and ammunition. When the rapper began "convulsing" an FBI agent administered two doses of Narcan—an emergency treatment when opioid overdose is suspected—which awoke him though he remained incoherent, according to The Chicago Tribune newspaper.

The musician was pronounced dead at 3:14 am at a nearby hospital, approximately an hour after the plane landed. Juice WRLD is the latest in a string of famous musicians to die of an opioid overdose in recent years. Prince and Tom Petty were among the biggest names. Fellow rapper Lil Peep suffered an accidental overdose of fentanyl and Xanax in 2017.

Both he and Juice WRLD were of a generation known as the "SoundCloud rappers"—a subgenre that takes its name from the streaming platform where its artists first find fame. The crop of artists in recent years has become a disruptive movement in hip-hop, combining a lo-fi underground sound with raw, heart-wrenching lyrics leading some to dub them "emo rappers." These musicians whose careers are built on internet stardom often rap about popping pills, notably Xanax, an anti-anxiety medication.—AFP

In Albania, a film follows communism's star-crossed lovers

Inside the stone walls of a 13th-century fortress, Albanian and Russian actors are striving to re-enact a little-known but troubling chapter of their shared history for the big screen. Co-written by Albania's acclaimed novelist Ismail Kadare, this historical drama is the first joint production between the two countries in almost 70 years. The working title for the love story is "Gjirokastra", the southern Albanian city where the story unfolds. It will be the first feature film to delve into the tragic fate of mixed couples persecuted by Tirana's communist regime.

The trouble started after Tirana severed ties with Moscow in 1961, a diplomatic break that, overnight, turned young Albanians with Soviet-born wives into suspected traitors. "The characters I'm interested in are forgotten or little-known victims of communism: foreigners held in Albania and savagely persecuted by the regime," Kadare told AFP. While this is his debut as a screenwriter, the novelist and poet has won a string of literary prizes and is regularly mooted as a contender for Nobel honors.

"So many individual fates were shattered by history," said Kadare, who co-wrote the script with the Russian screenwriter and director Yuri Arabov. In the 1950s many Albanian men studied abroad in the Soviet Union, some of them returning home with Russian, Polish, Hungarian or Bulgarian partners. The film follows the story of one such couple.

Executions and labor camps

For years, Albania and the USSR were close allies, and Tirana's communist dictator Enver Hoxha an admirer of Joseph Stalin. But after the Soviet leader's successor Nikita Khrushchev embarked on a series of de-Stalinisation reforms, Albania's dictator broke with "revisionist" Moscow and its satellite states in 1961. Foreign women living inside Albania, whose borders were locked down under Hoxha, were given a choice: return home or stay with their husbands and risk persecution. There is no data on how many couples joined the tens of thousands of perceived regime opponents jailed or sentenced



Russian director and screenwriter Yuri Arabov (second left) monitors a shooting on the set of his new movie provisionally called "Gjirokastra", inside of former Albanian communist dictator Enver Hoxha house in Tirana.

to hard labor during Albania's 40 years of communism. Some 5,500 men and 450 women were also executed by the regime.

One survivor, however, is Irina Sallaku, an 88-year-old who now lives in Tirana. Born in Soviet Russia, Sallaku married an Albanian who was studying engineering in Leningrad. The couple returned to Tirana in 1955 with twins. Their lives were shattered two decades later, when her husband was executed by the Albanian regime on charges of "sabotage". Sallaku was sent with their two daughters to a labor camp. They were not released until 1988. "Many foreigners who made an act of heartfelt resistance by choosing to live in Albania have had a tragic destiny," Sallaku told AFP.

Like many, she still doesn't know the final resting place of her husband, a constant source of torment. But she welcomes the making of a movie that will tell a story similar to hers on a large scale. "This is a tragic episode in the story (of Albania) that needs to be told in order to understand the scale of the crime," she said, speaking in a hushed voice.

Real love

The film, which Kadare started writing in

2010, traces the story of Russian student Katia, who meets her future Albanian husband, Arjan, in Moscow. Years after starting a new life together in Albania, the husband is arrested for "spying" and executed. Katia, also accused of spying, ends up imprisoned in the Gjirokastra fortress, which at that time was used as a jail. While most of the filming took place in Gjirokastra, the birth place of both Hoxha and Kadare, some scenes were also filmed in the late dictator's villa in the center of Tirana.

Two Albanian actors play the Hoxha, who died in 1985, and his wife Nexhmije, still alive at the age of 99. Director Arabov describes the film as a "tribute to all the innocent victims of totalitarian regimes". With the shooting wrapped, editing starts at the end of the month. And the work has already given birth to a new love story—between Polina Grishina, the Russian actress who plays Katia, and Besmir Bitraku, the Albanian actor who plays her husband. "We are our history," Bitraku, a popular actor in Albania, said with a smile. Loreta Mokini, the Albanian co-producer of the film, added: "Love is blind, it doesn't learn from history".—AFP



Russian director and screenwriter Yuri Arabov (center) monitors a shooting on the set of his new movie provisionally called "Gjirokastra".



Russian actress Polina Grishina (center), playing Katia, stands past other actresses on the set of the new movie provisionally called "Gjirokastra".

Rape trial told **Weinstein** a 'seasoned' predator

Harvey Weinstein was a “seasoned” sexual predator and rapist who abused his power as a movie-producing titan to prey on vulnerable aspiring actresses, prosecutors said Wednesday as his trial heard from its first witness. Weinstein, wearing a dark suit, shook his head as New York Assistant District Attorney Meghan Hast painted a picture of a 300-pound (140 kilogram) bully who violently raped, humiliated and manipulated several women, leaving them traumatized for years. His defense team hit back by saying the fallen film producer engaged in consensual relationships with his accusers, including a “loving one” in which the woman called Weinstein “her casual boyfriend.”

That woman, who says Weinstein raped her in a New York hotel room in 2013, was identified for the first time in court as actress Jessica Mann, having until now remained anonymous. “It will be clear throughout this trial that the defendant knew he was preying on the naive and the defenseless,” Hast told the court, saying many of his victims came from broken homes. “They didn’t know they were being lured in on false pretenses. They thought they had got their big break. He was the old lady in the gingerbread house luring the kids.”

Defense attorney Damon Cheronis countered that it was “untrue” and “quite the contrary” to call the “Pulp Fiction” producer a predator. Wednesday’s hearing started with Judge James Burke reminding the 12-member jury and six alternates that they must base their verdict on evidence heard in court and not discuss the trial with anyone outside. Hast then laid out the prosecution’s case in a lengthy statement that included graphic descriptions of sexual assaults.

She said Weinstein raped “The Sopranos” actress Annabella Sciorra in the winter of 1993-94 after a pursuit which included him introducing her to the drug valium. “He left her emotionally and physically destroyed and



Harvey Weinstein arrives at a Manhattan court house for the first day of opening statements at his trial in New York City.— AFP

passed out on the floor,” the prosecutor told a packed courtroom with more than 100 journalists in attendance.

Accusers named

The attorney likewise said Weinstein left former production assistant Mimi Haley lying “motionless like a dead fish” after assaulting her in his New York apartment in July 2006. And Hast accused Weinstein of treating Mann like a “rag doll” after raping her in her hotel room in March 2013. Before that alleged assault, the court heard, Weinstein injected his penis with erection medication.

Weinstein, 67, faces life in prison if convicted of predatory sexual assault charges related to

Haleyi and Mann in the New York proceedings seen as key to the #MeToo movement. The trial, expected to run until March 6, will also hear evidence from Sciorra and three other accusers who were named for the first time in court Wednesday. They are Dawn Dunning, Lauren Young and Tarale Wulff, whose allegations were previously unknown.

Young will allege that Weinstein raped her in 2013. Dunning says Weinstein grabbed her vagina in 2004 and Wulff will testify that the defendant masturbated in front of her. They will take the stand as the prosecution tries to convince the seven men and five women on the jury that Weinstein engaged in a pattern of predatory sexual behavior.

Hundreds of emails

Weinstein’s attorney Cheronis said the jurors would see hundreds of emails and other correspondence showing Mann and his client were “in a loving relationship.” A year after the alleged assault, Mann wrote “Miss you big guy!” in one email, and another which said “Thank you for your unfailing support and kindness,” Cheronis said. In February 2017, she wrote to Weinstein: “I love you, I always do. But I hate feeling like a booty call,” Cheronis told the court.

“Members of the jury, that is not how you talk about predators, that is not how you talk about your abusers,” he said. Cheronis argued that Weinstein’s accusers changed their attitude towards him as the #MeToo movement gathered steam in 2017. “We will show that the truth has changed since 2013 and the truth can’t change. There is only one truth,” he said.

Ignited #MeToo movement

The prosecution’s first witness, former Weinstein Company board member Lance Maerov, testified that the defendant regularly bragged about his powerful connections, including to the Clintons. Weinstein muttered inaudibly as Maerov—an executive with communications giant WPP—said the movie mogul’s charming public persona was “diametrically opposed” to who he was in private. “You don’t like Mr Weinstein, do you?” said lead defense attorney Donna Rotundo during a brief cross-examination. “Not particularly,” replied Maerov.

More than 80 women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct but many of the alleged crimes fall outside the timeframe for bringing charges. Arriving at court, Weinstein made his way unsteadily up a few steps but without the walking frame he has used for recent proceedings. The trial continues on Thursday. — AFP

Actor Cuba Gooding Jr to stand trial in April

Actor Cuba Gooding Jr will stand trial April 21 on charges he groped three women, a judge ruled Wednesday, in the latest #MeToo case to reach the courts. The 52 year old actor is accused of inappropriately touching one of the women in a restaurant in Manhattan in September 2018. He is also accused of pinching a second woman’s buttocks at a nightclub the next month and of grabbing another woman’s breast without her consent at a New York bar in June 2019.

Gooding, who won the Oscar for best supporting actor in 1997 for the American football movie “Jerry Maguire,” has pleaded not

guilty to six charges against him, with the three main ones each carrying the potential for one year in prison. Judge Curtis Farber of the New York Supreme Court also ruled on Wednesday that the prosecution could call two other women as witnesses during the trial. They claim they are also victims of Gooding, though their accusations are not the subjects of criminal proceedings.

Farber, however, ruled against allowing 17 other women whom Manhattan prosecutor Cyrus Vance had also wanted to call to testify in order to avoid “undue prejudice” against Gooding. The actor is also known for the 1991 film “Boyz n the Hood” and for playing OJ Simpson in the 2016 miniseries “American Crime Story.” Gooding’s trial will mark the third high-profile case to come out of the #MeToo movement to move to the courts this year, in addition to film mogul Harvey Weinstein’s ongoing trial in New York and R&B star R. Kelly’s trial in Chicago, which is also set for April. — AFP

US actor Cuba Gooding Jr arrives at the Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City.—AFP

Former Grammy head flatly denies rape allegation

The former CEO of the embattled Recording Academy, the institution behind the Grammys, on Wednesday rejected as “ludicrous and untrue” his ousted successor’s allegations that he raped an unnamed foreign female musician. Neil Portnow’s denial comes one day after Deborah Dugan filed an explosive discrimination complaint against the Academy, which included the rape allegation, days after she was put on leave and just before Sunday’s Grammy awards. Dugan’s bombshell 44-page filing with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Los Angeles claims she was suspended after raising concerns of sexual harassment, voting irregularities and other misconduct within one of music’s most powerful organizations.

Portnow—who stepped down as CEO after 17 years at the helm, amid outrage over his controversial comments that women artists should

“step up” to gain more recognition for their work—said Dugan’s filing “is filled with inaccurate, false and outrageous and terribly hurtful claims against me.” “The allegations of rape are ludicrous, and untrue. The suggestion that there was [a rape] is disseminating a lie,” read Portnow’s statement, published in full on Rolling Stone’s website.

He also denied demanding a \$750,000 consulting fee to stay on as a consultant, which Dugan alleges was a proposal up before the Academy’s board. Dugan’s filing dealt a major blow to the Recording Academy less than a week before the Grammys—music’s biggest night of the year. Major nominees this time out include Lizzo, Billie Eilish and Lil Nas X. —AFP



In this file photo The Recording Academy President Neil Portnow speaks onstage during the 61st Annual Grammy Awards. — AFP



Supermodel Kaia Gerber to sit on top fashion jury

Teenage supermodel Kaia Gerber is to sit on the jury of one of fashion's most prestigious prizes, its organizers said Wednesday. The 18-year-old American, the daughter of former catwalk queen Cindy Crawford, has been one of the stars of Paris fashion fortnight, which ends late Thursday. Gerber will sit on the jury of the Hyeres fashion festival on the French Riviera at the end of April to decide one of the top prizes for rising young designers.

The model sparked fevered comment on social media when she wore a spectacular wedding dress that closed the Givenchy haute couture show late Tuesday. The gown with a showstopping structured veil—that was somewhere between a halo and its own grotto—made headlines after the reported break-up of Gerber's romance with US stand-up comedian Pete Davidson.

Critics raved about Clare Waight Keller's embroidered creation. The British designer also made the wedding dress the Duchess of Sussex Megan Markle wore for her marriage to Prince Harry in 2018. Gerber said the dress had left her "speechless". "Closing Givenchy

haute couture", she wrote on Instagram.

"@clarewaightkeller you have left me completely speechless. Words will never begin to express my gratitude and appreciation for this moment. "Thank you to the incredible atelier and everyone who worked so hard to make this so special." The show, in a former convent in the French capital, was accompanied by musicians who were suspended from poles.

The Hyeres jury will be presided over by the Northern Irish designer Jonathan Anderson. As well as his own JW Anderson brand, he is also artistic director of the Spanish house Loewe. The prize they will decide is the oldest in the world for young fashion designers and was won in 2018 by the Dutch couple Rushemy Botter and Lisi Herrebrugh, who were later snapped up to lead the French label Nina Ricci.

Their own brand, Botter, made its Paris debut during men's fashion week. Other past winners include the Belgian Anthony Vaccarello, now at the head of Saint Laurent, and the Dutch duo Viktor & Rolf. The festival runs from April 25 to 29.—AFP



US model Kaia Gerber presents a creation by Givenchy during the Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.—AFP

Elie Saab's Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Haute Couture



Models present creations by Elie Saab at the end of the Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.—AFP



Fashion legend **Jean-Paul Gaultier** bows out in style



French designer Jean Paul Gaultier (center) celebrates with models at the end of his Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris. —AFP photos



French designer Jean Paul Gaultier acknowledges the audience at the end of his Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Haute Couture collection fashion show.



Jean-Paul Gaultier has bowed out of fashion with all the cheek and showmanship with which he has lit it up over the last half century. The legendary French provocateur bid farewell Wednesday with an hour-long feelgood musical spectacular with an orchestra and a cast of hundreds to celebrate the friends and the often outrageous looks that helped make him a star.

With what seemed like the entire fashion world gathered to pay tribute, the mammoth production began with a black coffin with two conical breasts sticking out of it being carried down a set worthy of Cecil B DeMille. It was Gaultier's knowing joke that the conical bra he famously put on Madonna will probably end up on his tombstone.

British singer Boy George closed the show, with fashionistas on their feet as the designer emerged in the same blue work overalls as his studio staff when the curtain lifted to reveal the backstage. Raised onto the shoulders of some of the 220 models who had sashayed down the runway, he threw kisses as the audience chanted his name to the strains of the Culture Club hit "Church of the Poison Mind".

The ode to freaks and outsiders echoed the way the maverick designer pioneered body positive thinking and gender fluidity long before they became fashionable. American singer Beth Ditto and the bearded Austrian drag queen Conchita Wurst were among the atypical models he managed to charm onto the catwalk.

While Madonna herself did not make it to the show, the "French Madonna" Mylene Farmer did, along with a galaxy of Gallic stars including "Betty Blue" actress Beatrice Dalle. In a touching message before the curtain lifted, Gaultier gave the world a lesson in sustainability and making do. "There are too many clothes and too many that are never



Models present creations by Jean Paul Gaultier during the Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.



worn. Don't throw them away, recycle them," he said, declaring his final collection was his first "upcycled haute couture" one.

"When I was a child my mother told me how she would turn my father's old worn trousers into skirts. That marked me. You can love a garment again by transforming it," Gaultier said. "I have been doing that since... In my first show and in this my last there are creations made with the jeans I've worn," he said. "It's the most beautiful of materials. Like a lot of humans, it becomes even more beautiful as it gets older." The flamboyant creator stunned fans on Friday by announcing that the haute couture show in the French capital would be his last.

'Laughing and crying'

Many believe the 67-year-old showman may now throw himself into showbiz. His "Fashion Freak Show", a cheeky cabaret revue based on his life has been a popular and critical hit. With its catchphrase "Tout le monde est beau!" ("Everybody looks so good!"), it was a feel-good smash when he premiered it at the Folies Bergere in Paris in 2018.

It is now touring Russia after an acclaimed London run.

Gaultier's perfume range and high-end haute couture business, Gaultier Paris, will live on, the brand told AFP. "For years now Jean Paul-Gaultier has been saying, 'I am going to have to make a decision (about the future)'," said fashion historian



Olivier Saillard. "I think the success of the show has shown him a way," he added. "It has been wonderful for him to see the public laughing and crying with him," the historian told AFP.

"It is so much more joyful than a fashion show, which lasts 11 minutes and where people are always on their phones taking photos." The impish creator had previously carved out a cult following as a presenter of the late-night 1990s television show "Eurotrash". Gaultier stopped designing ready-to-wear clothes in 2015 to concentrate on haute couture-extravagant handmade clothes which only the world's richest women can afford.

Body-positive pioneer

Never less than flamboyant, Gaultier was a fashion prodigy. From the start he challenged gender stereotypes and conventional ideas of beauty, once placing an advert for "atypical" models. "The facially disfigured should not refrain from applying," he added. Saillard said the couturier was "like a father" to many top designers he had mentored over the years, but "he feels fashion has changed terribly". Nor was it a secret that Gaultier was unhappy with the Catalan luxury conglomerate Puig, who bought his brand in 2011. "He will be back, but in a different way," said Saillard.—AFP





Participants of Dziady Zywieckie traditional folk custom are seen around the mountain town of Milowka in southern Poland.—AFP photos



Masks of the participants of Dziady Zywieckie traditional folk custom are seen in Milowka, southern Poland.

Devils, bears and Death ring in the New Year in Poland

Mountain men disguised as devils, the Grim Reaper, horses and bears ring-in the New Year with a cacophony of drums, whistles, shouts and catchy melodies in a time-honored tradition still popular in Poland's mountains. For centuries, men have crisscrossed snowy villages nestled in the foothills of Poland's southern Beskid range around the New Year to wish neighbors happiness and prosperity in return for gifts of food or small sums of money.

Similar folk customs marking the winter solstice are practiced in neighboring countries and can be traced back to pagan times. For the last half-century lively troupes of characters have flocked to the Beskid village of Milowka for the colorful and loud "Dziady Zywieckie" festival that ranks as part of Poland's intangible cultural heritage. "All this uproar, characters dressed in very bright colours, the noises, bells and whistles, cracking whips are meant to chase away spirits who want to descend to Earth," festival organizer Andrzej Maciejowski told AFP.

"The characters represent people and imaginary entities known to rural folk in days gone by: otherworldly beings, devils and the Grim Reaper, as well as ethnic minorities like Jews or Roma and old professions like peddlers or healers," he added. Bears and horses play a leading role in the custom signaling that spring and new life are on their way. Men parading as lively horses symbolize vigour while others, posing as bears, bear the power to "fertilize the Earth so that it bears more fruit than last year," adds Maciejowski. Cracking whips open the joyful if chaotic festivities before the Grim Reaper makes an appearance followed by troupes of horses and bears dancing wildly to symbolize new life.

Circle of life

"In popular tradition, death as represented by the Grim Reaper is never final, but rather marks the passage to a new and higher stage of life," explains ethnographer Barbara Rosiek. During the

noisy procession through the village and in the courtyards of cozy old log cabins, the groups hail the eternal circle of life marked by order or disorder in nature. Horses run, devils bicker and taunt onlookers to whom peddlers also display their merchandise promising marvels, sometimes in a grumpy manner.

Amid the din, the Grim Reaper cuts a calm figure, waving his scythe at onlookers. "Death wants to take people's lives but even the devils prevent it. Death only scares people," says Szymon Sikora, 28, a truck driver dressed up as the Grim Reaper in a terrifying mask and with a large scythe in hand. Dressed up as a peddler, Robert Brzusnia, 45, has taken part in the festival for nearly all his life. "I've participated... for 40 years. My father did too," he said. "All December, the guys meet in their free time to prepare their masks and costumes, and to rehearse," says Maciejowski, who cannot contain his amusement. "Bells tinkle and whips crack loudly. In short, the tradition is alive and well."—AFP



Afghan drought forces shepherds into desperate measures

Nooruddin watched helplessly as his flock of 100 sheep began to die from hunger and thirst on the dry drought-ravaged hillsides of Balkh province. Rather than let more of the prized creatures die a slow death on the dry hillsides of Balkh province in the north, he made the decision to slaughter most of the rest. "I cut their heads off," the 65-year-old herder said, adding that their malnourished frames meant their meat was "useless". "We fed it to the dogs," Nooruddin told AFP.

He's one of many whose traditional livelihoods—from farmers to carpet weavers—are under threat as changing weather patterns wreak havoc. Experts warn the situation will only get worse, with Afghanistan one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, even though it produces just 0.1 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. For many this latest drought is the worst they can recall. "I've seen droughts before, but never as severe," said livestock trader Mirza, who like many residents only uses one name. "A lot of sheep and animals died on the mountains and in the desert," the 45-year-old added.

Mohammed Aref, a 19-year-old shepherd who raises karakul sheep-famed for their curly-haired lambs' pelts that are turned into traditional hats—said shepherds sold off their emaciated animals for pittance to butchers. "A lot of us had a big loss," Aref told AFP from the noisy livestock market outside Mazar-i-Sharif, on a crisp, early winter morning. "Most of us can't afford to get more (livestock) and now our life is ruined."

Huge temperature rise

Aref and other Balkh residents have no notion of climate change as it is understood in places with better access to information and education, but all agreed things were changing. The last big drought they remembered was about a decade ago. Before that, there hadn't been one for about 50 years, they said. "We had a drought 12 years ago," recalled 68-year-old Aynoddin, another karakul sheep farmer, "but last year's was the worst". According to the United Nations Development Program, about 80 percent of Afghans rely on rain-fed crop and animal farming for their incomes.

Over the next four decades in Afghanistan, scientists predict a

decrease in rainfall and a rise in average temperatures of up to 4 degrees Celsius compared to 1999, the UNDP said. The agency noted droughts could soon be considered the norm, unleashing further desertification and loss of arable land. Problems are only compounded when rains do eventually come. Last spring, flash floods swept entire villages and fields away.

The UN said in an overview of last year's aid operations that nearly half of all rural residents now face some level of food insecurity in Afghanistan, a country where unemployment and poverty are already major drivers of the war. While light rains in the autumn eased woes for some, the weather has since dried up again. Asked if they worried for the coming year, several farmers gave a common Afghan response. "If there is a drought, God will decide, so I don't worry," Aynoddin said.

Looming crisis for weavers

The Global Adaptation Initiative, run by the University of Notre Dame in the US, currently ranks Afghanistan 173 out of the 181 countries it scored in terms of a nation's vulnerability to climate change and its ability to adapt. The human cost is plain to see at a camp for internally displaced people just outside Mazar-i-Sharif, where rows of white UN tents house hundreds of families and the main source of water is from a large communal tank. Shamayel, a 35-year-old mother from Faryab province in the northwest, said her family came to the camp to escape conflict and the drought.

She used to weave colorful traditional kilim rugs, but increasing wool prices made it impossible. Seven kilograms of wool previously cost about \$19, she said, but the price rose to \$31 in the past year or two. Perhaps surprisingly, though, rising wool costs haven't caused a price jump for Afghan rugs and carpets. Traders in Mazar complained the ongoing uncertainty and anxiety around delayed election results and talks between the Taliban and the US have essentially frozen the market. Another former weaver at the camp, Ghulam Sakhi, 50, said he too had been forced to give up his trade when he arrived. "I want to weave, I miss it," he said, smiling as he described his craft. "Now I feel useless."—AFP



In this photograph shepherds lead a flock of sheep as they graze at field on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif.—AFP photos



A child knots the edges of a carpet at a carpet store on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif.



Carpet weaver Ghulam Sakhi sits in an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif.



A shopkeeper waits for customers at his carpet shop in Mazar-i-Sharif.



Workers wash a carpet in the compound of a carpet store on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif.



Welcome to
Isfahan!

Lifestyle | Travel

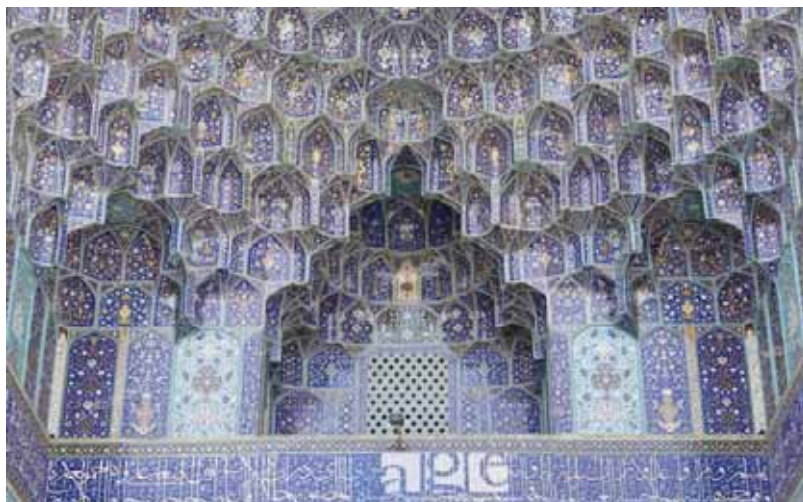
Esfahan is Iran's top tourist destination for good reason. Its profusion of tree-lined boulevards, Persian gardens and important Islamic buildings gives it a visual appeal unmatched by any other Iranian city, and the many artisans working here underpin its reputation as a living museum of traditional culture. Walking through the historic bazaar, over the picturesque bridges and across the Unesco-listed central square are sure to be highlights of a holiday.

Masjed-e Shah

As the country's third-largest city, Esfahan is home to some heavy industry, including steel factories and a much-discussed nuclear facility in the outskirts of town. Inevitably, then, traffic jams are a regular occurrence. Despite these modern realities, the inner core of the city remains a priceless gem. This elegant mosque, with its iconic blue-tiled mosaics and its perfect proportions, forms a visually stunning monument at the head of Esfahan's main square.

Unblemished since its construction 400 years ago, it stands as a monument to the

vision of Shah Abbas I and the accomplishments of the Safavid dynasty. The mosque's crowning dome was completed in 1629, the last year of the reign of Shah Abbas. Although each of the mosque's parts is a masterpiece, it is the unity of the overall design that leaves a lasting impression, and the positioning of the much-photographed entrance portal is a case in point as it has more to do with its location on the square than with the mosque's spiritual aims.



Bazar-e Bozorg

One of Iran's most historic and fascinating bazaars, this sprawling covered market links Naqsh-e Jahan (Imam) Sq with the Masjed-e Jameh. At its busiest in the mornings, the bazaar's arched passageways are topped by a series of small perforated domes, each spilling shafts of light onto the commerce below. While the oldest parts of the bazaar (those around the mosque) are more than a thousand years old, most of what can be seen today was built during Shah Abbas' ambitious expansions of the early 1600s.

The bazaar is a maze of lanes, madrasehs, khans (caravanserais) and timchehs (domed halls or arcaded centres of a single trade, such as carpet vendors or coppersmiths). It can be entered at dozens of points, but the main entrance is via the Qeysarieh Portal at the northern end of Naqsh-e Jahan (Imam) Sq.

Cool in summer and warm in winter, it's easy to lose half a day wandering the bustling lanes of the bazaar, sniffing the heaps of layered spices and dishes of dried dates, watching shoppers finger coloured lengths of material, and pausing to admire the rows of red and white teapots in the many crockery shops. Teahouses help punctuate the walk and a beryani restaurant is the perfect place for lunch.

Hemmed on four sides by architectural gems and embracing the formal fountains and gardens at its center, this wondrous space is a spectacle in its own right. It was laid out in 1602 under the reign of the Safavid ruler, Shah Abbas the Great, to signal the importance of Esfahan as a capital of a powerful empire. Cross the square on a clear winter's day and it's a hard heart that isn't entranced by its beauty.

At 512m long and 163m wide, Naqsh-e Jahan is one of the largest squares in the world, earning a listing as a Unesco World Heritage site. The name means 'pattern of the world' and it was designed to showcase the finest jewels of the Safavid empire - the incomparable Masjed-e Shah, the elegant Masjed-e Sheikh Lotfollah and the lavishly decorated Kakh-e Ali Qapu and Qeysarieh Portal. It has changed little since it was built, and at each end the goal posts used in regular polo games 400 years ago are still in place (these polo matches are depicted on miniatures for sale around the square). The only modern additions are the fountains, which were added by the Pahlavis, and the souvenir and craft shops, which occupy the spaces on either side of the arched arcades.

Resisting grumbles from shop owners who occupy the surrounding arcades, recent civic administrations have restored the square to its full glory by making the entire space a pedestrian zone. Horse-drawn carriages, a few electric carts and Shank's pony are now the only transport in the square allowing visitors to enjoy the majesty of the view untroubled by traffic.

The square is at its best in late afternoon when the blue-tiled minarets and domes are lit up by the last rays of the sun and the mountains beyond turn red. This is the time when local families congregate for a promenade around the perimeter, the fountains are turned on and the light softens, illuminating the truly splendid architecture.



Naqsh-e Jahan (Imam) Square



Kakh-e Ali Qapu

Built at the very end of the 16th century as a residence for Shah Abbas I, this six-storey palace also served as a monumental gateway to the royal palaces that lay in the parklands beyond (Ali Qapu means 'Gate of Ali'). Named after Abbas' hero, the Imam Ali, it was built to make an impression, and at six storeys and 38m tall, with its impressive elevated terrace featuring 18 slender columns, it dominates one side of Naqsh-e Jahan (Imam) Sq.

The terrace affords a wonderful perspective over the square and one of the best views of the Masjed-e Shah and

the mountains beyond. The attractive wooden ceiling with intricate inlay work and exposed beams has been painstakingly restored and now attention is turning towards the walls. Peer behind the scaffolding and watch the artisans at work and it's easy to understand why the project is taking so long.

Many of the valuable paintings and mosaics that once decorated the 52 small rooms, corridors and stairways were destroyed during the Qajar period and after the 1979 revolution. Fortunately, a few fine examples remain in the throne room off the terrace, but the real highlight of the palace is

the music room on the upper floor. The stucco ceiling is stencilled with the shapes of vases and rose-water shakers to enhance the acoustics. This distinctive craftsmanship, considered by some to be one of the finest examples of secular Persian art, extends to the walls creating a mosaic of shadows. — www.lonelyplanet.com

Comic

Word Search

Through the Looking Glass

Find and circle all of the Through the Looking Glass words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a quote by Humpty Dumpty from the book.

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

ALICE BEETLE BOAT BROOCH CARPENTER CHES DAISIES DINAH ELEPHANT FAWN FROG GARDEN GNAT GOAT GOLDEN CROWN GUARD HAIGHA HATTA HILL HUMPTY DUMPTY JABBERWOCKY KITTY LION LOOKING GLASS OYSTERS PAWNS POETRY RATTLE RED KING RED KNIGHT RED QUEEN ROSE SHAWL SNOWDROP SOLDIERS SQUARES TIGER-LILY TRAIN TWEEDLEDEE TWEEDLEDUM UMBRELLA UNICORN VIOLET WALRUS WHITE KING WHITE KNIGHT WHITE QUEEN

Yesterday's Solution

Valentine's Day

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

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

The hidden message is: VALENTINES DAY CARD

Crossword 2418

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16 17
18 19 20
21 22 23 24 25
26 27 28
29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36
37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44
45 46 47 48
49 50 51
52 53 54 55 56
57 58 59 60 61
62 63 64 65 66
67 68 69 70 71 72 73
74 75 76 77 78 79
80 81 82 83
84 85 86

ACROSS

1. A federally chartered savings bank.
4. The attribute of having a strong offensive smell.
12. Electronic equipment that provides visual images of varying electrical quantities.
15. (Irish) The sea personified.
16. Motionlessness attributable to a temporary paralysis.
17. An accidental happening.
18. A rapid bustling commotion.
19. Plant bearing very hot and finely tapering long peppers.
20. How long something has existed.
21. African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
23. An informal term for a father.
24. Related on the mother's side.
26. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
27. Closed with a lace.
29. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
32. A ductile malleable reddish-brown corrosion-resistant diamagnetic metallic element.
33. Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
37. A medicinal drug used to evoke vomiting (especially in cases of drug overdose or poisoning).
41. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
43. Twist or braid together, interlace.

45. A populous province of south central China.
47. Period extending from Dec. 24 to Jan. 6.
48. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
49. (computer science) The smallest discrete component of an image or picture on a CRT screen (usually a colored dot).
50. A piece of information about circumstances that exist or events that have occurred.
52. The United Nations agency concerned with civil aviation.
54. Be iridescent.
57. The hospital ward or clinic in which patients are detoxified.
61. An ancient Hebrew unit of capacity equal to 10 baths or 10 ephahs.
62. Become one.
64. Distinctive and stylish elegance.
67. Spread abroad or out.
70. Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
74. A port city in western South Korea on the Yellow Sea.
75. Type genus of the Gavidae.
79. A city in the European part of Russia.
80. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
81. Concerned with worldly rather than spiritual interests.
83. The most common computer memory which can be used by programs to perform necessary tasks while the computer is on.
84. Experiencing or showing sorrow or unhappiness.

DOWN

1. Loose or flaccid body fat.
2. Large genus of tropical shrubs or herbs some of which yield fibers of mucilaginous substances.
3. A natural stream of water smaller than a river (and often a tributary of a river).
4. The seventh month of the Moslem calendar.
5. Jordan's port.
7. Strike sharply.
8. A small Asian country high in the Himalayas between India and Tibet.
9. The compass point midway between east and southeast.
10. A benefice to which no spiritual or pastoral duties are attached.
11. A river in eastern France.
12. An informal conversation.
13. East Indian cereal grass whose seed yield a somewhat bitter flour, a staple in the Orient.
14. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
22. Any of several large deciduous trees with rounded spreading crowns and smooth gray bark and small sweet edible triangular nuts enclosed in burs.
25. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
28. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
30. To or from every one of two or more (considered individually).
31. A unit of magnetomotive force equal to 0.7958 ampere-turns.
34. A city of northern Poland near the mouth of the Vistula River on a gulf of the Baltic Sea.
35. Trade name for an alloy used to make high-energy permanent magnets.
36. A person who enjoys reading.

38. Enthusiastic approval.
39. A soft yellow malleable ductile (trivalent and univalent) metallic element.
40. (British slang) Cafe.
42. Ludicrously odd.
44. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
46. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
51. The branch of engineering science that studies the uses of electricity and the equipment for power generation and distribution and the control of machines and communication.
53. Attractiveness to the opposite sex.
55. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
56. A doctor's degree in dental surgery.
58. Abnormal dryness of the conjunctiva and cornea of the eyes.
59. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
60. A record in which commercial accounts are recorded.
63. Of or relating to the kidneys.
65. A name that has been assumed temporarily.
66. A hemoprotein composed of globin and heme that gives red blood cells their characteristic color.
68. A ruler of the Inca Empire (or a member of his family).
69. Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
71. A sensation (as of a cold breeze or bright light) that precedes the onset of certain disorders such as a migraine attack or epileptic seizure.
72. (old-fashioned) At or from or to a great distance.
73. A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
76. A human limb.
77. Being one more than six.
78. Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
82. A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.

Yesterday's Solution

H A I L I S O E T E S R A M
A R C A B O R S H C H I D A
S C A B S U D O R O S C A N
P H O E B E A P E P A I N S
L A N A I A T H I N A I
A M E E R A N D U A D
S A N D B A R S T R A N G E
C U D K C A E I A A
O L E A R I A H L A R D E R
M E D L I N E A G O N A D A L
A R A C D A B A A B M
C U E E N B A B K B
A D A D S H A R D I D E A
M A R A C A I N I O N A B C
A D E P L U M I E R A M A C
H A T A P P A L L E D A B A

Daily SuDoku

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

medium

Yesterday's Solution

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

hard

TV Listings



01:30 Bus Driver
02:50 Tsunami: The Wrath
Cometh
04:15 Black Panther
06:30 Men In Black 3
08:30 Beast Of Burden
10:15 Tsunami: The Wrath
Cometh
11:50 Men In Black 3
13:50 Fahrenheit 451
15:40 Twister
18:00 Judge Dredd
19:50 Gone In Sixty Seconds
22:00 The A-Team



00:00 The Lodgers
01:40 It Comes At Night
03:20 Hollow In The Land
05:00 Real Women Have Curves
06:30 Where Angels Fear To
Tread
08:30 The Wrong Nanny
10:00 The Wedding Stalker
11:30 Murder, She Baked: A
Deadly Recipe
13:00 Deadly Expose
14:30 Game Change
16:30 That Good Night
18:05 Wonder
20:00 Twilight
22:05 Single White Female



00:45 My Favorite Martian
02:30 The Lion King 2: Simba's
Pride
04:15 Mighty Joe Young
06:15 My Favorite Martian
08:00 George Of The Jungle
09:35 Finding Nemo
11:35 Mighty Joe Young
13:35 Finding Dory
15:25 Peter Pan: Return To Nev-
erland
17:00 Bedtime Stories
19:00 The Rookie
21:15 George Of The Jungle
22:50 Finding Dory



01:30 6 Days
03:10 Searching
04:55 The Wizard Of Lies
07:10 A-X-L
08:55 Getting Grace
10:45 Goosebumps 2: Haunted
Halloween
12:15 Penguins
13:30 White Fang
15:00 Ugly Dolls
16:30 Mortal Engines
18:40 Venom
21:00 Daisy Winters
22:40 Tully



00:35 Honey Honey Bear
02:05 Nur And The Dragon's
Temple
03:15 Victor And The Secret Of
Crocodile Mansion
04:55 Treasure Hounds
06:30 Pacific Pirates
08:00 Zodiac: The Race Begins
09:35 Hocus Pocus Alfie Atkins
10:50 Boonie Bears & The
Hunters
12:20 Honey Honey Bear
14:00 Kurt Turns Evil
15:20 Zodiac: The Race Begins

16:55 Doctor Proctor Bubble In
The Bathtub
18:35 Legend Of The Sea
20:00 Hocus Pocus Alfie Atkins
21:15 Kurt Turns Evil
22:35 Boonie Bears & The
Hunters



00:00 Destiny Turns On The
Radio
01:45 The Producers
04:05 Final Recipe
06:00 The Beautician And The
Beast
07:55 Shrek Forever After
09:30 Rushmore
11:10 Of Mice And Men
13:05 House Arrest
15:00 Nacho Libre
16:35 Annie
18:40 Think Like A Man Too
20:30 Gringo
22:25 American Made



00:30 The Internship
02:25 Ace Ventura: When Nature
Calls
04:00 Spotlight
04:05 Spotlight
04:10 Hollywood On Set 3
04:40 Hollywood On Set 3
05:05 Spotlight
05:10 Spotlight
05:15 Spotlight
05:20 Hollywood On Set 3
05:45 Hollywood On Set 3
06:15 Spotlight
06:20 Hollywood On Set 3
06:50 A Bundle Of Trouble: An
Aurora Teagarden Mystery
08:20 Last Scene Alive: An Au-
rora Teagarden Mystery
09:50 Clue
11:30 Spotlight
11:35 Angus Thongs And Perfect
Snogging
13:15 Three Wishes
15:10 Boys And Girls
16:40 The Internship
18:35 Push
20:25 The Fountain
22:00 Rounders



00:38 Ordinary Decent Criminal
02:10 Gangs Of New York
05:00 Spy Kids
06:40 Rust And Bone
08:45 The Zero Theorem
10:40 Ordinary Decent Criminal
12:10 The Assignment
13:50 Ceremony
15:15 Our Kind Of Traitor
17:00 Closed Circuit
18:35 Spy Kids
20:00 The Sea Of Trees
21:47 The Games Maker
23:40 Promised Land



00:00 The Daily Show With
Trevor Noah
00:30 Impractical Jokers
00:53 50 Central
01:15 Comedy Central Presents:
Menna W FINA
01:45 Inside Amy Schumer
02:10 Friends
02:32 Friends
02:55 Lip Sync Battle
03:20 Comedy Central Presents:
Menna W FINA
03:50 Inside Amy Schumer
04:13 The Daily Show With
Trevor Noah
04:40 Lip Sync Battle

05:00 Friends
07:10 Impractical Jokers
08:55 Takeshis Castle Indonesia
11:05 Friends
11:30 Friends
11:55 Friends
12:20 Friends
12:45 Friends
13:10 Workaholics
15:15 Comedy Central Presents:
Menna W FINA
17:20 Friends
19:30 Martha And Snoop Potluck
Party Challenge
20:00 The New Negros
20:30 50 Central
22:00 The Daily Show With
Trevor Noah
22:30 Jeff Ross Roast Criminals
Live From Brazos Jail
23:30 Alternatino



00:00 E! True Hollywood Story
02:00 Nightly Pop
03:00 Hollywood Medium With
Tyler Henry
05:00 Revenge Body With Khloe
Kardashian
07:00 E! News
08:00 Pop Of The Morning
08:55 E! News: Daily Pop
09:50 Hollywood Medium With
Tyler Henry
10:45 Keeping Up With The Kar-
dashians
12:35 E! News
13:30 Pop Of The Morning
14:25 E! News: Daily Pop
15:20 Keeping Up With The Kar-
dashians
16:15 Revenge Body With Khloe
Kardashian
17:10 Revenge Body With Khloe
Kardashian
18:05 Very Cavallari
21:00 Revenge Body With Khloe
Kardashian
23:00 Nightly Pop



00:20 The Alec Baldwin Show
01:10 Grown-Ish
02:10 Ramy
03:10 Curb Your Enthusiasm
03:40 Late Night With Seth Meyers
04:25 The Tonight Show Starring
Jimmy Fallon
05:15 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
06:15 Ally McBeal
07:15 Late Night With Seth Meyers
08:15 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
09:15 The Tonight Show Starring
Jimmy Fallon
10:15 Bless This Mess
10:45 Last Man Standing
11:15 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
12:15 Ally McBeal
13:15 The Alec Baldwin Show
14:15 Grown-Ish
14:45 Grown-Ish
15:15 Bless This Mess
15:40 Last Man Standing
16:05 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
17:00 Ally McBeal
18:00 The Alec Baldwin Show
19:00 Grown-Ish
20:00 Mixed-Ish
20:30 Black-ish
21:00 The Tonight Show Starring
Jimmy Fallon
22:00 Ramy
23:05 Curb Your Enthusiasm
23:40 Late Night With Seth Meyers



00:30 Magnum P.I.
01:20 Stumptown
02:05 Warrior
03:00 Star
03:45 S.W.A.T.
04:30 Siren
05:20 Good Morning America

07:00 The View
08:00 S.W.A.T.
08:50 Stumptown
09:40 Chicago P.D.
10:30 Emergence
11:20 Magnum P.I.
12:10 Siren
13:00 The View
14:00 S.W.A.T.
15:00 Live Good Morning Amer-
ica
17:00 Marvel's Cloak & Dagger
17:45 Queen Sugar
18:30 DC's Legends Of Tomor-
row
19:20 Criminal Minds
20:10 The Resident
21:00 9-1-1
22:00 The New Pope
23:00 Star
23:50 Criminal Minds



00:00 Grand Designs New
Zealand
01:00 Beyond The Beaten Path
02:00 Anthony Bourdain: Parts
Unknown
03:00 My Retreat
03:30 My Retreat
04:00 Top Million Dollar Agent
04:30 Top Million Dollar Agent
05:00 Next Stop
05:30 Next Stop
06:00 Grand Designs New
Zealand
07:00 A Taste Of Travel
07:30 Gino's Italian Escape
08:00 Beyond The Beaten Path
09:00 Anthony Bourdain: Parts
Unknown
10:00 Grand Designs New
Zealand
11:00 Top Million Dollar Agent
11:30 Top Million Dollar Agent
12:00 Next Stop
12:30 Next Stop
13:00 Travel Time With Linda
13:30 Travel Time With Linda
14:00 The Renovation King
14:30 The Renovation King
15:00 Beyond The Beaten Path
16:00 Anthony Bourdain: Parts
Unknown
17:00 Rustic Adventures: Italy
17:30 Rustic Adventures: Italy
18:00 My Greek Odyssey
19:00 Crazy Beautiful Weddings
19:30 Crazy Beautiful Weddings
20:00 The Apartment
21:00 Best Laid Plans
22:00 Rustic Adventures: Italy
22:30 Rustic Adventures: Italy
23:00 My Greek Odyssey



00:00 The First 48
01:00 Homicide Hunter
02:00 PD Cam
02:50 Ghost Hunters
03:40 It Takes A Killer
04:25 Live PD: Police Patrol
05:10 The First 48
05:50 Homicide Hunter
06:35 Homicide: Hours To Kill
07:25 It Takes A Killer
08:00 Live PD: Police Patrol
08:25 Homicide Hunter
09:10 Homicide Hunter
09:55 The First 48
10:45 The First 48
11:40 Homicide: Hours To Kill
12:35 The First 48
13:30 Crimes That Shook Britain
14:25 Live PD: Police Patrol
14:55 Live PD: Police Patrol
15:25 It Takes A Killer
15:55 It Takes A Killer
16:20 Homicide Hunter
17:15 The First 48
18:10 Homicide: Hours To Kill
19:10 Live PD: Police Patrol
19:40 Live PD: Police Patrol
20:05 It Takes A Killer
20:35 It Takes A Killer
21:05 The First 48
22:00 Homicide Hunter
23:00 Live PD Presents: Women
On Patrol



00:00 People Magazine Investi-
gates
01:00 Betrayed
02:00 Shattered
03:00 The Murder Tapes
05:30 Reasonable Doubt
06:20 Nightmare Next Door
07:10 Who Killed Jane Doe?
08:00 Shadow Of Doubt
08:55 Shadow Of Doubt
09:50 Scene Of The Crime With
Tony Harris
10:45 Scene Of The Crime With
Tony Harris
11:40 Nightmare Next Door
12:35 Reasonable Doubt
14:25 What Lies Beneath
15:20 Pandora's Box: Unleashing
Evil
17:10 Nightmare Next Door
18:05 Never Say Goodbye
20:00 Murder Loves Company
23:00 Dead Silent



01:05 Ripley's Believe It Or Not!
01:50 Savage Builds
02:35 Salvage Hunters
03:20 Diesel Brothers
04:50 How Do They Do It?
05:35 Garage Gold
06:00 Salvage Dawgs
06:20 Garage Gold
06:45 Ultimate Survival
07:35 Wheeler Dealers
08:20 Gold Rush
09:10 Alaska: The Last Frontier
09:55 Salvage Hunters
10:45 How Do They Do It?
11:30 Diesel Brothers
13:05 Salvage Dawgs
13:30 Garage Gold
13:55 Salvage Hunters
14:40 Alaska: The Last Frontier
15:30 Ed Stafford: Left For Dead
16:15 Unique Rides
17:05 Alaska: The Last Frontier
17:50 Gold Rush
18:40 How Do They Do It?
19:25 Diesel Brothers
21:00 Wheeler Dealers
21:50 Unique Rides
22:40 Mighty Truckers
23:30 Deadliest Catch



00:30 Rome: Rise & Fall Of An
Empire
01:15 Patton 360
02:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
02:45 Evolve
03:30 The Lost Evidence
04:15 Cities Of The Underworld
05:00 Ancient Aliens
05:45 Deep Sea Salvage
06:30 Battles BC
07:15 Rome: Rise & Fall Of An
Empire
08:00 Evolve
08:45 The Lost Evidence
09:30 Cities Of The Underworld
10:15 Ancient Aliens
11:00 Deep Sea Salvage
11:45 Battles BC
12:30 Rome: Rise & Fall Of An
Empire
13:15 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
14:00 Evolve
14:45 The Lost Evidence
15:30 Cities Of The Underworld
16:15 Ancient Aliens
17:00 Deep Sea Salvage
17:45 Battles BC
18:30 Rome: Rise & Fall Of An
Empire
19:15 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
20:00 Evolve
20:45 The Lost Evidence
21:30 Cities Of The Underworld
22:15 Ancient Aliens
23:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
23:45 Battles BC



00:10 Evermoor Chronicles
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Alex & Co.
01:25 Alex & Co.
01:50 Evermoor Chronicles
02:40 Alex & Co.
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Evermoor Chronicles
04:45 Alex & Co.
05:35 Violetta
06:25 Binny And The Ghost
06:45 Rolling With The Ronks
07:00 Shake It Up
07:25 Raven's Home
07:50 Disney Mickey Mouse
07:55 Stuck In The Middle
08:45 K.C. Undercover
09:10 Bizaardvark
09:35 Jessie
10:25 Miraculous Tales Of Lady-
bug & Cat Noir
11:15 Bizaardvark
11:40 Bizaardvark
12:05 Liv And Maddie
12:55 K.C. Undercover
13:45 Bunk'd
14:10 Miraculous Tales Of Lady-
bug & Cat Noir
14:35 Miraculous Tales Of Lady-
bug & Cat Noir
15:00 Shake It Up
15:50 A.N.T. Farm
16:40 Bizaardvark
17:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
17:10 Amphibia
17:35 Miraculous Tales Of Lady-
bug & Cat Noir
18:00 Raven's Home
18:25 Coop And Cami Ask The
World
18:50 Sydney To The Max
19:15 Stuck In The Middle
20:05 K.C. Undercover
20:30 Shake It Up
21:20 Liv And Maddie
22:10 Jessie
22:35 Jessie
23:00 Miraculous Tales Of Lady-
bug & Cat Noir
23:50 Lolirock



00:12 Breadwinners
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Rabbids Invasion
01:24 Sanjay And Craig
01:48 Sanjay And Craig
02:12 Winx Club
02:36 Winx Club
03:00 Regal Academy
03:24 Regal Academy
03:48 Rabbids Invasion
04:12 Rabbids Invasion
04:36 Breadwinners
05:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
05:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
05:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Tur-
tles
06:12 The Loud House
06:36 Motu Patlu
07:00 Motu Patlu
07:24 Chop Chop Ninja
07:36 Chop Chop Ninja
07:48 Winx Club
08:12 44 Cats
08:24 44 Cats
08:36 I Am Frankie
09:00 Henry Danger
09:24 The Bureau Of Magical
Things
09:48 Game Shakers
10:12 School Of Rock
10:36 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky And
Dawn
11:00 The Thundermans
11:24 The Thundermans
11:48 The Thundermans
12:12 The Thundermans
12:36 The Thundermans
13:00 All That
13:24 All That
13:48 All That
14:12 All That
14:36 All That
15:00 44 Cats

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

As the sun moves into Aquarius and your social zone on Monday for a four-week stay, it encourages you to enjoy mixing and mingling. Although there is still a powerful focus on your sector of career, and you may be still in the process of working through key issues, it's time to give yourself a break. Besides, the people you connect with on the social scene could be extremely helpful in furthering your goals and ambitions. Go easy around midweek, especially if someone encourages you to buy a membership to a club or gym, because it could be rather expensive. Check before you commit. Listen to your gut on Thursday. If you get an intuition to call someone, follow through. It could be worth your while. Are you ready for a fresh start? The new moon on Friday, again in your social sector, could see you committing to a community project or moving in new circles.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

It's your turn in the spotlight with the sun moving into your sector of career and ambition on Monday for a four-week stay. This is a chance to take stock and set your priorities. What do you want to accomplish? Having clear goals can be half the battle, and persevering despite obstacles can see you doing very well. If you're ready for a new beginning, this week's new moon can help. This week can also have a romantic quality, because lovely Venus links with jovial Jupiter on Thursday and angles toward feisty Mars on Sunday. Ready for a date? Thursday can be warm and delightful, especially if you're hoping to get closer to someone for the first time. But the atmosphere can be just about perfect for any social event. The weekend is a tad different, though, as an awkward angle suggests an attraction of opposites.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

With the sun moving into your sector of far horizons on Monday, this week could see you ready for travel adventures. The coming four weeks are a chance to enjoy a short trip or even an early vacation. But this is also a time when you may be reaching out for more in terms of opportunities and experiences. You might also feel restless and eager to ditch your regular routines and do something different. Resist the urge to act on impulse, though. Planning ahead is the better way. There is still a focus on an intense zone. And while you may still be dealing with key issues, a lightness and buoyancy can help you handle this with greater ease. Are you thinking of pooling resources with someone? A delightful Venus-Jupiter connection could see you linking up and making plans. If you do go ahead, it could be a worthwhile venture.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

The emphasis on your sector of shared resources could encourage you to take stock of financial matters and think about how you might improve on them. And with a new moon this week, this can be the ideal time for a fresh start, whether you want to consolidate debts or get your money working harder for you in general. Even so, it might be tempting to splurge when you're with friends, especially midweek. Give yourself a limit if you can. Regarding relationships, a positive Venus connection midweek may be perfect for an outing with a friend or breaking the ice regarding a budding romance. This lively connection could see you enjoying each other's company more frequently.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

The sun glides into your relationship sector on Monday to light up this area and bring more opportunities for socializing and generally enjoying life. While you may still be busy getting out and about, this influence can help you relax and be just the tonic you need. And with the new moon in this same zone on Friday, this is a perfect opportunity to kick-start a romantic bond. Are you ready to break the ice? If so, this is the time to go for it. Pleasure options could tempt you as feisty Mars continues its journey through your leisure zone. With Venus angling toward Mars over the weekend, you might be tempted by someone who has a mysterious quality. Would you get along? Perhaps the only way to find out is to go on a date.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

After an intense focus on your sector of creativity, things could feel a little easier in this sector. And while you may be continuing to process through a key issue, there could be signs of progress that give you confidence and spur you on. Lifestyle issues may be more emphasized this week as the radiant sun enters this zone for four weeks. It joins Mercury, which could inspire you to take a closer look at your routines and consider which ones are working and which aren't. This is your chance to experiment with various ways of doing things. For instance, if you're eager to diet or exercise, try different options so you can settle on those that suit you best. The new moon in this sector on Friday is perfect for initiating new habits and letting go of those that no longer serve your best interests. There is also a pleasantly romantic transit on Thursday that could see you and another enjoying a wonderful date.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

If past weeks have been a little intense, the focus on your leisure zone could be just the tonic. You really deserve to get out and enjoy life and indulge in those things that recharge you. Even so, midweek could be a tad disruptive as a restless sun-Uranus angle suggests an event may not go ahead as planned. Be flexible and you'll find something else to take its place. Luscious Venus angles toward jovial Jupiter on Thursday, so you may be in the mood to entertain at your place. If so, this could be quite the occasion. Whether you invite friends, work colleagues, or both, this is one of those events that you might be eager to repeat. If you're in the mood for romance, there are options, and one of them could take you by surprise. With lovely Venus angling toward feisty Mars, you could fall for someone who has a very different personality than you. Even so, it could work.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You've likely had a hectic few weeks, and with the sun moving into your domestic sector, it's time to step back from life. This can give you a chance to reflect on all that's happened and come to some conclusions. It's also a chance to enjoy some self-care and nurturing and spend time with your nearest and dearest. If you've felt misunderstood for any reason, particularly after the intense Saturn-Pluto transit, this homey energy can soothe and heal. A delightful Venus-Jupiter connection on Thursday will linger for a day or so and could see you getting on well with someone. This open-minded person is likely very compassionate and sensitive, and you may feel you can talk to them about anything. Could there be romantic potential here? Yes. Are you ready to make a few changes? The new moon on Friday is the perfect time to kick-start any household or family projects.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

While financial issues may still be on your mind, the presence of upbeat Jupiter can assist by connecting you with the right people and advice. However, there is a positive focus on your sector of communication with the sun moving in on Monday and joining chatty Mercury. This can be helpful for negotiating and sorting out issues and finding a compromise. Still, it helps to be careful midweek because there could be some disruption to your plans. With a little flexibility, you can work around this. A delightful tie between creative Venus and jovial Jupiter on Thursday could inspire you to purchase something for the home. If you have a penchant for vintage items, you could pick up the perfect piece. The new moon on Friday can be excellent for closing deals, signing contracts, or launching a website or blog.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You enjoy a few treats, and with the sun and thoughtful Mercury in your money zone, this is the time to go in search of a bargain. The sun's presence in your financial sector as of Monday can shine the light of awareness on money matters. This can be a call to take stock and sort out anything that's bothering you. If you're ready to commit to a budget or new financial habits, the new moon on Friday is the perfect time to do so. Even so, avoid splurging midweek, because you could regret an impulsive buy almost immediately. Your social life looks positive this week, with an endearing Venus-Jupiter tie encouraging you to attend an event that you might enjoy very much. Whether you're spoken for or solo, it could bring a golden opportunity your way. Finally, chatty Mercury's tie to feisty Mars on Saturday can be a call to listen to your gut when choosing a new gadget or other key purchase.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

With the sun easing into your sign on Monday after spending some time in a more private zone, you could feel back in control. Your vitality and confidence can increase, and this can leave you more upbeat, especially if events have left you a tad drained over recent weeks. This is your opportunity to indulge in those things that have personal meaning for you. And if others accuse you of being selfish, don't listen to them. Focus on those people, projects, and situations that bring you the most happiness and you won't go wrong. Are you ready for a new beginning? The new moon in your sign on Friday is the best of the year for you. It's a chance to write down your intentions. No matter how big and bold they are, the act of getting them down on paper and reading through them daily can see some of them materializing at a future date. Articulate Mercury's move into your sign on Thursday is perfect for talking things over and getting advice. Restless energies over the weekend could see you eager for some excitement.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You are entering a phase this week when the cosmos encourages you to slow down and make time for reflection. This is an opportunity to clear away emotional baggage, tie up loose ends, and find closure on situations that have been dragging on for too long. And if you need a chance to rest, this is the ideal time to do so. There's a new moon in this same sector on Friday, making this a chance to take up a spiritual practice such as meditation, yoga, or anything else that can help bring you peace of mind. If you're ready to keep a dream journal or use journaling as a daily practice to unblock the creative flow, this is the best time to begin. Someone may have romantic designs on you this week. When luscious Venus in your sign angles toward expansive Jupiter, you might be asked out on a date. Go for it. You could have a wonderful time.

Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Jordan	00962
Albania	00355	Kazakhstan	007
Algeria	00213	Kenya	00254
Andorra	00376	Kiribati	00686
Angola	00244	Kuwait	00965
Anguilla	001264	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Antiga	001268	Laos	00856
Argentina	0054	Latvia	00371
Armenia	00374	Lebanon	00961
Australia	0061	Liberia	00231
Austria	0043	Libya	00218
Bahamas	001242	Lithuania	00370
Bahrain	00973	Luxembourg	00352
Bangladesh	00880	Macau	00853
Barbados	001246	Macedonia	00389
Belarus	00375	Madagascar	00261
Belgium	0032	Majorca	0034
Belize	00501	Malawi	00265
Benin	00229	Malaysia	0060
Bermuda	001441	Maldives	00960
Bhutan	00975	Mali	00223
Bolivia	00591	Malta	00356
Bosnia	00387	Marshall Islands	00692
Botswana	00267	Martinique	00596
Brazil	0055	Mauritania	00222
Bruncei	00673	Mauritius	00230
Bulgaria	00359	Mayotte	00269
Burkina	00226	Mexico	0052
Burundi	00257	Micronesia	00691
Cambodia	00855	Moldova	00373
Cameroon	00237	Monaco	00377
Canada	001	Mongolia	00976
Cape Verde	00238	Montserrat	001664
Cayman Islands	001345	Morocco	00212
Central African Republic	00236	Mozambique	00258
Chad	00235	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Chile	0056	Namibia	00264
China	0086	Nepal	00977
Colombia	0057	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Comoros	00269	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Congo	00242	New Caledonia	00687
Cook Islands	00682	New Zealand	0064
Costa Rica	00506	Nicaragua	00505
Croatia	00385	Nigar	00227
Cuba	0053	Nigeria	00234
Cyprus	00357	Niue	00683
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Norfolk Island	00672
Czech Republic	00420	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
Denmark	0045	North Korea	00850
Diego Garcia	00246	Norway	0047
Djibouti	00253	Oman	00968
Dominica	001767	Pakistan	0092
Dominican Republic	001809	Palau	00680
Ecuador	00593	Panama	00507
Egypt	0020	Papua New Guinea	00675
El Salvador	00503	Paraguay	00595
England (UK)	0044	Peru	0051
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Philippines	0063
Eritrea	00291	Poland	0048
Estonia	00372	Portugal	00351
Ethiopia	00251	Puerto Rico	001787
Falkland Islands	00500	Qatar	00974
Faroe Islands	00298	Romania	0040
Fiji	00679	Russian Federation	007
Finland	00358	Rwanda	00250
France	0033	Saint Helena	00290
French Guiana	00594	Saint Kitts	001869
French Polynesia	00689	Saint Lucia	001758
Gabon	00241	Saint Pierre	00508
Gambia	00220	Saint Vincent	001784
Georgia	00995	Samoa US	00684
Germany	0049	Samoa West	00685
Ghana	00233	San Marino	00378
Gibraltar	00350	Sao Tome	00239
Greece	0030	Saudi Arabia	00966
Greenland	00299	Scotland (UK)	0044
Grenad	001473	Senegal	00221
Guadeloupe	00590	Seychelles	00284
Guam	001671	Sierra Leone	00232
Guatemala	00502	Singapore	0065
Guinea	00224	Slovakia	00421
Guyana	00592	Slovenia	00386
Haiti	00509	Solomon Islands	00677
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Somalia	00252
Honduras	00504	South Africa	0027
Hong Kong	00852	South Korea	0082
Hungary	0036	Spain	0034
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Sri Lanka	0094
Iceland	00354	Sudan	00249
India	0091	Suriname	00597
Indian Ocean	00873	Swaziland	00268
Indonesia	0062	Sweden	0046
Iran	0098	Switzerland	0041
Iraq	00964	Syria	00963
Ireland	00353	Taiwan	00886
Italy	0039	Tanzania	00255
Ivory Coast	00225	Thailand	0066
Jamaica	001876	Toga	00228
Japan	0081	Tonga	00676

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

Friday, January 24, 2020

DR. MOHAMMAD AL HAJRY
Canadian Board of Otolaryngology
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics.
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
A rare Subspecialty in Microscopic Ear Surgery, Cochlear implant & Ear diseases

- ◆ Diagnosis/ Treatment of General Ears, Nose, and Throat conditions in adults & pediatrics
- ◆ Minimally Invasive Endoscopic sinus surgery including Balloon sinuplasty
- ◆ Minimally Invasive Microscopic Endoscopic Ear surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of Otolaryngology and Audiology (Hearing loss, Tinnitus & balance disorders)
- ◆ Facial Plastic and reconstructive surgeries (Rhinoplasty, Otoplasty, Fillers & Botox injections)
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of snoring & obstructive sleep apnea in clinic without surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of voice and swallowing disorders.
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of Head and Neck benign & malignant tumors.

Salmiya, Belajat Street, Tel: 1881122

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DR. FAHAD S BUHAIMED
Consultant Cosmetic Dermatologist & Hair Transplant, NY

ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

- o Dermatology board certified.
- o Fellowship training program in cosmetic dermatology and hair transplant, New York, USA.
- o Member of American cosmetic dermatology society.
- o Referee reviewer of International journal of Dermatology.

SPECIALIZED IN:

- o Dermatology & Cosmetic Treatments.
- o Laser Treatments.
- o Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- o Body & Face Contouring.
- o Injectable Fillers & Botox.

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Tel.: (+965) 22060777.
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www.beautybeyond.com.kw

DR KHALED ALMERRI
Consultant Interventional Cardiology
Department: Heart & Vascular Center

Specialized in:

- 1-Diagnostic and therapeutic cardiac catheterization (Angiography and Angioplasty). Aortic valve implantation.
- 2- Diagnosis and treatment of coronary artery diseases
- 3- Diagnosis and treatment of heart failure, cardiomyopathies and valvular diseases.
- 4-Diagnosis and treatment of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- 5-Diagnosis and treatment of syncope, palpitations and cardiac arrhythmias.
- 6-Non-invasive diagnostic procedures echocardiography, exercise stress test, and 24 hour blood pressure and Holter monitoring

Know your Doctor
Otorhinolaryngology (E.N.T)
Dr Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj
ENT Specialist

- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship - Canada
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board Otolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery
- ◆ Member of the British Laryngological Association
- ◆ Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery
- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society

Specialized in:

- ◆ Management of benign and malignant vocal cord lesions.
- ◆ Vocal cord augmentation.
- ◆ Treatment of spasmodic dysphonia.
- ◆ Adenotonsillectomy using latest techniques.
- ◆ Thyroid surgery.
- ◆ Surgery for the deviated nasal septum.
- ◆ Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- ◆ Treatment of allergic rhinitis.
- ◆ Treatment of snoring.
- ◆ Treatment of vertigo.

Scope of Clinical Practice:

- ◆ General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- ◆ Single Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ VATS Procedure (Treatment of Pleural through Pleuroscopy)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon Insertion & Removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gynaecology & Abdominal Hernias Surgery
- ◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
- ◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
- ◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

- ◆ American Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo - Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo - Rectal Surgeon

daralshifa
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
Head of Cardiology department
at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

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Health & Science

Friday, January 24, 2020

NEUROLOGY & CLINICAL NEUROPHYSIOLOGY

These services include, but are not limited to, the below:

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- Epilepsy
- Parkinson's disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Dementia
- Alzheimer's disease
- Facial palsy
- Trigeminal neuralgia
- Tremors
- ALS
- Muscular dystrophy
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Myositis
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Myasthenia gravis
- Muscle weakness



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NEUROLOGY & CLINICAL NEUROPHYSIOLOGY



Dr. Abdullah Al Ajmi
Consultant Neurologist

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Opthalmology Services

Dr. Ahmed Hosni Abd Elhamid
Consultant

Dr. Rany Essam Mitwally
Senior Registrar

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Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency



Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED

Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

- Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- (IFSO) member .
- Faculty member of (BEST).
- Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

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

email: wbuhaimeed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228

Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

Classifieds

Friday, January 24, 2020

CHANGE OF NAME

I Ceeyantagath Mannangadian Ashraf, F/O Ahnaf Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan Ashraf residing at Ceeyam New House, Ayikara, Poovalap, Cannanore 17, Kerala, holder of Passport No: N1900966 issued at Kuwait on 19.08.2015 have changed my minor son's name as Given Name: Ahnaf Ashraf, Surname: Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan. **(C 5619)**

I Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan Ashraf, F/O Alameen Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan Ashraf residing at Ceeyam New House, Ayikara, Poovalap, Cannanore 17, Kerala, holder of Passport No: R2316678 issued at Kuwait on 26.03.2017 have changed my minor son's name as

Given Name: Alameen Ashraf, Surname: Ceeyantagath Mannangadiyan. **(C 5619)**
23-1-2020

I, Mohamed Zuhara (given name) Zuhara Mohamed Palathara (sur-name), holder of Indian Passport No. T1938866, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given name: Zuhara Mohamed and sur-name: Palathara. **(C 5618)**

I, Hussaini Shakir, Arwa holder of Indian Passport No. J3963226 issued at Embassy of India, Kuwait. I am a permanent resident of Dungerpur Rajasthan, India and presently residing in Kuwait hereby declare my given name is Arwa Hussaini and sur-name is Shakir. **(C 5490)**
21-1-2020

STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 6819 - 6817
Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw



Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY NIGHT: Very cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h and some high clouds will appear, with a chance for frost forming over some agriculture and desert areas

BY DAY: Rather cold with light variable wind to light to moderate south westerly wind, with speed of 08 - 30 km/h .

Hospitals

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

Clinics

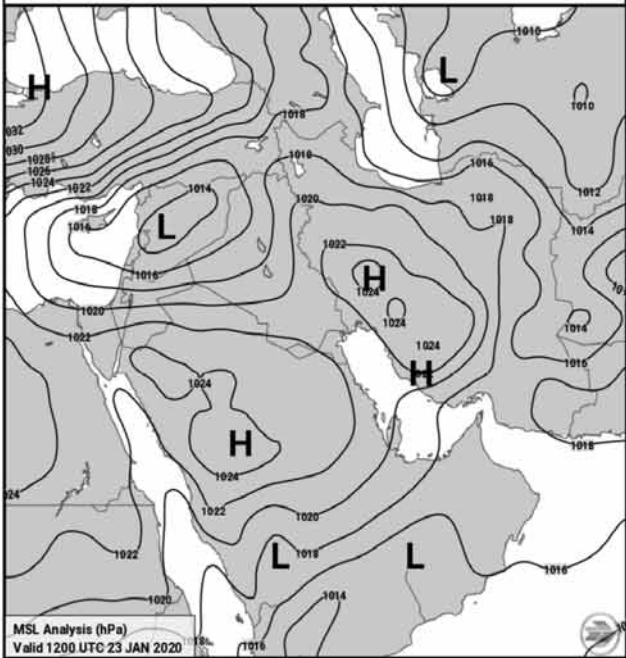
Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082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

WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.
KUWAIT CITY	17 °C	09 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	17 °C	04 °C
ABDALY	16 °C	04 °C
BUBYAN	16 °C	07 °C
JAHRA	17 °C	07 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	16 °C	11 °C
AHMADI	17 °C	09 °C
NUWAISIB	20 °C	09 °C
WAFRA	18 °C	04 °C
SALMY	15 °C	02 °C

SFC. CHART 23/01/2020 1200 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	01/24	Rather cold	18 °C	04 °C	VRB-SW	08 - 30 km/h
Saturday	01/25	Rather cold and Partly cloudy with a chance for blowing dust over open areas with a chance for	16 °C	06 °C	SE-NW	15 - 45 km/h
Sunday	01/26	Rather cold with a chance for rising dust over open areas	17 °C	05 °C	NW	20 - 50 km/h
Monday	01/27	Rather cold and some scattered clouds will appear, With a chance for frost forming over	17 °C	03 °C	NW	15 - 42 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:19
Sunrise	06:41
Zuhr	12:00
Asr	14:59
Sunset	17:19
Isha	18:39

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	21 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	80 %
MIN. RH	28 %
MAX. Wind	SW 60 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 2020

38 Investment-starved Ukraine plans 'nanny' for wealthy foreigners



40 Nigerian rice farmers fall short after borders close



41 ECB launches review of monetary policy tools, goals



DAVOS: International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva (left) and BlackRock Chair and CEO Laurence D. Fink attend a session at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, yesterday. —AFP

France, US set aside 'digital tax' row for now

Nearly 140 governments to launch tax talks Jan 29-30

DAVOS, Switzerland: France and the United States agreed yesterday how to press ahead with a global rewrite of cross-border tax rules for the digital era, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said. Le Maire said he and US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin had set aside a bilateral dispute over France's digital tax on big tech companies to focus on securing a broader global deal this year that would include a minimal corporate tax rate.

The two hammered out a series of written proposals for the first redrafting of international tax rules since the 1920s that will be put to 137 governments when discussions start next week at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. "We had long talks this morning with the US Treasury Secretary and the OECD Secretary General, and I am happy to announce to you that we have found an agreement between France and the United States, providing the basis for work on digital taxation at the OECD," Le Maire said at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos.

"It's good news, because it reduces the risk of American sanctions and opens up the prospect of an international solution on digital taxation," he added. Preparations led in part by France and the United States to launch the OECD talks had been eclipsed by their bilateral row with Washington threatening retaliatory tariffs against Paris' own national tax on big tech companies that book out-sized profits on

French income, despite a minimal physical presence.

US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron had discussed the issue in a phone call on Sunday. OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría has been working for years on finding ways to create a level playing field on digital taxation. Those efforts are now being accelerated to see if an agreement can be reached by December. Speaking on a panel at Davos with Le Maire, Gurría said he was hopeful of securing a draft framework by July. "We have no Plan B—we just have to get it done," he said.

Other countries including Italy and Britain are also pursuing or imposing their own national digital-tax regimes. Le Maire said it was preferable to have an international framework rather than a proliferation of national digital taxes. France has said it will scrap its own tax if an international accord can be reached. "So we have to build something different and that's exactly what we want to do during 2020."

France's existing digital tax is based on turnover. But Le Maire admitted that was not optimal from an economic point of view, saying the OECD's plan to tax profits was more sound. There will be intense discussion over what level of profit would be taxed and how it would be collected. After meeting Mnuchin, Le Maire said a US proposal that any deal be optional for companies was no longer on the table. —Reuters

Dubai's largest Islamic bank acquires smaller lender



DUBAI: Dubai Islamic Bank said yesterday it has completed the acquisition of Noor Bank to consolidate its position as the top Islamic lender in the United Arab Emirates. DIB said in a statement posted on Dubai bourse website the acquisition was carried out through a share swap after securing the necessary approvals from the regulatory authorities. The bank said the move raises its assets to \$75 billion, making it one of the biggest Islamic banks in the world, but it remains the fourth largest lender in the UAE behind three conventional banks.

"The acquisition of Noor Bank is a landmark achievement, establishing DIB as one of the largest Islamic banks in the world and amongst the largest banking entities in the UAE," chairman Mohammad Ibrahim Al-Shaibani said. CEO Adnan Chilwan said the acquisition will boost the UAE's position in the world of Islamic finance. "This acquisition will undoubtedly strengthen Dubai's role as a global hub for Islamic finance, allowing greater investment and growth in key sectors," Chilwan said. Islamic finance, based on banning interest rates, has been growing at a fast pace in Islamic countries. —AFP

Business

Investment-starved Ukraine plans 'nanny' for wealthy foreigners

FDI into Ukraine plummets since 2014 annexation of Crimea

DAVOS: Ukraine, battling a sharp decline in foreign investment, yesterday announced a novel plan to attract more cash inflows—a “nanny” to look after foreigners wary of putting their money in the country. Prime Minister Oleksiy Goncharuk told investors at the economic forum in Davos that such a nanny would be a multilingual point person within the government for big foreign investors ready to help with any issue.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) into Ukraine has plummeted since the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Moscow and the war with pro-Russian separatists in the east which led to the rapid pullout of Russian investors. “We are offering an investment nanny,” Goncharuk told a breakfast meeting of investors at the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF) organized by the Viktor Pinchuk Foundation.

“You will have this opportunity to have a specific individual in the government who will hear you,” he added. He pledged that the gov-

ernment of President Volodymyr Zelensky would “show the world that Ukraine is open to investment” notably by fighting corruption, which is regularly seen as the biggest scourge for the economy.

“There is no doubt that at the highest level there is no corruption,” he said. “But this is not enough.” Zelensky, who addressed the forum on Wednesday before heading on a visit to Israel, told investors in a special video message anyone who invests more than \$100 million in Ukraine would have such a personal “guardian” from the government.

“It is the state that will protect you. You will have a manager—an investment nanny—who speaks five languages and works with you 24/7,” said the president.

‘Miracles come true’

FDI to Ukraine dropped in 2018 to under \$2.4 billion, according to the UN’s trade agency, after registering over \$8 billion in 2012.



DAVOS: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky reacts during his special address at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos yesterday. — AFP

the premier offer to resign. Zelensky refused to accept the resignation of Goncharuk, saying he wanted to give the premier “a second chance” in the job after he offered to quit following a leaked recording emerged of him questioning the president’s grasp of economics. Repeatedly pressed over his intentions at the conference, Goncharuk insisted he had no plans to quit. “I am not planning to step down. We have wonderful relations within the team. “We will stay as long as we have trust,” he added. Zelensky, a former comedian and actor who in a hit show played the part of a teacher who unexpectedly became president, took office in May last year after winning a landslide election victory on pledges to reform the country and end the war in the east.

“We do not have sufficient investments,” Zelensky told the forum on Wednesday. “Ukraine is the place where miracles come true. Today we are under-invested and under-loved, so don’t miss out on Ukraine.” — AFP

Greece wants wriggle room on debt management

ATHENS: Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis yesterday said his country, recovering from a decade-long debt crisis, wanted more freedom to manage its annual primary surplus.

“If we overperform in one year, let it count towards the next year,” Mitsotakis said at the Davos economic forum. “We don’t have a smoothing mechanism for our primary surplus. So if we deliver a bigger primary surplus, as we will in 2019, there’s no way for me to carry it over to the next year.”

“It doesn’t make any sense whatsoever. Then my incentive is to spend it at the end of the year. That’s not serious fiscal policy,” Mitsotakis said. Under the terms of its final bailout, negotiated by the previous leftist government, Greece must produce a primary budget surplus of 3.5 percent of GDP until 2022 and of 2.2 percent of GDP on average to 2060.

Primary budget surpluses exclude government debt interest payments. In its latest budget, Athens forecasts a primary surplus of just over 3.5 percent of GDP in 2020. Elected in July on a ticket of tax cuts and growth, the conservative Mitsotakis has vowed to renegotiate the 3.5 percent target.

Athens is “on a good path to convince our creditors to relax our fiscal targets for 2021,” he said yesterday. Mitsotakis also insisted Thursday there was “no real issue” regarding Greece’s long-debated debt sustainability.

“We’re sitting on close to 40 billion (euros) on cash reserves,” he said, referring to a sum largely gathered by the previous government through high taxation believed to have contributed to their electoral loss. “Our debt may be high in objective terms but if you look at our repayment schedule until 2032 it’s extremely benign,” the PM said.

Greece aims to borrow between 4.0 and 8.0 billion euros (\$4.4-9 billion) in 2020, following a year that saw the country’s once-soaring credit rates drop into negative territory. The Greek public debt agency says the country’s total debt burden is expected to decrease from 181 percent of GDP (335 billion euros) in 2018 to 173 percent of GDP (329 billion) in 2019. — AFP



US dollar notes are seen in front of a stock graph in this picture illustration. — Reuters

Too good to be true? The best investment that never was

LONDON: Leading investors may well have been tempted by a startup prospectus offering a slice of a long-neglected sector that promises vast growth, low risks and healthy returns.

The catch?

“Unfounded Ltd” was not a real startup, but a company invented to throw light on the sorry state of investment in female entrepreneurs and the barriers women face to win funding.

The pitch was sent to 100 global venture capitalists by non-profit group H&M Foundation in an initiative launched yesterday to encourage funders to back women in business. “Unfounded Ltd is a tool to break the barriers that women entrepreneurs face in access to finance,” said Diana Amini, global manager of the H&M Foundation, founded by the owners of the Swedish fashion chain.

“By using the language of investors, we want to reach the in-

dividuals who make the judgment calls and write the cheques.” Women-owned companies perform better on average than those run by men, said the report, but often miss out on the money they need to grow.

Companies founded by women won 3 percent of venture capital funding in the United States last year, according to data cited by H&M. A recent United Nations report found 80 percent of female-owned firms in emerging markets struggle to get credit.

Surmounting sexism to invest more in women could boost the global economy by up to \$5 trillion – about the size of Japan’s economy, the Boston Consulting group said last year.

The report offers advice for investors and other financial businesses who it said are “uniquely positioned” to drive change – and also stand to benefit from businesses neglected by rivals. Key steps include training men to shed bias, hiring more women to make funding decisions, and making investors aware that female pitches may be less bombastic – and much more realistic. Funding women can also create a “domino effect” beyond work, said Reintje van Haeringen of humanitarian organization CARE, which works with the H&M Foundation to help women entrepreneurs. “Women are often seen to have a modest role in their families’ decision making and the business gives them the self-confidence and opportunity to grow,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. “With the increased income and that extra power, they start transforming their whole communities,” she said. — Reuters

Business

Friday, January 24, 2020

Mexico goes ghost as its oil hedge bill spirals

Experts question effectiveness of hedging strategy

MEXICO CITY/NEW YORK: Mexico is playing a risky game of hide and seek with the oil market. To frustrate speculators and contain an annual bill of more than \$1 billion, Mexico is going to new lengths to mask its attempts to insure its revenue from oil sales against falling prices - no mean feat for a hedging program known as Wall Street's biggest oil trade.

Getting the hedge right is crucial for Mexico as it offers stability at a time the government is planning to boost social welfare and security spending, the economy is stagnating and the country's credit-worthiness is under intense scrutiny. Once an enigmatic agreement between a handful of finance industry officials and Wall Street banks, the hedge is now the most anticipated deal in the oil futures market, making it harder, and more costly, for Mexico to arrange.

For its 2020 hedge, however, Mexico has adopted a different strategy than in previous years, according to a Wall Street source with direct knowledge of the deal.

This time, an estimated two-thirds of the options Mexico bought in financial markets were indexed to the international Brent crude benchmark, shifting away from the Maya oil Mexico mainly produces, according to the source. By using such a heavily traded contract as Brent, Mexico should have been able to cut costs by getting lower quotes for its trades and to place bets more unobtrusively to avoid prices shifting ahead of its moves, market sources said. But critics say the strategy creates new risks. By using international oil contracts based on a different kind of oil, the structure of the hedge may not fully reflect Mexico's export mix dominated by Maya, which is typically cheaper than Brent.

Sweet or sour

"I would expect a divergence of prices over the long term. This pressure on Maya could move prices down faster than its hedge. This would cause a loss on the physical sale of Maya

and minimal-to-possibly no benefit of the hedge," said Ryan Dusek, director at consulting firm Oppertune LLP based in Houston, who added that the trade could end up being "worthless." The Mexican finance ministry declined to comment on the structure of the hedge.

The Wall Street source said the proportion of Maya crude hedged for 2020 was significantly lower than in previous years. For the 2009 deal, for example, Barclays, Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley hedged 305 million barrels of crude using Maya and only 25 million with Brent, data obtained by Reuters through a freedom of information request showed.

The Wall Street source said for 2020, Mexico had bought put options on Brent on the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) at \$54-\$56 a barrel and hedged Maya at \$42.

Brent is trading at around \$63 a barrel while Maya's official selling price for deliveries to the U.S. Gulf Coast is about \$55, according to S&P Global Platts pricing data.

The options give Mexico the right to sell oil at the predetermined price, so if the actual market price is lower, the options pay out and make up the difference - acting effectively as an insurance policy.

But if the price of Maya, a heavy sour crude, falls faster than Brent, a light sweet crude - or Maya drops and Brent rises - Mexico could miss out on oil revenues without the hedge kicking in, analysts and market sources said. Mexico has had to contend with the potential divergence in Maya and Brent crude prices before but the risk is now greater as demand for heavy crudes globally is expected to slump.

Reuters was unable to determine whether Mexico has taken additional steps to bridge any gaps between Maya and Brent.

'Hacienda hedge'

Mere rumors of Mexico's "Hacienda hedge," which gets its name from the country's finance



MEXICO CITY: An employee works on at the Centenario deep-water oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Veracruz, Mexico.

ministry, can shift prices ahead of its anticipated deals and the government fears participants push up premiums when they suspect Mexico is about to trade. "Banks have become much better at accumulating information about it," said Victor Gomez, a former Mexican finance ministry official involved in the hedge until 2018.

In part due to this, the hedge's cost has increased 10-fold in peso terms since 2001, even though the number of barrels hedged has barely changed, the data obtained from the freedom of information request showed. Mexico spent the equivalent of \$212 million to hedge 200 million barrels in 2001 but in 2016, hedging 212 million barrels cost \$956 million. In 2017, Mexico stopped disclosing the number of barrels it has hedged.

Now, for the first time in at least 19 years, finance ministry officials have declined to reveal how much they're spending to protect 2020 revenue, saying the information would give speculators insight into their strategy and raise costs.

"What we don't want is that they identify the moments that Mexico goes to the market, because that raises the costs of the premium," Gabriel Yorio, one of the main architects of the hedge under President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who took office a year ago, told reporters this month.

The cost of the hedge has also risen because the peso has declined versus the US dollar and because options have become more expensive since many commodity-oriented funds, which were natural counterparties to the deal, have closed. Officials have also declined to say how much of the 1.73 million barrels a day it produces they're protecting, nor to what extent they're using put options or a budget stabilization fund to guarantee government revenue. — Reuters

US home sales surge to near two-year high

WASHINGTON: US home sales jumped to their highest level in nearly two years in December, the latest indication that lower mortgage rates are helping the housing market to regain its footing after hitting a soft patch in 2018, though record low inventory could be an obstacle to continued strong gains.

The report from the National Association of Realtors on Wednesday followed on the heels of government data last week showing homebuilding raced to a 13-year high in December. Renewed housing market momentum could soften some of the hit on the economy from manufacturing as the thaw in US-China trade tensions is offset by Boeing's suspension this month of production of its troubled 737 MAX plane.

"The previous weak link, housing, is coming back, but the current laggard, manufacturing, is slowing further," said Joel Naroff, chief economist at Naroff Economic Advisors in Holland, Pennsylvania. Existing home sales increased 3.6 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 5.54 million units last month, the highest level since February 2018, boosted by a surge in sales of multi-family housing units and gains in single-family home dwellings. November's sales pace was unrevised at 5.35 million units.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast existing home sales would increase 1.3 percent to a rate of 5.43 million units in December. Last month, existing home sales rose in the Northeast, West and the populous South. But sales fell in the Midwest. Existing home sales, which make up about 90 percent of US home sales, surged 10.0 percent on a year-on-year basis in December. For all of 2019, sales were unchanged at 5.34 million units.

The report helped to lift the PHILX housing index. Stocks on Wall Street were trading higher, also cheered by an upbeat forecast from IBM and China's efforts to contain a new flu-like virus outbreak.

The dollar was little changed against a basket of currencies, while US Treasury prices were mixed.

The housing market is being supported by cheaper mortgage rates after the Federal Reserve cut interest rates three times last year. The 30-year fixed mortgage rate has dropped to an average of 3.65 percent from its peak of 4.94 percent in November 2018, according to data from mortgage finance agency Freddie Mac. But the sector, which accounts for about 3.1 percent of gross domestic product, remains constrained by a lack of homes, especially in the lower-priced segment of the market, because of land and labor shortages.

The supply squeeze and resulting reacceleration in house price inflation could slow home sales this year. According to the NAR, there was a 14 percent drop from a year earlier in sales of houses priced \$100,000 and below.

"Still, with rising incomes, more households being formed, and low mortgage rates, demand for housing should remain robust to keep home sales activity at an elevated level - although likely

little changed from 2019," said Ben Ayers, senior economist at Nationwide in Columbus, Ohio.

Lift to GDP

December's increase in existing homes sales likely means more in brokers' commissions, which suggests that housing probably contributed to GDP growth again in the fourth quarter. Residential investment rebounded in the third quarter after contracting for six straight quarters, the longest such stretch since the 2007-2009 recession. The Atlanta Fed is forecasting GDP to rise at a 1.8 percent annualized rate in the fourth quarter. The economy grew at a 2.1 percent rate in the July-September period. The government will publish its snapshot of fourth-quarter GDP next Thursday. There were a record-low 1.40 million previously owned homes on the market in December, down 14.6 percent from November and 8.5 percent from a year ago. As a result, the median existing house price soared 7.8 percent from a year ago, the most since January 2016, to \$274,500 in December. House prices increased 4.8 percent in 2019. — Reuters

Business

Nigerian rice farmers fall short after borders close

Imported rice becomes more scarce as consumption grows

MAKURDI, Nigeria: Thomas Tyavwa Maji is planting rice on more of his land in Nigeria's Benue State than ever to take advantage of a surge in prices since the country shut its land borders in August.

But he says he cannot go much further. With no machinery or irrigation, limited manual labor and no spare cash for fertilizers, the 45-year-old is not expecting any dramatic change in his fortunes. "We work until we get exhausted, manually we get exhausted," said Maji, as a woman nearby beat hand-harvested stalks on the ground to separate the grains from the chaff. The constraints Maji faces have bedevilled many rice farmers and millers across Nigeria for years. Despite government measures designed to spur production, farmers in Nigeria get far less from their land than other major rice growers and the West African country is only marginally less reliant on imports.

That's a problem for a government that wants to grow all of its own food and boost the country's agriculture, a sector that accounts for nearly a third of gross domestic product in Africa's biggest economy. When he came to power in 2015, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari pledged to help the nation become self-sufficient in rice - once a luxury but now a staple for millions of Nigerians.

In 2015, Nigeria's central bank banned the use of its foreign exchange to pay for rice imports and has backed loans of at least 40 billion naira (\$130 million) to help small-holders boost output. It also banned rice imports across land borders and kept hefty 70 percent tariffs on imports coming through ports. In August last year, Nigeria went a step further and closed its land borders altogether to stamp out smuggling, often from neighboring Benin, with rice being one of the main targets.

Buhari's spokesman, Garba Shehu, said the measures boosted rice production to 9.2 million tons last year from 7.2 million in 2015, making Nigeria more or less self-sufficient, though traders can import rice through ports if they pay

the tariffs. Agricultural data specialist Gro Intelligence, however, put Nigeria's rice output at 4.9 million tons in 2019, up 60 percent from 2013 but well below local consumption of 7 million tons. The US Department of Agriculture, meanwhile, expects Nigeria's 2020 rice imports to rise 9 percent to 2.4 million tons, in part due to the high cost of unprocessed Nigerian paddy rice and elevated operating costs at mills.

In Lagos, Nigeria's biggest city, supermarket shelves remain stocked with a plethora of imported rice brands. In the markets where most Nigerians buy their food, sacks of Nigerian rice are piled high but imported rice is still available, even though some traders keep the foreign grain under wraps to prevent it being confiscated by customs agents.

Low yields

Small-scale farmers such as Maji account for 80 percent of Nigeria's rice production with a handful of large companies, such as Coscharis Group, Dangote and Olam, growing the rest, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In Benue state, virtually every aspect of Maji's farming manual, from planting to harvesting to levelling out roads to take the crop to market. It's a similar story on many Nigerian farms, leaving the average yield per hectare at just over 2 tons - half the global average and a fraction of Egypt's 9.5 tons a hectare, according to UN data. Experts say there is little hope of improvement without significant investment in irrigation, mechanization, roads and storage. More than 12 percent of rice is also wasted due to poor roads and inefficient harvesting, milling and storage, consultants KPMG said in a review of the Nigeria's rice industry.

In a good year, Maji makes about 1.5 million naira (\$4,900) - nowhere close to the 5 million, at least, a tractor would cost. Without irrigation, a goal so remote he doesn't even know the cost, he can only plant one crop a year. "At this scale, we will not even be able to fetch a tractor. Talk less of fertilizer and other chemicals," Maji said.



MAKURDI, Nigeria: With no machinery or irrigation, limited manual labor and no spare cash for fertilizers, Nigerian farmers are not expecting any dramatic change in their fortunes.

According to the FAO, less than 1 percent of Nigeria's farmland is irrigated, compared with a global average of more than 20 percent. Small- and medium-scale rice millers, who account for more than 80 percent of the local market, also say they're struggling to meet increased demand without proper equipment. At Wurukum Rice Mill in Makurdi, Iveren Asan works alongside her sister, using a loud diesel-powered generator to drive machinery processing paddy grains into consumable rice.

Nearby, rice grains that have been parboiled in vats heated by firewood dry on tarps. She said new buyers from across the country had surfaced since the border closures - but producing more would require significant investment in new machines and the higher prices were not enough on their own. "We can't meet the demand. We are doing the process manually, so we cannot meet the demand," she said.

More broadly, experts warned that extreme measures, such as border closures, taken in the name of food security were hurting Nigerians,

stunting the development of other industries and holding back foreign investment. "The border closure has been incredibly disruptive," said John Ashbourne, an economist at Capital Economics. "It stops industries from getting the imports they need, and it pushes up prices."

The border closure is set for review Jan. 31 but the presidency's Shehu said land frontiers would remain shut until Nigeria's neighbors stopped smuggling on their side - and there was "no sign of compliance yet". Ashbourne said even some farming has taken a hit from government policies.

After glass was added to a central bank list of items importers cannot buy with foreign exchange, some tomato paste plants shut because they couldn't source the jars they needed. On another farm in Benue State, Abraham Hon, 51, weaves through rows of melons and corn before reaching his rice, the crop that generates the most money. "The prices look pretty good," he said, as men cut stalks of rice by hand and laid them in piles on the ground. — Reuters

Chile CB hopeful of no recession, will prevent peso panic

LONDON: Chile's central bank will intervene forcefully if violent protests threaten its peso currency again, though it hopes the relative calm in recent weeks will be enough to keep the country out of recession, its deputy governor Joaquin Vial said. Vial told Reuters in an interview that Chile's most widespread protests since its return to democracy in 1990 had done serious damage to the economy.

He is hopeful though that it will not be worse than the central bank feared in December when it slashed its 2020 growth forecast

to a range of 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent from 2.75 percent to 3.75 percent previously.

"It looks to me that the estimate (for the economy) we made last quarter is very much in line with what happened," Vial said. Asked if there was still a risk of a "technical" recession, defined as back-to-back quarterly contractions in the economy, he added: "If you look at the chart we are probably going to avoid that because the worst figures were from October and November."

"December is going to be very bad also, but we have seen some normalization and the first quarter will most likely be somewhat better...But we have to see how fast confidence is going to restore."

The protests initially erupted in October after metro ticket prices were raised, but quickly escalated to subway stations being set alight and riots on the streets that left 26 dead and upwards of \$1.5 billion in

losses for businesses. Vial warned that March and April could get rough again, with more student protests expected and then a referendum on replacing Chile's dictatorship-era constitution. If tensions do flair again though the central bank is prepared after last year's troubles saw the peso plunge 15 percent.

Vial said it had looked like getting "out of control" at one point, but the central bank stepped in, putting \$10 billion of its roughly \$40 billion of currency reserves on the table to stem the rout.

It required a number of emergency meetings but it worked. It ended up using about \$2 billion of its reserves and the peso made back some ground, but the bank is still on alert. "We have signalled very clearly that we may intervene again in the foreign exchange market if there is disruption again."

At the same time, Vial stressed that the

central bank does not want to change the "trend" of the exchange rate. "Among other things we think this is part of the normal reaction to the new reality of the Chilean economy," he said referring to the sharp shock to growth. It could be argued that is should be lower, but "we don't feel uncomfortable with this level of the exchange rate," he added.

On interest rates, which did not change during the protests, there are opposing forces. The economy is under stress, but the sharp drop in the peso means inflation will soon be nearly 4 percent, well above the central bank's preferred level of 3 percent. "We don't feel the depreciation has created the pressure to raise rates," Vial said.

However, with the risk of more peso weakness if demonstrations become violent again, he added: "from my personal point of view, (a rate cut) is less likely that the opposite option." — Reuters

Business

ECB's Lagarde on the spot over economic risks, strategy rethink

Governors leave interest rates at historic lows, maintain quantitative easing

FRANKFURT AM, MAIN: European Central Bank chiefs left easy-money policy settings in place yesterday, leaving president Christine Lagarde to detail a rethink of its aims and methods and update her assessment of risks facing the eurozone. At their meeting in Frankfurt, governors left interest rates at historic lows and maintained “quantitative easing” (QE) bond-buying purchases, a spokesman said.

What's more “the governing council also decided to launch a review of the ECB's monetary policy strategy,” he added. At her first press conference as ECB chief last month, Lagarde vowed to “turn each and every stone” in the planned probe.

Slated to finish this year, the rethink is slated to look above all at the ECB's just-below-two-percent inflation goal and the tools the bank should use to achieve it. The institution's last stock-taking in 2003 took place several years before it intervened massively in inter-bank markets amid the global financial and economic crisis.

Observers will be on the lookout for information on the review and any small changes in language regarding economic risks, after several weeks of mostly positive political tailwinds for the economy. This year marks a new phase for her presidency, after its early months were spent smoothing divisions among policymakers that erupted under predecessor Mario Draghi.

Inflation goal

“The most important part of the review will be an assessment of the definition of price stability and how to reach it,” said economist

Carsten Brzeski of ING bank. For most of its active life, the ECB has aimed for inflation “close to, but below two percent” to fulfil its mandate to keep eurozone prices stable. But over the past seven years, it has failed to achieve that goal despite unprecedented policy experiments.

One option would be to simply target inflation “around” two percent. Such “symmetry” in the inflation target could mean the bank would not immediately hit the brakes once inflation approaches two percent, instead potentially allowing it to overshoot a bit. That “would allow the ECB to actually take it easy” and stick to its present negative interest rates for longer, Brzeski said. What's more, “such a clarification of the target would be helpful... to limit disagreement in the governing council,” added Goldman Sachs chief economist Alain Durre.

On top of the ECB's headline goal, the review could also tackle issues like making decisions more consensual, side effects of policy tools like bond-buying and negative rates, and how to take climate change into consideration. Lagarde has identified climate action as a new frontier for central banking, including via its bond-buying scheme and bank supervision role, while retaining price stability as the ECB's primary mandate.

Shifting risks

The ECB chief's judgment of risks facing the euro area will also be closely scrutinized. Lagarde suggested in December that dangers have become “less pronounced”, a nuance quickly picked up on by financial markets.

Since then, signs of clouds beginning to clear



BRUSSELS: (Left to right) Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank, EU commissioner-designate for Economy Italy's Paolo Gentiloni, German Federal Minister of Finance Olaf Scholz and Austria's Minister of Finance Gernot Blumel, speak during Ecofin meeting at the EU headquarter in Brussels on Tuesday. — AFP

over the global economy have multiplied, including prospects for an orderly British exit from the EU at the end of January. The International Monetary Fund — Lagarde's old patch — this week pointed to a “moderate pick-up in global growth” ahead, although “policy mis-

steps” could still derail it. And the US-China trade conflict, with its harmful knock-on effects on Europe, has been soothed for now by a new trade deal. On Wednesday however, President Donald Trump levelled new threats of car import taxes against the EU. — AFP

Brexit brings jobs boost for Germany

BERLIN: About two dozen British firms told German authorities in 2019 they plan to open offices in Germany and will create 680 new jobs, more than in the previous two years combined, the government's business marketing arm said yesterday.

Germany Trade and Invest (GTI) linked the increase to Britain's departure from the European Union on January 31, and said the number of planned new jobs may rise as some firms registered plans directly with Germany's 16 federal states. “We are witnessing a constant increase in the activity of British companies in Germany,” said GTI chief Robert Hermann.

Some companies were moving to Germany to skirt tariffs that could be imposed on British goods and services once Britain leaves the EU while others were attracted by favorable conditions, Hermann added. About a third were finance and business services companies, just under a third specialized in IT and some 40 percent were a mix that included engineering and consumer specialists. Britain's parliament has approved a divorce settlement with the EU, which includes a business-as-usual transition deal covering the period after Brexit Day on Jan. 31 until the end of December.

Hermann said British business leaders appear undeterred by Germany's weakening economy, whose export-oriented manufacturing sector is in recession. Germany is Britain's second-biggest export market after the United States. — Reuters

Can Lebanon's new govt revive the economy?

BEIRUT: After three months of political paralysis, Lebanon has finally formed a government under Prime Minister Hassan Diab. Now comes the task of saving the country from a biting financial crisis and winning over investors and foreign donors.

How likely is a debt default or restructuring?

Lebanon's public debt burden, equivalent to around 150 percent of GDP, and its twin current account and fiscal deficits looked unsustainable even before anti-government protesters took to the streets three months ago.

With many of the international sovereign bonds trading at less than half their face value, market observers see an increasing likelihood of Lebanon struggling to repay some of its obligations and seek a restructuring with creditors at some point.

One of the first tasks of the government will be to decide whether to proceed with a central bank proposal to ask local holders of some of this year's bonds, including a \$1.2 billion issue maturing in March, to swap them for longer-dated ones to ease pressure on state finances. Any move to delay bond repayments could constitute a default in the eyes of credit rating agencies and risk pushing its credit rating further into junk territory.

Is a currency devaluation a given?

The Lebanese pound's 22-year-old peg to the US dollar has

been strained to near breaking point by the country's political and banking crisis. With the pound losing roughly a third of its official value on the black market as dollars have dried up, a devaluation has loomed increasingly large. Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh has previously ruled out any such move, saying the government has the means to maintain the peg. But without a revival in sagging capital flows and a recovery in Lebanon's external balance sheet, the central bank's ability to defend the peg will diminish.

How can the banking system be revived?

Banks have long served as a vital cog in keeping Lebanon's economy moving. By taking deposits from Lebanon's millions of scattered diaspora and snapping up the government's local debt, banks helped prop up the state's finances. But that system has broken as foreign deposits dry up in the face of a collapse in confidence in the banking system. Non-resident private sector deposits in the banking sector fell by 11.3 percent on an annual basis in November, while Lebanon faces a hard currency shortage - leaving Lebanese at home and abroad with restricted access to their bank funds. Some financial experts believe banks will require a deeper injection of cash than the 20 percent of capital they've been told by the central bank to raise.

What about securing foreign financial support?

Lebanon is mired in recession and its recovery remains largely dependent on the government's ability to make reforms needed to secure international financial support. Lebanon needs a \$20 billion-\$25 billion bailout including International Monetary Fund support to emerge from its financial crisis, according to former economy minister Nasser Saidi. But assistance appears uncertain given Diab's support from the Iranian-backed Hezbollah and its allies. — Reuters

Sports

Under-fire weightlifting chief steps aside for corruption probe

Decision comes after board's 13-hour emergency meeting in Doha

DOHA: International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) president Tamas Ajan agreed late Wednesday to relinquish his duties for 90 days while an independent investigation into allegations of corruption and doping violations are carried out.

Ursula Papandrea, the president of USA Weightlifting, will take over veteran Ajan's role in an acting capacity until April, said an IWF statement issued late Wednesday in Doha after a 13-hour emergency meeting of the organization's executive board.

German broadcaster ARD alleged in a documentary earlier this month that a "culture of corruption" had been established in the Olympic sport with prominent weightlifters rarely subjected to drugs tests and cash being taken by doping controllers to accept manipulated urine samples.

The IWF executive board agreed to appoint independent experts to assess the allegations, a move it claimed would act "decisively" to restore the governing body's battered reputation. "This work is expected to be completed during a 90-day period, starting immediately," it said.

'Unjust attack'

Hungarian Ajan, 81, who has been at the IWF since 1976 serving 24 years as general secretary and the past 20 as president, claimed the documentary's allegations were unfounded. "They are not supported by the relevant documentation or by people involved in the relevant decisions," he was quoted as saying in the statement.

The IWF said analysis of the ARD allegations was considered at the meeting, fol-

lowed by "comprehensive discussions" and the decision to carry out "a detailed plan of action". "Consistent with the principle at the heart of the IWF's successful and widely-welcomed recent anti-doping reforms, the IWF will now convene a group of independent experts to assess the validity of the ARD allegations," the IWF said.

Papandrea will head a commission to identify experts in fields including anti-doping and financial reporting. "The experts will be appointed by the IWF executive board," said the statement and will report to the next IWF Congress in Bucharest in March.

The documentary by journalists at German broadcaster ARD including Hajo Sepelt, who broke the story on Russia's state doping scandal, claimed that half of the 450 world championship or Olympic medallists

between 2008 and 2017 were not asked to undertake any doping tests while a doctor for the Moldovan team was caught on hidden camera explaining how urine samples could be manipulated. Beyond doping, the report accused the IWF of transferring \$5 million in funding from the International Olympic Committee into two Swiss accounts overseen only by Ajan.

Ajan claimed he had been the victim of "an unjust attack" by ARD. "It should be stressed that yes, there are two bank accounts, but neither is secret," said Ajan in an interview with Hungarian TV. "This film has completely ruined my life and 50 years of my work. A large part of my work has been about doping prevention," he added. "That's why it was a blow to the gut for them to claim we had done nothing." —AFP

Spotlight on Williamson as India begin NZ tour

WELLINGTON: New Zealand will be looking to put their Test humiliation in Australia behind them when they switch formats today to start a five-match Twenty20 series against India with the spotlight on Kane Williamson's leadership.

The series launches a six-week tour by Virat Kohli's men with three one-day internationals and two Tests to follow. However, in a Twenty20 World Cup year it is form in cricket's shortest format that will command considerable attention.

India have just completed a successful three-match ODI series against Australia and Kohli's immediate concern on arriving in New Zealand was the tight schedule his side faced. "It's definitely getting closer and closer to landing at the stadium straight, that's how compressed the game has come," he said on the eve of the first match in Auckland before switching his attention to the plight of rival captain Williamson. There has been intense debate in New Zealand whether captaining the side in all three formats put too much pressure on the 29-year-old, the New Zealand batting talisman who had below par innings of 34, 14, nine and a duck against Australia last month.

Kohli, who also leads all three Indian sides, said leadership was not always determined by results. "It's also about how you can get the team together and get the guys functioning under you as well, which I think Kane has done wonderfully well," Kohli said. "He has the respect of his team-mates and he has the trust of his team-mates, is what I can see, and he's also a very, very smart cricketer."

Williamson, described by former New Zealand skipper Brendon McCullum as a "reluctant leader", said he was always open to doing what is best for the team. "I do feel fortunate to be leading such a great group of guys that share a similar passion, which is to keep moving this team forward," Williamson said. "If those (leadership) discussions are to eventuate and collectively there's a thought that it would be best for the team, then my stance is whatever is right and fits the group."

New Zealand head into the series with injuries in the pace bowling ranks and short of recent Twenty20 matches, but they do have the advantage of home wickets where they have excelled against India in recent years. —AFP

Pakistan seek to retain T20 top spot against Bangladesh

LAHORE: Pakistan are seeking to hold on to the top world ranking and also prove again the country is capable of hosting international cricket when they take on Bangladesh in a Twenty20 series starting today.

If the host team lose just one of the three matches scheduled they will slide to second behind England or India in the rankings after holding the top spot since January 2018. But they also want to show the security situation has improved enough for the team to start regularly hosting home internationals.

Following an attack in 2009 by Islamist militants on a convoy ferrying the Sri Lanka team to a fixture in Lahore, Pakistan became a wilderness for the national side who had to play home fixtures in the Middle East.

That ended in December when Sri Lanka returned to give Pakistan their first home series in a decade. The first priority for skipper Babar Azam is to stay top of the world in the shortest international version of the game.

"The focus is to continue the number one ranking," said Babar yesterday. "We can hang on to that only if we win all three matches, so it is a do-or-die situation and we have planned for that," he told a press conference.

Pakistan's rise started in 2016 under Sarfaraz



LAHORE: Bangladesh cricketers exercise at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore yesterday, ahead of the T20 cricket match of a three-match series between Pakistan and Bangladesh. —AFP

Ahmed as they won eleven consecutive Twenty20 series—before losing three on the trot. A poor finish in the 50-over World Cup in England, where they failed to reach the semi-finals, resulted in the sacking of Sarfaraz and head coach Mickey Arthur, to be replaced by Azam and Misbah-ul-Haq respectively.

The team remained in a slump in Australia late last year, losing 2-0 in the Twenty20s and by the same margin in two Tests. Now the selectors have recalled veterans Mohammad Hafeez and Shoaib

Malik, but they need all the experience they can get.

Bangladesh, who last toured Pakistan in 2008, are coming off the back of an impressive series in India, where they won one of their three matches. They also have a 2-1 advantage against Pakistan in the last three Twenty20 internationals.

"We have been good," said Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah. "We want to do well in Pakistan." Mahmudullah said security fears had been left behind in Bangladesh. "We feel good in Pakistan... so the focus will be on cricket." —AFP

Women's Cricket WCup 2021 to grace NZ Test grounds

WELLINGTON: Next year's Women's Cricket World Cup final will be played at Christchurch's Hagley Oval, it was announced yesterday, under-

scoring the growth of the game over the past two decades. When Christchurch previously hosted the women's final in 2000 it was played on a rural ground 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the city.

For the 2021 edition it will be played at an upgraded Hagley Oval, one of New Zealand's principal Test venues, which has recently received approval to erect lights to host night fixtures. The tournament opener will be at Auckland's Eden Park, which hosted the 1987 and 2011 Rugby World Cup

finals, with other matches to be played at cricket Test venues in Wellington, Hamilton, Tauranga and Dunedin. NZ captain Sophie Devine said the allocation of games to prominent Test grounds was a milestone for women's cricket. "Last time New Zealand hosted the World Cup in 2000 it was all out at Lincoln University, which is a great venue but the opportunity to... play at some of the best cricket grounds, not only in New Zealand but in the world, is a really special opportunity," she said. —AFP

Sports

Nadal, Kyrgios through as freak weather hits Australian Open

Zverev advances; Thiem taken to five sets before win

MELBOURNE: Rafael Nadal and Nick Kyrgios reached the Australian Open third round yesterday after the weather-disrupted tournament faced a new challenge: dirty rain which left courts muddy and unplayable.

After a day of clean-up operations and delays, Australia's Kyrgios fought his way past Frenchman Gilles Simon in four sets and Wimbledon champion Simona Halep stamped her class with a win over Britain's Harriet Dart.

Nadal, a 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 winner over Argentina's Federico Delbonis, miscued a shot that hit a ballgirl in the head, but he melted hearts when he apologized and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "I was so scared for her, honestly," the 19-time Grand Slam winner said. "The ball was quick and straight on the head. She's a very brave girl."

Kyrgios, increasingly popular with home fans after his fundraising efforts for Australia's bushfire crisis, was cruising at two sets up when he dropped the third set and with it, his composure. But just when it looked like he would suffer one of his trademark implosions, he rallied for a 6-2, 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 victory. "I definitely lost my way a little bit... but I decided to refocus," Kyrgios said of his mini-meltdown in the third set. "I could have gone to a very dark place in the fourth set but I put it away."

Kyrgios and Nadal stay on course for a fourth-round clash and the next installment in their grudge match after the Aussie hit back at criticism from the

"super salty" Spaniard last year. Their victories followed a day of upheaval caused by the dirty rain, the latest weather problem at a tournament which has contended with bushfire smoke, heavy downpours and strong wind. Rain mixed with a dust storm coated the Melbourne Park facilities in a fine layer of mud which took hours to clean and made many outside courts temporarily unusable.

'I was freaking out'

As action resumed Alexander Zverev, another man who has a running feud with Kyrgios, showed signs of a return to form as he downed Egor Gerasimov 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, 7-5. The German seventh seed has been practicing up to seven hours a day after a winless ATP Cup and the hard work paid off as he safely reached the third round. "Definitely much better than the ATP Cup. Now in the third round, I'm very happy about that," said the 22-year-old, who beat Italy's Marco Cecchinato in round one.

However, fifth seed Dominic Thiem had a scare as he was taken to five sets by Australia's 140th-ranked Alex Bolt before recovering his composure to win 6-2, 5-7, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 6-2. "It was all of a sudden a really tight third set that shouldn't happen. That's why I was freaking out inside and also outside today," said the two-time French Open finalist.

A nosebleed was one of Daniil Medvedev's



MELBOURNE: Spain's Rafael Nadal speaks with a ball kid who was hit by the ball during the men's singles match against Argentina's Federico Delbonis on day four of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

biggest challenges in his win over Spanish qualifier Pedro Martinez, while Gael Monfils, who injured his racquet hand playing computer games before the tournament, downed Ivo Karlovic.

In the women's draw Halep beat Dart 6-2, 6-4, while Belinda Bencic knocked out former French

Open champion Jelena Ostapenko — she was playing despite the sudden death of her father this month. Two-time Major winner Garbine Muguruza, who scaled Mount Kilimanjaro in the off-season as she searches for a return to form, dispatched home hope Ajla Tomljanovic 6-3, 3-6, 6-3. —KUNA

Asian Handball Championship semis start tomorrow

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Semifinals of the 19th Asian Handball Championship, which qualifies for the World Cup in Egypt 2021, are set to start tomorrow at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Hall in Sabah Al-Salem. Qatar and Japan already qualified, while the other two teams are yet to be decided. The winner of the match between South Korea and Iran will qualify, while the loser will take third place in Group B. Meanwhile, the match between Bahrain and UAE will decide who joins Japan in the semifinals from Group A, which was full of surprises. Bahrain, which qualified for the Olympics for Asia two months ago, lost to Japan, while Saudi Arabia suffered an unexpected loss to UAE.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's exit from the second round and failure to qualify for the World Cup was seen as a surprise given the players' abilities and history of achievements. The team's visible confusion in the final 10 minutes of their meeting with Iran wasted their chance to win, before they unexpectedly collapsed against South Korea and seemed to capitulate following the first half until the end.

No appeasements

Assistant Secretary General of Kuwait Handball Association Abdallah Al-Thiyab issued an apology to Kuwaiti fans for being knocked out of the tournament. "We wanted to make them happy by reaching the World Cup finals, but it was not meant to be," he said. Thiyab asserted that there



KUWAIT: Iraq attempts to score in their Asian Handball Championship match against New Zealand yesterday.

were not any "appeasement" made in selecting players to the national team. "Rather, we selected the best in Kuwaiti clubs, and there were some players who could not play for personal reasons," he explained.

"There were some negatives for sure, which we will study and (try to) avoid in the future," he said. "There was not any complacency on the players' part, rather all were up to their responsibility, but we did not succeed. I thank the players for their efforts in preparing for the tournament."

"Luck was against us"

Iraq's assistant coach Mahmoud Subhi expressed regret that his team failed to reach the World Cup, adding that the team prepared well and has good players, but luck was against them. Subhi predicts that Bahrain and



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

SPANISH LEAGUE PRIMERA

Osasuna v Levante 23:00
beIN Sports

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Brescia v AC Milan 22:45
beIN Sports

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

BV Borussia Dortmund v FC Koln 22:30
beIN Sports HD 5

FRENCH LEAGUE

OGC Nice v Stade Rennais 22:45
beIN Sports

South Korea will go on to join Qatar and Japan to the World Cup in Egypt.

China gets first win

China secured its first win in the consolation round, after losing twice in the tournament, beating Australia yesterday which suffered its second loss in the same round. Despite the close performance between the two teams in the first half which ended in favor of China 14-13, the second half saw tactical superiority for the Chinese who increased the goal difference to eight five minutes before the end of the match.

Eli Manning calling time on 16-year NFL career

One of five players in history with at least two Super Bowl MVPs

NEW YORK: Quarterback Eli Manning, who won two Super Bowls and was the face of the New York Giants franchise for more than a decade, is retiring from the NFL, the team said Wednesday. The Giants said Manning — who spent all 16 seasons of his NFL career with the Giants after a draft-day trade in 2004 — will formally announce his retirement on Wednesday.

“For 16 seasons, Eli Manning defined what it is to be a New York Giant both on and off the field,” said John Mara, the Giants’ president and chief executive officer. “Eli is our only two-time Super Bowl MVP and one of the very best players in our franchise’s history. He represented our franchise as a consummate professional with dignity and accountability. It meant something to Eli to be the Giants quarterback, and it meant even more to us.”

Manning, 39, led the Giants to Super Bowl victories over the New England Patriots after the 2007 and 2011 seasons. He is one of just five players in NFL history with at least two Super Bowl MVPs, a club that also includes Joe Montana, Bart Starr, Tom Brady and Terry Bradshaw. But he spent most of 2019 as backup to rookie quarterback Daniel Jones, starting just four games. Set to become a free agent, Manning had made it clear he didn’t relish the backup role.

Manning, younger brother of another superstar quarterback, Peyton Manning, started 234 games for the Giants — the fourth most by a quarterback for one club. He was drafted first overall by the San Diego Chargers in the 2004 draft but he made it known he didn’t want to play in San Diego and was traded to the Giants.

‘A privilege to coach’

He finishes his career seventh all-time with 366 touchdown passes, seventh in passing yards with 57,023, and tied with Joe Montana for 11th in career wins with 117. But he’ll be best remembered for two of the biggest upsets in Super Bowl history. In February of 2008 the Giants stared down Tom Brady and the New England Patriots, ending New England’s bid for a perfect season.

Manning’s MVP performance included a miraculous completion to David Tyree, Manning escaping the grip of Pats defenders to find Tyree, who held the ball against his helmet long enough to make the pass complete. Manning then found Plaxico Burress with the game-winning pass with 35 seconds to play. Manning and the Giants beat the Patriots again to cap the 2011 season.

“It was an honor and privilege to coach Eli, and to go through the wonderful and magnificent moments that he and his teammates provided for



EAST RUTHERFORD: In this file photo taken on December 28, 2019 Eli Manning #10 of the New York Giants waves to fans while leaving the field after the second half of the game against the Philadelphia Eagles at MetLife Stadium on December 29, 2019 in East Rutherford, New Jersey. — AFP

all of us in the world championship ‘07-’08 and ‘11-’12 seasons,” former Giants coach Tom Coughlin said.

“He’s an incredible big-game performer. You talk about a guy that’s great to coach, focused

every day, took tremendous pride in preparing, practice, had a great sense of humor, was a cynic in the locker room. But the guys loved him, and they loved him for it, and they played for him.” —AFP

Raiders officially christen team ‘Las Vegas Raiders’

LAS VEGAS: With help from Nevada governor Steve Sisolak, the formerly Oakland Raiders announced their official name change to become the Las Vegas Raiders on Wednesday, at the site of their new home. “I do hereby proclaim January 22, 2020, as the day to celebrate the renaming of the Las Vegas Raiders,” Sisolak said from Allegiant Stadium before the team unveiled a banner with the new name.

“The Raiders were born in Oakland, and played 13 seasons in L.A. Both cities will always be part of our DNA but, today, we begin a new chapter in our storied history,” owner Mark Davis said from the podium. “For today, January 22, 2020, we are now the Las Vegas Raiders. And, today, Las Vegas officially becomes our nation’s capital.”

Several players, past and present, were on hand for the announcement, and they took turns on stage to help hammer a stake holding a sign that read, “Las Vegas Raiders est. 2020.” The group included quarterback Derek Carr and former Super Bowl-winning quarterback Jim Plunkett.

The Raiders were approved to relocate from Oakland in March of 2017 and played the last three seasons in Oakland during the construc-



tion of their \$1.9 billion stadium in Las Vegas. The team is expected to officially move its facilities and operations to Las Vegas sometime this offseason. The NFL draft will be held in Las Vegas at the end of April. Construction on the stadium is expected to be complete in July.

The relocation is the third in the Raiders’ history, after they moved from Oakland to Los Angeles in 1982 and then back to Oakland in 1995. Since the NFL merger, there have been only six other relocations. The Raiders owe a \$378 million relocation fee. Sports Business Daily reported last month that NFL owners gave the team permission to exceed the league-mandated debt limit of \$350 million as it goes through the relocation process. —Reuters

Police issue arrest warrant for Antonio Brown

MIAMI: US police in Florida issued an arrest warrant for former NFL player Antonio Brown after an alleged battery and burglary at his home on Tuesday. Brown, 31, faces charges of burglary with battery, burglary of an unoccupied conveyance and criminal mischief less than \$1,000, said officer Christian Lata of the police in Hollywood, a city between Miami and Fort Lauderdale.

The incident, in which police responded to a 911 emergency call on Tuesday afternoon, had already resulted in the arrest of Brown’s trainer, Glenn Holt. The alleged victim told officers he was battered by Brown and Holt.

According to local television station WPLG, Holt’s arrest report said the charge stemmed from a disagreement between Brown and the driver of a moving company truck over payment for the release of Brown’s property.

Star wide-receiver Brown said he was finished with the NFL after his release by the New England Patriots in September amid an ongoing NFL investigation into rape and sexual assault allegations. Brown had landed in New England just three days after he was cut by the Oakland Raiders. Over the past month police had been called to his Florida house because of clashes between Brown and his girlfriend of eight years, the mother of three of his children. —AFP



GLENDALE: In this file photo taken on August 15, 2019 wide receiver Antonio Brown #84 of the Oakland Raiders warms up before the NFL preseason game against the Arizona Cardinals at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. —AFP

Sports

Pelicans' Williamson thrills in NBA debut; Lakers bounce back

First overall pick finishes with 22 points in 18 minutes

LOS ANGELES: New Orleans rookie Zion Williamson flashed some brilliance in his long-awaited NBA debut Wednesday, but the San Antonio Spurs spoiled the party at Smoothie King Center with a 121-117 victory over the Pelicans.

Williamson, who was the number one overall draft pick in June, offered a tantalizing glimpse of what's to come in his career when he exploded for 17 points in little more than three minutes in the fourth quarter.

The 19-year-old sensation had been sidelined since arthroscopic surgery on his right knee on the eve of the Pelicans' season-opener in October. He made a tentative start, scoring just five points with four rebounds, one assist four turnovers in less than 12 minutes on the floor over the first three quarters.

With 8:52 remaining and the Spurs up 99-91, Williamson connected with a three-pointer from the top of the key that ignited the crowd of 18,365. He followed up with an alley-oop layup, fed by Lonzo Ball, drained a trey and put back his own miss with a spinning layup before adding two more three-pointers.



NEW ORLEANS: Zion Williamson #1 of the New Orleans Pelicans shoots the ball against the San Antonio Spurs on January 22, 2020 at the Smoothie King Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. — AFP

MVP chants

The crowd was chanting “M-V-P!” as he capped the burst with a free-throw, but he was soon subbed out of the game as Pelicans coach Alvin Gentry stuck to the plan of playing Williamson only in short bursts. “I think what you saw there is a taste,” Gentry said. “There’s a lot of potential there.”

He said he’d counseled Williamson at halftime to be more aggressive, and he was pleased to see him deliver. “I think there’s a really, really high ceiling that he can reach, and he can reach it soon,” added Gentry, who nevertheless was impervious to the cries of “We want Zion” from fans late in the fourth quarter.

“It was very hard,” Williamson admitted of coming out of the game just as he had found his rhythm. “I’m 19. Honestly, in that moment I’m not thinking about longevity I’m thinking about winning that game. So it was very tough,” added

Williamson, who finished with 22 points, seven rebounds and three assists.

The Spurs, who led by as many as 15 and by 12 to start the fourth quarter, were up 109-108 when Williamson departed and quickly pulled away again. LaMarcus Aldridge led the Spurs with 32 points and DeMar DeRozan added 20 for a San Antonio team holding down the eighth and final playoff spot in the West. Williamson, who admitted on Tuesday he wasn’t sure just how much sleep he’d get on the eve of his debut, said that as the pre-game introductions were made he just told himself to “be calm.”

‘Great stuff’

He said it wasn’t just Gentry who urged him at halftime to defer less but also teammates in-

cluding Jrue Holiday. “I think he did well,” Holiday said, commending the teenager’s poise. “We’re almost in February and he hadn’t played a game yet, so for him to come out and do that his first game is pretty elite.”

Spurs coach Gregg Popovich was pleased to have a courtside seat for Williamson’s debut. “Oh, yeah, it’s great stuff. I’m glad he’s back, a talent like that,” Popovich said. “He’s a great guy on top of it all. So it’s good for the Pelicans. It’s good for basketball. He’s quite a package as a player and as a person.”

LeBron, Davis carry Lakers

LeBron James started hot and Anthony Davis found his groove Wednesday as the Los Angeles Lakers bounced back from an embarrassing loss to the Boston Celtics with a 100-92 win over the Knicks in New York.

James scored 19 of his 21 points in the first half and Davis scored 17 of his game-high 28 in the second, continuing to improve in his second game back from a five-game absence because of a bruised backside.

It was a welcome return to form for the NBA Western Conference leaders, who endured their worst defeat of the season on Monday in a 139-107 loss to the Celtics in Boston. “Obviously the one in Boston we didn’t come to play at all, no way, shape or form,” Davis said. “We try not to lose two in a row, we bounced back tonight with a great win against a hungry team. We just want to make sure we keep playing Laker basketball, keep playing defensively, keep pushing the pace offensively. When we do those things we’re a tough team to beat.”

The Lakers, who improved to 35-9, had 13 points from Kentavious Caldwell-Pope and 10 from Kyle Kuzma. James connected on eight of 10 shots in 17 minutes in the first half, but the Lakers were 48-48 at halftime against a Knicks



NEW YORK, NEW YORK: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers passes the ball in the first half against the New York Knicks at Madison Square Garden on January 22, 2020 in New York City. —AFP

NBA results/standings

New Orleans 117, San Antonio 121; Atlanta 102, LA Clippers 95; Boston 119, Memphis 95; Miami 134, Washington 129 (OT); New York 92, LA Lakers 100; Golden State 96, Utah 129; Phoenix 87, Indiana 112; Chicago 117, Minnesota 110; Houston 121, Denver 105; Detroit 127, Sacramento 106; Orlando 114, Oklahoma City 120; Toronto 107, Philadelphia 95.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference				
	W	L	PCT	GB		W	L	PCT	GB
Milwaukee	39	6	0.867	—	LA Lakers	35	9	0.795	—
Miami	31	13	0.705	7.5	Utah	31	13	0.705	4
Toronto	30	14	0.682	8.5	LA Clippers	31	14	0.689	4.5
Boston	29	14	0.674	9	Denver	30	14	0.682	5
Indiana	29	16	0.644	10	Dallas	27	16	0.628	7.5
Philadelphia	29	17	0.630	10.5	Houston	27	16	0.628	7.5
Orlando	21	24	0.467	18	Oklahoma City	26	19	0.578	9.5
Brooklyn	18	24	0.429	19.5	San Antonio	20	23	0.465	14.5
Detroit	17	28	0.378	22	Memphis	20	24	0.455	15
Chicago	17	29	0.370	22.5	Portland	19	26	0.422	16.5
Charlotte	15	30	0.333	24	Phoenix	18	26	0.409	17
Washington	14	29	0.326	24	New Orleans	17	28	0.378	18.5
Cleveland	12	32	0.273	26.5	Minnesota	15	29	0.341	20
New York	12	33	0.267	27	Sacramento	15	29	0.341	20
Atlanta	11	34	0.244	28	Golden State	10	36	0.217	26

team that is third from bottom in the East.

Although he had a quiet second half in terms of scoring, James came up with four of his five steals after the break. “It was a slow-paced game so defensive stops were very key to our success tonight,” James said. “I tried to start off the game being aggressive and I was able to get myself going. AD was able to facilitate down the stretch and it was good basketball.” —AFP

Barcelona and Madrid made to sweat by Ibiza and Unionistas

Griezmann saves Messi-less Barca with two goals in second half

MADRID: La Liga's heavyweights were both given a scare by third tier opponents in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday as Barcelona needed two late goals to beat Ibiza and Real Madrid dug deep for victory over Unionistas de Salamanca. Barca sit 44 places ahead of Ibiza and Madrid 56 above Unionistas but the lowly duo both came close to extraordinary upsets, only for Ibiza to lose 2-1 and Unionistas 3-1 in front of their jubilant home fans.

With Lionel Messi rested and not even on the bench, Antoine Griezmann proved the savior for Barcelona, scoring twice in the second half, including a 94th-minute winner, after Pep Caballe had given the hosts a fairytale lead at Can Misses. "Scoring gave them confidence," said Barca coach Quique Setien. "We were a bit sloppy, we gave the ball away and that gave them life. It wasn't easy."

Discomfort was more fleeting for Madrid, who conceded an equaliser in the second half following a brilliant run and finish from Unionistas' Alvaro Romero, only to restore their advantage five minutes later. Juan Gongora turned the ball into his own net after Gareth Bale, back from injury and illness, scored his first goal for his club since September 1. Bale's celebrations were notably muted and he had to go off in the second half. "He sprained his ankle a little," said coach Zinedine Zidane. "I don't think it's much but tomorrow we'll see."

At the end, Unionistas fans were waving their scarves with pride just as Ibiza's supporters had applauded their team off, even though Griezmann had dashed their hopes just moments before. Only last week, Barcelona topped Deloitte's annual Football Money League with a total revenue of \$959.3m for 2018/19 while Madrid were

just behind, the world's second richest club with \$864m.

Unionistas, meanwhile, only came into existence in 2013, launched by their own supporters after UD Salamanca went out of business. It was a dream draw to get Real Madrid but they almost had to move grounds because their Las Pistas has one stand and lighting that needed upgrading.

Ibiza are even younger, having formed in 2015 and played in the fifth tier only three years ago. Griezmann's rescue act was cruel but important for Setien, who enjoyed a 1-0 victory in his first game in charge against Granada on Sunday but could hardly afford a loss of this magnitude so early in his tenure.

Snapping at their heels

For all the dominance of the ball, there was a lack of cutting edge against Ibiza, who restricted their star-studded opponents to one shot in the first half, Barca's lowest in any game they have played this season.

With a trip to Valencia to come in La Liga on Saturday, Setien left Messi, Sergio Busquets and Gerard Pique out of the squad. Youngsters Ansu Fati, Riqui Puig and Carles Perez all started. Ibiza were at their visitors from the off, closing the gaps and snapping at their heels. If the home side's aim was to contain, they went one better by taking the lead in the ninth minute.

Puig was at fault, caught napping by Caballe, who finished off Javi Perez's cross. Twice Ibiza almost added a second as Angel Rodado scored after bundling through Clement Lenglet but too enthusiastically, with the goal chalked off. Then Rai Nascimento hit the post after being played in by Javi Lara.



IBIZA TOWN: Barcelona's French forward Antoine Griezmann shoots to score his team's second goal during the Copa del Rey (King's Cup) football match between UD Ibiza and FC Barcelona at the Can Misses municipal stadium in Ibiza, on January 22, 2020. — AFP

Ibiza's pressing lost intensity in the second half and in the 72nd minute, Griezmann equalised. Frenkie de Jong's reverse pass was perfectly weighted, with Griezmann able to hit first time on the turn. Ibiza looked set for an extra 30 minutes but Griezmann struck again. Jordi Alba slid him through down and his finish flew across German Parreno and found the far corner.

Bale announced his return to the Real Madrid line-up with a goal as his right-footed effort took an awkward deflection on its way in, even if there

was little sign that he enjoyed it. In the 57th minute, Romero, who was playing in the Spanish third tier last season, capitalised on a slip from Eder Militao to weave through and apply an excellent, lifted finish but parity was brief.

Gongora turned the ball into his own net under pressure from Brahim Diaz, who then added a third in injury-time. Elsewhere, holders Valencia beat Logrones 1-0 while Segunda strugglers Tenerife knocked out La Liga's Real Valladolid with a surprise 2-1 win. — AFP

Ronaldo fires Juve into Italian Cup semi-finals

TURIN: Juventus coach Maurizio Sarri complimented Cristiano Ronaldo's mother as the Portuguese star extended his scoring streak in a 3-1 win over Roma to advance to the Italian Cup semi-finals on Wednesday.

The Portuguese star picked up a Gonzalo Higuain cross after 26 minutes, finishing off from an angle in the Allianz Stadium. It was the 34-year-old's 12th goal in eight consecutive games in which he has played in all competitions for the Turin giants but his first in the Italian Cup.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner has also scored seven goals in four matches played in 2020. "I believe that the compliments should be made to his mother," said Sarri of Ronaldo who has now scored in 15 different club competitions throughout his career.

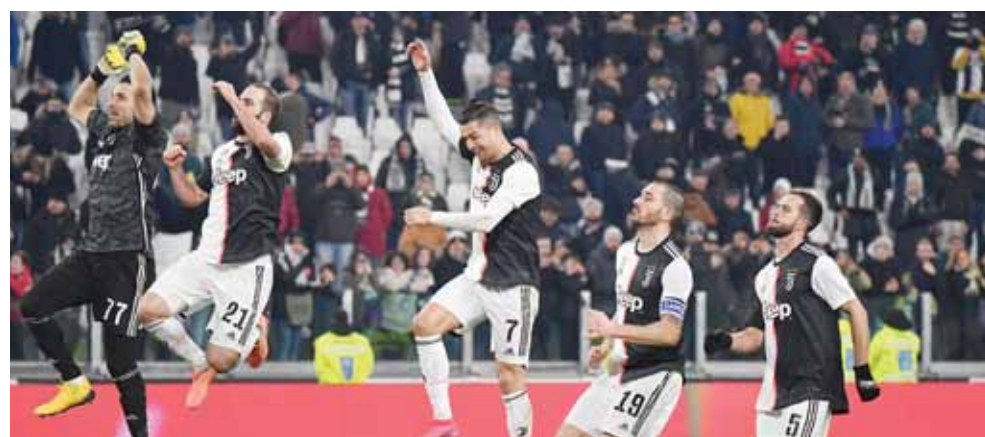
"He is in super form physically. In terms of explosiveness he is doing well, he takes great care of the details. It is difficult to improve on an in-

dividual level. We are talking about one of the greatest of all time and I would like to help him win a sixth Ballon d'Or."

Rodrigo Bentancur added a second goal after 38 minutes with defender Leonardo Bonucci nodding in a third just before the break. Cengiz Under pulled a goal back for Roma five minutes after the break, rifling in from a distance with the ball hitting the crossbar and bouncing in off goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon in the Juventus goal.

Buffon denied Alessandro Florenzi and Aleksandar Kolarov to keep Juventus on course in the competition they have won 13 times but exited in the quarter-finals last season to Atalanta. Brazilian Danilo limped off before the break to be replaced by Juan Cuadrado, leaving Sarri with an injury worry ahead of this weekend's trip to Napoli.

Roma, fourth in the league, were struggling with injuries while Edin Dzeko was sitting out a ban, but their form was worrying just four days before their derby clash against city rivals Lazio. "The difference in the first half was efficiency," said Roma coach Paulo Fonseca. "The first chance they had, they scored. The same for the second. We know that Edin Dzeko is a very important player for us and his ban was damaging, but the forwards could have done much better this evening."



TURIN: (From left) Juventus' Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, Juventus' Argentinian forward Gonzalo Higuain, Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo, Juventus' Italian defender Leonardo Bonucci and Juventus' Bosnian midfielder Miralem Pjanic acknowledge the public at the end of the Italian Cup (Coppa Italia) round of 8 football match Juventus vs AS Roma on January 22, 2020 at the Juventus stadium in Turin. — AFP

Juventus — who lost the Italian SuperCup last month to Lazio — will play either AC Milan or Torino in the semi-finals. Holders Lazio were eliminated in the quarter-finals on Tuesday with a 1-0 loss to Napoli. Italy international Lorenzo Insigne needed just 99 seconds to score the goal

that won a match in which both teams had a player sent off and Serie A top scorer Ciro Immobile missed a penalty in the first 25 minutes. AC Milan travel to Torino next Tuesday with Inter Milan hosting Fiorentina. The final will be played on May 13 in Rome. — AFP

‘Embarrassing’ Man Utd suffer fresh woe, Spurs boost top four bid

Leicester end drought with big win over West Ham

LONDON: Manchester United were labeled an “embarrassment” as pressure mounted on Ole Gunnar Solskjaer following Burnley’s shock 2-0 victory, while Tottenham boosted their top four prospects with a 2-1 win over Norwich on Wednesday. Solskjaer’s side suffered a third defeat in their last four Premier League games to put the United boss’s job security back under the microscope.

Burnley’s first top-flight win at Old Trafford since 1962, secured by Chris Wood’s 39th minute opener and a Jay Rodriguez thunderbolt after the break, exposed the flaws in a lacklustre United side who have made their worst start to a season since 1989-90.

The majority of Old Trafford was on its feet when chants of “stand up if you hate Glazers” echoed around the ground in reference to United’s owners. Executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward was also subjected to many other abusive chants, while those few fans who remained in the stadium booed Solskjaer and his players at full-time.

Former United defender Rio Ferdinand, a Premier League and Champions League winner with the club, slammed the performance and called for the US-based Glazer family to take action to stop the rot. “I can’t defend this,” Ferdinand told BT Sport. “These young kids now in schools around the country, they are not going to be wearing Manchester United shirts. Fans are walking out after 84 minutes! It’s an embarrass-

ment. People at the top need to look and see this and make changes, put a plan in place that people can sit there and see where we are going now. I don’t see it.”

Fifth placed United are six points behind fourth placed Chelsea as they battle to qualify for next season’s Champions League via a top four finish. Solskjaer admitted United had only themselves to blame, but he claimed the youngsters in his side deserved some patience.

“The boys have given everything they’ve got. They are experiencing this period for the first time in their lives, some of them,” he said. “It’s very difficult for them. The expectations of this club as well are high, and some of them have played 10, 12 or 15 games and it’s not easy for them. Of course I’m going to back them. I’m going to be here to help them get through this. When you’re at Man United there’s always going to be criticism. We can’t do anything but hold our hands up and say ‘this isn’t good enough for this club’. Of course we’re disappointed in the points tally and performances, we’re still fifth in the table.”

Alli ends Spurs drought

Tottenham needed a late winner from Son Heung-min to snap a four-game winless streak in the league and breathe new life into their push for a top-four spot. Dele Alli’s opener had ended a three-game run without even scoring in the league for sixth placed Spurs before Teemu



MANCHESTER: Burnley’s New Zealand striker Chris Wood (R) celebrates scoring the opening goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Burnley at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on January 22, 2020. — AFP

Pukki’s penalty 20 minutes from time for bottom-of-the-table Norwich. South Korea forward Son’s stooping header 11 minutes from time hauled Jose Mourinho’s men within six points of Chelsea.

Elsewhere, Ayoze Perez scored twice as third placed Leicester ended their two-match winless league run with a 4-1 victory over West

Ham that was marred by an injury to their leading scorer Jamie Vardy. Vardy limped off just before half-time at the King Power Stadium with his side 1-0 ahead thanks to Harvey Barnes’ 24th-minute opener, with the winger then setting up Ricardo Pereira to fire home the second in added time. — AFP

Solskjaer in firing line but Man Utd malaise runs deep

LONDON: Manchester United played out the final stages of Wednesday’s humiliating 2-0 defeat to Burnley in front of banks of empty seats, raising fresh questions over how long beleaguered boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer will survive.

The United teams that Solskjaer played in during the glory years of Alex Ferguson were famed for their great escapes but his young, jaded players are struggling to live up to the club’s swash-buckling traditions.

Solskjaer has now lost more Premier League games than he has won since being handed the job on a permanent basis in March after an exhilarating three-month stint as caretaker boss. His appointment increasingly looks a rash and misjudged decision by the club’s executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward, who is blamed by large sections of United’s support for the club’s malaise. Should Solskjaer be the fall guy for yet another disappointing season, he would be the fourth manager to come and go since Ferguson retired in 2013.

Transfer errors

But a change in the dugout would not address the deeper-lying problems at the club, with repeated errors made in the transfer market. United have spent close to £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) on transfers in the past seven years and still have the highest wage bill in the Premier League.

Yet they find themselves 30 points adrift of league leaders Liverpool, who also have two games in hand, and just 11 above the



MANCHESTER: Manchester United’s Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer reacts during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Burnley at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on January 22, 2020. —AFP

relegation zone. “If you don’t lose your job for essentially over-seeing that investment, that wage bill, and putting that team out on the pitch then I have to say something is really wrong,” former United captain Gary Neville said of Woodward. “In terms of what the club needed to do for a number of years now — put the best in class football operators into that club and they’re not doing it. They’re not doing it and it’s a mess.”

Mauricio Pochettino is likely to be the man United turn to should Solskjaer go. The Argentine proved his ability to work wonders with a young squad on a far more restricted budget than he would have at United in five years at Spurs before being sacked earlier this season. But it is change further up the hierarchy United fans most crave, starting with Woodward letting go of his grip on football operations. —AFP

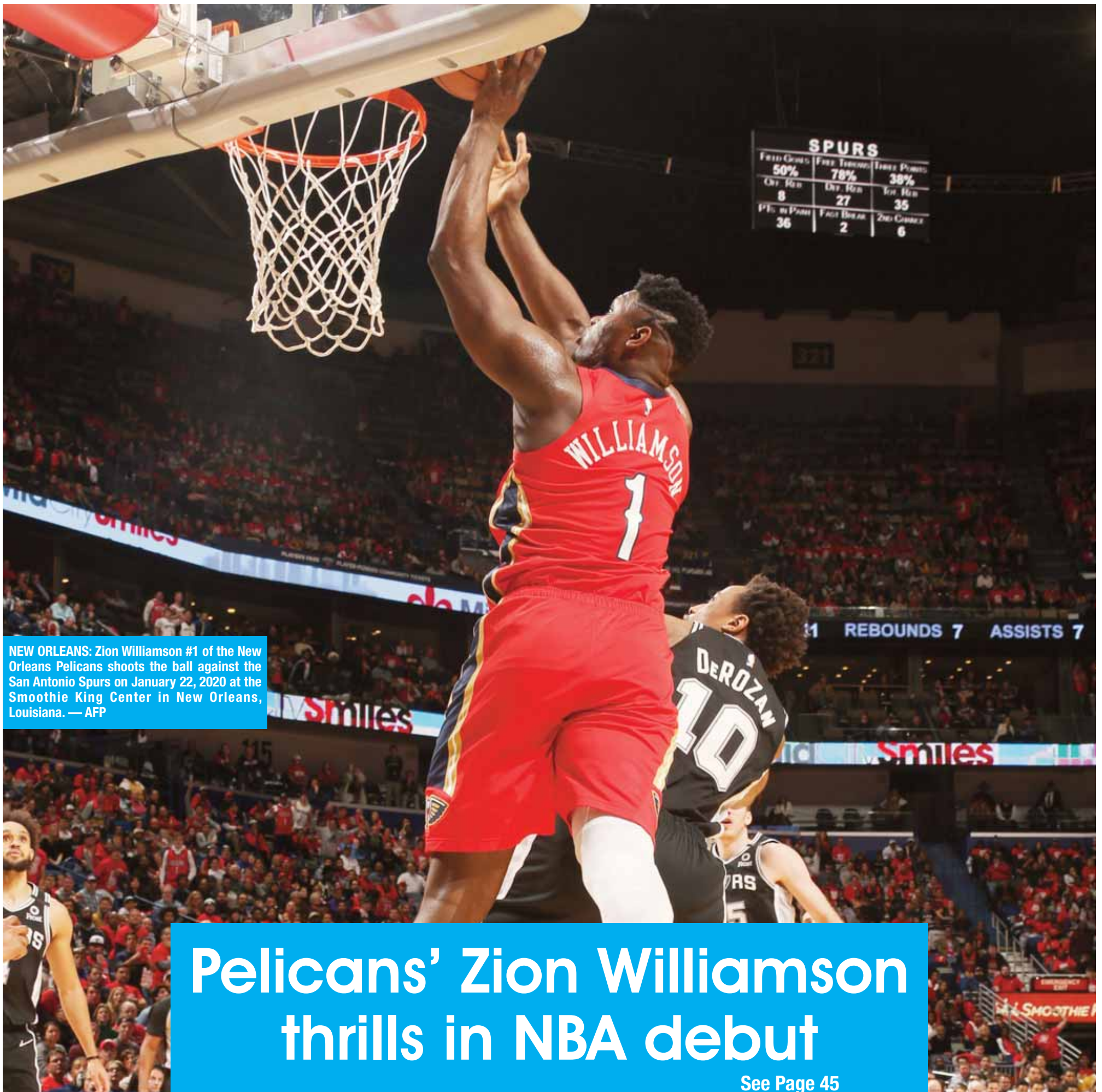
English Premier League table

English Premier League table after Wednesday’s matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Liverpool	22	21	1	0	52	14	64
Man City	24	16	3	5	65	27	51
Leicester	24	15	3	6	52	24	48
Chelsea	24	12	4	8	41	32	40
Man Utd	24	9	7	8	36	29	34
Tottenham	24	9	7	8	38	32	34
Wolves	23	8	10	5	34	30	34
Sheff Utd	24	8	9	7	25	23	33
Southampton	24	9	4	11	31	42	31
Arsenal	24	6	12	6	32	34	30
Crystal Palace	24	7	9	8	22	28	30
Everton	24	8	6	10	28	35	30
Burnley	24	9	3	12	28	38	30
Newcastle	24	8	6	10	24	36	30
Brighton	24	6	7	11	27	34	25
Aston Villa	24	7	4	13	31	45	25
West Ham	23	6	5	12	27	38	23
Bournemouth	24	6	5	13	23	37	23
Watford	24	5	8	11	21	36	23
Norwich	24	4	5	15	24	47	17

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NEW ORLEANS: Zion Williamson #1 of the New Orleans Pelicans shoots the ball against the San Antonio Spurs on January 22, 2020 at the Smoothie King Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. — AFP

Pelicans' Zion Williamson thrills in NBA debut

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