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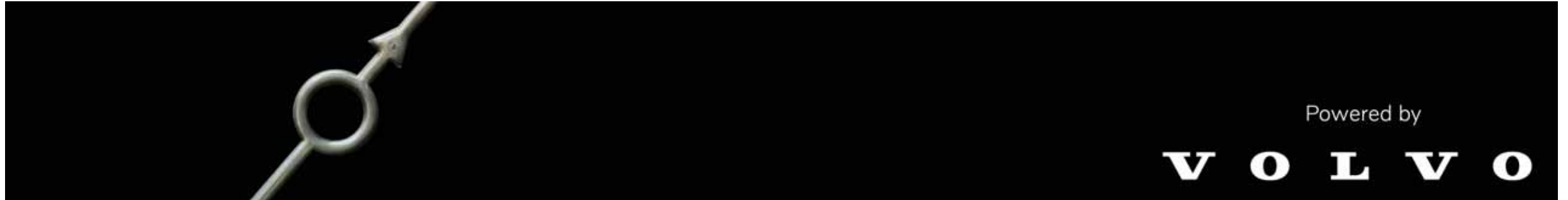
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Trump Mideast plan, rejected by Palestinians, faces dim prospects

Abbas throws 'conspiracy' in 'dustbin of history' • Erdogan slams 'unacceptable' proposal

Amir attends luncheon at Azayez farm



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, flanked by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and senior ruling family members, cuts a ceremonial cake yesterday at a luncheon held in his honor at Azayez farm in Abdaly. — KUNA (See Page 2)

JERUSALEM: US President Donald Trump's long delayed Middle East peace plan won support in Israel yesterday but was bitterly rejected by Palestinians facing possible Israeli annexation of key parts of the West Bank. Trump, who unveiled the plan on Tuesday at the White House standing alongside Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with no Palestinian representatives on hand, said his initiative could succeed where others had failed.

Trump has boasted that his plan will find support but most experts believe its unabashed backing of Israel and tough conditions for the creation of a Palestinian state mean it is doomed to fail. Major powers and some regional players responded with caution, saying Trump's project deserves study while stressing that a durable solution to the conflict can only emerge through Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

But Trump's proposals reportedly included no Palestinian input and grants Israel much of what it has sought in decades of international diplomacy, namely control over Jerusalem as its "undivided" capital, rather than a city to share with the Palestinians. It also offers a US green light for Israel to annex the strategically crucial Jordan Valley - which accounts for around 30 percent of the West Bank - as well as other Jewish settlements in the area.

"History knocked on our door last night and gave us a unique opportunity to apply Israeli law on all of the settlements in Judea (and) Samaria," said Israel's rightwing Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, using the Israeli term for the occupied West Bank. The Blue and White party led by Benny Gantz, Netanyahu's main election rival in March 2 polls, embraced Trump's

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Kuwaiti activists slam Trump plan, call for uprising

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Condemning Trump's Middle East peace plan, the Kuwaiti Progressive Movement (KPM) described the proposal - known as the "deal of the century" - as a new episode in a series of imperialist-Zionist conspiracies spanning decades to liquidate the Palestinian cause and quash the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian

people based on blatant collusion of most Arab regimes and benefiting from the wrong policies of some Palestinian leaders and the regretful division between Fatah and Hamas.

"Regardless of some stylized and rhetorical phrases used, the Trump-Netanyahu deal is provocatively designed to impose arrangements that are completely contrary to the most basic rights of the Palestinian Arab people. This unfair deal is publicly rejected by Palestinians and Arabs," a statement issued by the

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Aseeri denies quitting, but pressure mounts

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Ghadeer Aseeri yesterday denied that she has resigned or even plans to quit as she faces a no-confidence vote next week amid mounting pressure. Aseeri, a newcomer to the Cabinet, was grilled last week over allegations she violated the constitution and undermined the status of lawmakers and their constituents, and 10 lawmakers filed a no-confidence motion against her.



Ghadeer Aseeri

For the motion to pass, the votes of 25 MPs are needed and it appears that the number has already been secured with several lawmakers initially thought to be backing the minister, or at least staying neutral, turning their backs on her. If 25 MPs vote against the minister, she will be dismissed automatically, something that has never happened in Kuwait before because ministers who faced the threat of losing no-confidence motions opted to resign before the vote.

MP Abdullah Al-Roumi was the latest lawmaker to join the anti-minister camp yesterday, charging that Aseeri has taken a number of ill-advised decisions in the past few days aimed at boosting her chances of survival. He joined several MPs who were thought to be against the motion but changed their mind after Aseeri stripped a senior ministry official responsible for people of special needs Shafiq Al-Awadhi of most of her powers.

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Arab countries in balancing act on Trump plan

DUBAI: Arab states have cautiously welcomed the US peace plan for the Middle East, but the balancing act aimed at appeasing their powerful ally risks provoking domestic public opinion and Palestinian ire. The plan was unveiled in Washington on Tuesday by President Donald Trump, flanked by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who greeted the proposals enthusiastically in the face of Palestinian condemnation.

The only Arab ambassadors present were from Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates - three of Washington's closest allies in a region where many nations host US forces. Other Arab

states released carefully worded statements, in what experts said showed that the Palestinian cause has gone out of fashion and that security ties with Washington outweigh any appetite to oppose the plan.

Just weeks ago, Tehran and Washington appeared on the verge of war after the assassination of a top Iranian general. Iran responded with missile strikes on US targets in Iraq, bringing both sides to the brink. A shared hostility to Iran has seen Arab states in the Gulf quietly move closer to Israel, further displacing the Palestinian cause from the headlines.

After the deal was unveiled, Riyadh said its support for the Palestinians was "steadfast" but that it "appreciates" the American efforts and called for the start of direct talks. Abu Dhabi called it "an important starting point" while Cairo said it deserved a "thorough examination".

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Kuwait warns against visiting China; first virus cases in UAE

BEIJING: Kuwaiti Ambassador to China Samih Johar Hayat called on Kuwaitis to refrain from visiting China unless truly necessary due to the spread of the coronavirus. In a statement yesterday, the ambassador warned Kuwaitis against going to affected areas in China, especially Hubei province and its capital Wuhan. He advised citizens to immediately contact the Kuwait Embassy in Beijing and consulate generals in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong in case of emergency.

Kuwait's General Consul in Shanghai Meshaal Al-Shemali also called on Kuwaiti citizens to abstain from traveling to Shanghai due to the spread of the new coronavirus strain. Shemali said in a statement to KUNA that all Kuwaiti nationals who are currently in Shanghai

and surrounding districts should contact the consulate.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates said yesterday that a Chinese family of four who arrived from Wuhan were infected with the new coronavirus, in the first confirmed cases in the Middle East. The health ministry said that the condition of the family from Wuhan - the quarantined Chinese city at the epicenter of the health crisis - was stable and that they were "under medical monitoring".

The World Health Organization confirmed the infections, saying the family arrived in the Emirates earlier this month. They "were hospitalized on 25 and 27 January after testing positive for coronavirus," it said in a statement, adding that two of the patients never showed any

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TUBAS: Palestinian demonstrators pray next to Israeli soldiers standing guard during a protest outside this West Bank village near the Jordan Valley yesterday against US President Donald Trump's peace proposals. — AFP



KUWAIT: Thermal temperature scanners are used to screen passengers for fever upon their arrival at Kuwait international airport yesterday. — AFP

Kuwait's Amir attends luncheon banquet at Azayez farm



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah are welcomed at Azayez farm yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attend a luncheon at Azayez farm yesterday.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended yesterday a luncheon held at Azayez farm in the northern region of Al-Abdali. The luncheon, held by Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in honor of His Highness the Amir, was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Al-Sabah family members. — KUNA



(From left) His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.



Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah welcomes His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed to the farm.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah.



Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah speaks with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.



Al-Sabah family members in attendance.



Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah welcomes Sheikh Faisal Al-Humoud Al-Sabah.



Members of Al-Sabah family attend the luncheon.



Members of Al-Sabah family in attendance.



A display of pictures taken during a luncheon held in honor of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the Azayez farm in 2012.

Local

Kuwait presents file for safeguarding human rights at domestic level

Kuwait addresses UN human rights council during review session

GENEVA: Kuwait has presented its file for boosting and safeguarding human rights at the domestic level to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) session. Addressing the UNHRC session, Kuwaiti Minister of Finance, Acting Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel affirmed Kuwait's cooperation with the concerned international team and adherence to mechanisms for boosting and protecting human rights, in partnership with civil society organizations. Kuwait, since its founding, has been seeking to build a society advocating principles of human rights; a community keen on safeguarding these rights against any violation, she said.

Human rights are among Kuwait's priorities, in line with the Islamic sharia (law) and the 1962 (national) Constitution. Minister Aqeel said, praising the regular reports' presentation by the member states as an opportunity to practice self-criticism, pin point negative and positive aspects in this sector. She indicated at the desire to examine experience of sisterly and friendly states at this level, "where we aspire to revamp our policies and internal practices with respect of human rights." UPR is a process that involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. It is a state-driven process, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each state to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfill their human rights obligations. At the external level, Kuwait looks forward to cooperating with the international community, namely states and organizations, for sake of attaining more development and prosperity, the Kuwaiti minister added.

National efforts

Minister Aqeel, in her presentation to the UNHRC session, shed light on the national efforts to improve Kuwait's ranking in the global prosperity index, where it has succeeded to move from the level 80 in 2017 to 66, from among 149 states, in 2018. Moreover, Kuwait improved its ranking from 45 to 39, among 156 states, in the index of happiness in 2018. Minister Aqeel, in her presented report, has indicated that wealth cannot bring happiness to people, noting that satisfaction can be attained through political freedoms and solid social bonds. These are, she said, much more significant and effective factors than high income. Aware of these necessities, Kuwait has taken the path to attain objectives at these levels for its people. Moreover, Kuwait has established the permanent national committee, headed by the foreign ministry, to prepare reports and follow up on recommendations related to human rights-headed by the foreign ministry. This commission, which comprises representatives from all concerned authorities, seeks to honor the state commitments toward contracting committees and presenting reports as scheduled, she said, noting that its good work had drawn praise from the former commissioner of the UNHRC Prince Zaid bin Al-Hussein during a session of the council. The latter visited Kuwait in 2017.

Amir receives congratulations on anniversary

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday congratulation cables from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab and world leaders on the occasion of the 14th anniversary of his ascension to power. In the cables, they expressed their sincere wishes for His Highness, with full health and wellness, and for the State of Kuwait further progress, growth and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness. His Highness the Amir sent a cable to the brotherly and friendly leaders, thanking them for their kind feelings, wishing them a long healthy life.

Meanwhile, Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh said that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has a distinguished career at the domestic and international levels. Saleh, in a cable to

Keen on cooperation with the UNHRC, Kuwait hosted the special rapporteur on human trade in September 2016. Also in the same year, it received the team tasked with indiscriminate against women in law. In 2018, Kuwait played host to the rapporteur for rights of people of special needs. Currently, Kuwait is coordinating date for a visit by the rapporteurs charged with the right of housing, modern-time slavery and the team tasked with human rights, transnational companies and business institutions. Moreover, Kuwait had hosted delegations from many NGOs namely Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, she said.

Discrimination against women

Kuwait's 2015-2020 development plan envisions a set of objectives to help nations eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. The project includes allowing women to engage in all sectors including the political field, as well as launching a national strategy to end violence against women, she said. Moreover, 25 CEOs of private companies signed "principles of enabling women," as these national companies will be enlisted on the UN website and closely monitored, she added. Meanwhile, Aqeel said Kuwait focuses on protecting the rights of disabled people, as the country issued law no 8/2010 and joined the Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013. Kuwait also launched the Public Authority of the Disabled Affairs (PADA), which established a committee for students with disabilities, a committee for health affairs and others. The minister affirmed that big part of Kuwait's development plan focuses on allowing the disabled to play a vital role in society.

In the provision and access domain, a building code has been issued, a national framework set, training workshops organized and legal and official steps taken, all aiming at giving access to Kuwait City, she said. Kuwait has also adopted a recruitment strategy through training programs targeting people with special needs, the minister added.

Stateless residents

The Kuwaiti government is working pursuant to a clear-cut blueprint to resolve the issue of stateless residents (bedoons), she said, citing a relevant recent cabinet plan based on significant principles, primarily justice and equality, she noted. She said this category is viewed as having humanitarian considerations with political dimensions based on the fact that nationality is an unquestionable sovereignty matter. This principle, she maintained, has been established in international relations and enshrined in several pieces of national legislation.

In this regard, Aqeel spoke highly of His Highness the Amir's instructions intended to address the problems of this group just out of humanitarian reasons. Accordingly, the Kuwaiti Cabinet adopted a decree in 2011, giving its consent to the initiative of the central agency of illegal residents to provide continued humanitarian, social and civil services to illegal residents. For instance, they are offered health, education, food supply and job services just like Kuwaiti citizens, she

boasted. But, the minister affirmed that the number of illegal residents dropped from 220,000 before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 to 120,000 following liberation, then down to 85,000 in late 2018. Since the agency was created in 2010, 14,042 illegal residents have adjusted their positions by showing their own original official documents, she added.

In the area of contract workers, the minister said Kuwait has always provided guarantees in line with 19 World Labor Organization agreements. In this context, Kuwait adopted the private sector's labor law No 6/2010 and set up a manpower agency that serves over 1.6 million employees of 171 nationalities, she remarked. She cited Law no 68/2015 regarding domestic workers as an example to follow thanks to its multiple warranties, pointing out a new women center that offers help and legal protection and health services and free meals to women. Just out of its interest in criminalizing human trafficking in line with the UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Kuwait enacted Law No 91/2013 in this regard, she boasted. Furthermore, the cybercrime law includes strict penalties against anyone who may create a website or post online information bearing on human trafficking, the minister warned. As for the promotion of citizens' capability-building in the domain of human trafficking, the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies organized several courses for judges and prosecutors working in this area, the minister noted. The cabinet further issued a decree authorizing a national strategy to fight human trafficking,



GENEVA: Kuwaiti Minister of Finance Mariam Al-Aqeel (center) attends the UN Human Rights Council session. — KUNA

she indicated.

Human trade

In line with a Kuwaiti Cabinet resolution, the permanent committee tasked with enforcing the ban on human trade and immigrants' trafficking had been formed. It was headed by the minister of justice and included members representing various authorities. One of its most significant achievements was adoption of a national system prohibiting human trade, she said, re-affirming Kuwait's conviction that human rights issues have international and humanitarian aspects. According to such an approach, the State of Kuwait continues providing humanitarian aid to those suffering from poverty, diseases, hunger, natural catastrophes, crises resulting from wars across the world, as

a basis of human Rights, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Number of countries that had benefited from Kuwait till 2018 reached 106, minister Aqeel elaborated, noting that the Kuwaiti assistance aimed at funding projects in transport, water, sewage, agricultural, irrigation, industrial and energy sectors. Furthermore, Kuwait was in solidarity with victims of humanitarian crises throughout the world. It had hosted three international conferences for aiding Syrian refugees and the displaced and took part in the fourth and fifth conferences that had been held for the same purposes. Continuing, Aqeel said Kuwait earmarked \$1.9 billion for supporting the humanitarian situation in Syria in addition to presenting \$20 million for securing humanitarian needs in Iraq. — KUNA

“ Human rights among Kuwait's priorities ”

Ready for the Beach ??



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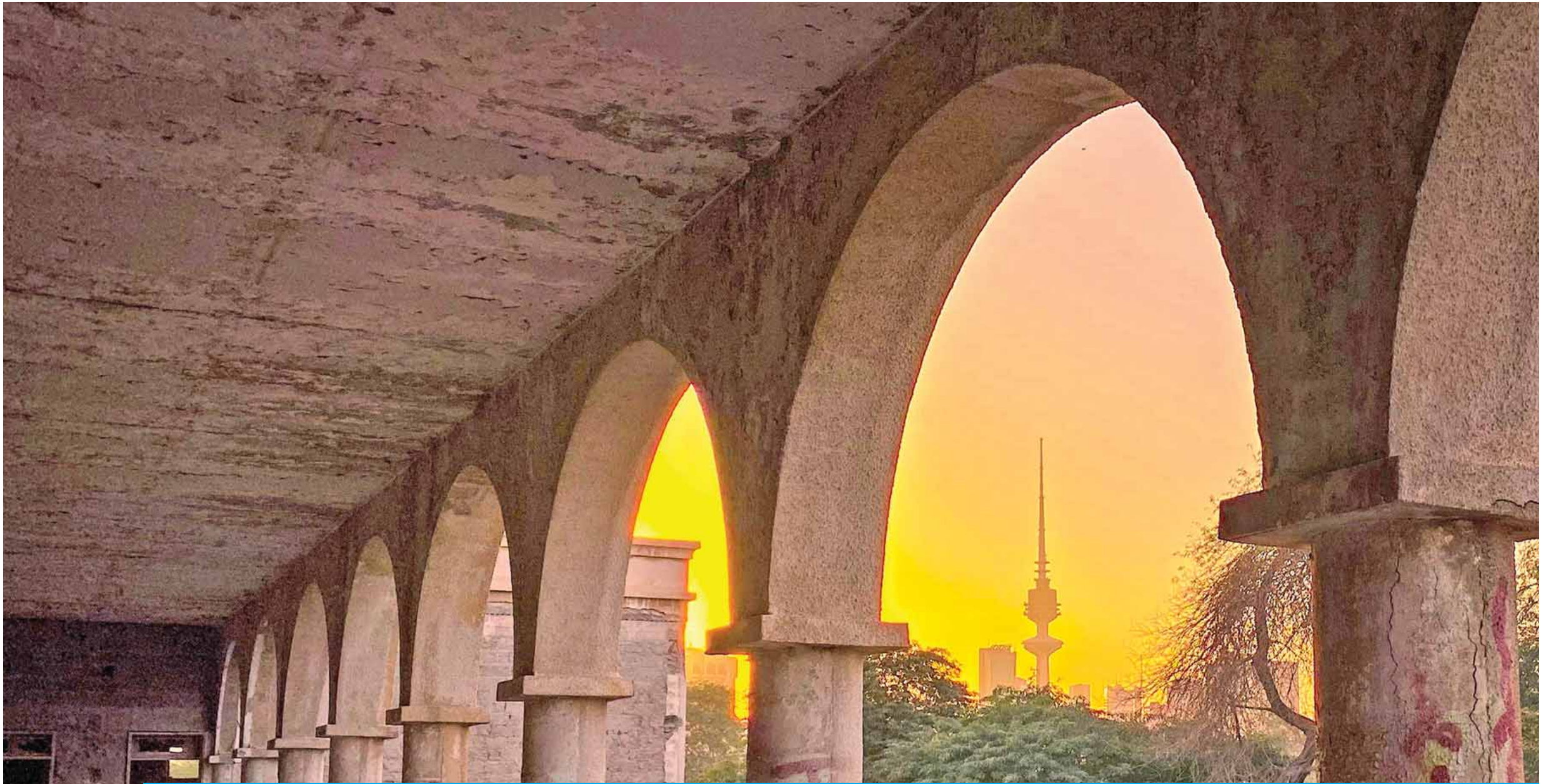
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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The Liberation Tower as seen from the old Amiri hospital. — Photo by Maysoon Al-Fares (KUNA)

Burgan Bank conducts workshop on Autism Spectrum Disorder

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KUWAIT: Burgan Bank and Autism Partnership Kuwait staff in a group photo

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently organized an awareness workshop for its employees on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in cooperation with Autism Partnership Kuwait (APK). The workshop was part of the bank's commitment to the center for the second consecutive year which falls under its dynamic corporate social responsibility strategy. Through the partnership, Burgan Bank strives to deliver meaningful and positive change in the lives of all segments of society.

Burgan Bank aims to raise a strong conscious work-



In cooperation
with Autism
Partnership
Kuwait

place culture and educate employees on vital societal and humanitarian issues through the provision of similar workshops and awareness seminars. The workshop covered many areas including: the definition of autism spectrum disorder, symptoms of autism in infants and young children, different cases of children with ASD, comparisons of behavioral patterns of children with autism, how to interact with children with autism, emphasizing the importance of early diagnosis, and effective treatment methods.

Autism Partnership Kuwait offers a wide range of rehabilitation and treatment services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from the age of two years to ten years and their families. Through highly qualified and professional consultants and specialists in the field, (APK) is the only branch in the Arab and Middle East region that represents the Autism Partnership Foundation located in the US among ten other global branches.

Burgan Bank's support to this initiative falls under its



Burgan Bank staff attend the workshop.

full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - 'Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural, social and health initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the Kuwaiti society.

Local

Health Ministry approves up to KD 500 raises for nursing staff

Manpower authority explains cases that can lead to closing domestic labor offices



Dr Fawwaz Al-Refae



Sana Taqaddum



KUWAIT: A group photo of participants at the International Nursing Conference 2020. — KUNA photos

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Ministry of Health's (MoH) assistant under-secretary for medical services Dr Fawwaz Al-Refae announced a plan to approve new nursing staff increments with up to KD 500 in raises according to the job title, adding Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah had personally contacted the finance ministry in this regard pending referring it to the Civil Service Commission (CSC) soon.

Speaking yesterday on behalf of the minister on the sidelines of the International Nursing Conference 2020 in which over 1,000 nurses took part, Refae hailed Kuwaiti nurses' skills and abilities, and stressed the need to develop them to international standards. Refae stressed that the conference coincides with launching throughout 2020 the celebration of World Nursing Day declared by WHO in May 2019 in appreciation of the

efforts of pioneering nurses as well as the role played by nurses in saving millions of lives worldwide.

"Choosing creativity and innovation as a motto for the International Nursing Conference 2020 reflects the organizing committee's awareness and realization of the significance of shedding more light on the latest international developments in this field, the role of nurses in scientific planning as well probing the future to utilize potential innovation and health development opportunities," Refae said, noting that MoH is keen on developing the skills of Kuwaiti nurses.

MoH nursing services manager Sana Taqaddum stressed the significance of the conference in developing nursing services and performance through discussing several scientific visions, papers and researches. Chairman of Kuwait Nursing Society Bandar Al-Enezi said nursing is constantly developing as a major sector related to health, adding that Kuwait had and

would always be supportive to all forms of development thanks to its faithful people who always work on developing nursing. Enezi added that Kuwait Nursing Society constantly cooperates with MoH and the nursing department to develop nursing staff skills through training courses, postgraduate studies and other studies needed.

Agencies' closure

The Public Authority for Manpower urged all domestic helper recruitment agencies to respect law number 68/2015 in order to avoid closure. The authority explained that agencies and offices can be closed in case of violating articles 24 and 25 of the law due to:

1. Failing to check with the domestic labor department if summoned (unless a valid excuse is proven).
2. Failing to deliver workers within 24 hours.
3. Failing to receive laborers upon arrival to Kuwait

or delay in doing so without due excuse.

4. Dealing with returned laborers or those recruited by others.

5. Signing contracts other than those accredited by the domestic labor department.

The authority also noted that office licenses will be temporarily suspended for three months in case of committing any of violations 1, 2 or 3 mentioned above and for six months in case of committing violations 4 and 5.

Sabah Al-Salem campaign

Mubarak Al-Kabeer municipal cleaning inspection teams toured Sabah Al-Salem to inspect all streets, said team manager Khaled Al-Azmi, noting that the tour started at 8:30 am and concluded at 1:00 pm. Azmi said 247 cubic meters of waste and three abandoned vehicles were removed, in addition to replacing 55 old garbage containers with new ones.



Fire drill at College of Engineering

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate carried out a practical exercise at the College of Engineering at

Shadadiya University yesterday. Ardiya fire station, safety and security department of the university, medical emergencies department and the interior ministry took part in the drill. The scenario included a fire on the

first floor, with five persons "injured". All 700 employees and students were evacuated, while the "injured" were taken out using a fire ladder and handed to medical emergency personnel.



Filipinos with pre-Jan 15 permit can head to Kuwait

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Philippines department of labor issued a decision allowing its nationals who got their work abroad permits before Jan 15 to leave for Kuwait, including domestic helpers. Commenting on the decision, chairman of the domestic helper agencies union Khaled Al-Dakhnan said the decision was a "partial relief" and that the crisis might be resolved within the coming few days. "Negotiations are promising and positive results may be seen next week," Dakhnan said, pointing out that both countries wish to get past the consequences of the recent death of a maid, especially after the Kuwaiti government referred the suspects to the criminal court over charges of first degree murder.

Expats' salaries

MP Abdullah Al-Kandari filed a parliamentary inquiry against Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel concerning expat employees in state departments. Kandari requested a list of the total number of expat government employees over the past five years and how many of them earn less than KD 500 a month. Meanwhile, MP Mohammed Al-Huwailah yesterday resigned from the parliamentary financial affairs committee to bring the total number of resigned members to four - Saleh Ashour, Bader Al-Mulla, Oudah Al-Ruwaie and Huwailah, said informed sources. The sources added that the committee's chairperson MP Safa Al-Hashem can no longer hold any meetings due to lack of quorum with the remaining two members - Khaled Dumaitheer and Majed Al-Mutairi.

Housing projects

Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Rana Al-Fares said the Mutlaa and South Saad Al-Abdullah housing projects are currently top priority at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare. Fares added the Cabinet shows a great interest in both projects and that she toured them both to inspect them and check the progress of work.

Setline scores

Chairman of the Cooperative Societies Union Meshaal Al-Sayyar strongly condemned what he described as utilizing cooperative work to settle political scores. Sayyar added that he strongly rejects unjustified and unlawful interferences in co-ops in the form of appointing unneeded board members by the ministry for the sake of creating balances.

Kuwaiti envoy commends GCC chief's service

RIYADH: Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Khaled Al-Sabah commended the service of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Abdullatif Al-Zayani during his tenure, which contributed to cementing ties and cooperation among the six GCC countries. Sheikh Ali, during a meeting with Zayani yesterday, thanked him for his relentless efforts to promote the GCC march. He wished Zayani best of luck in his future diplomatic mission. The Gulf Cooperation Council consists of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman. — KUNA



RIYADH: Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Khaled Al-Sabah presents a memento to GCC Secretary General Abdullatif Al-Zayani. — KUNA

Woman's hand freed from meat mincer

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The interior ministry's relations and security information department said firemen freed the hand of an Asian woman from a meat mincer yesterday. The woman was taken to Adan Hospital, where the fire technical rescue team freed her hand without causing any further complications. Doctors then treated her.



Kuwait, US discuss recent developments

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien discussed the close bilateral ties and recent regional and international developments over the phone yesterday. —



Ministries buy more air purifiers as India capital battles toxic air

Battle for witnesses looms; defense rests in Trump trial

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BEIRUT: People are pictured inside the terminal at Beirut International Airport Beirut. Information International, an independent Lebanon-based research body, estimates that the number of Lebanese who left the country and did not return in 2019 was up by 42 percent compared to the previous year. —AFP

Lebanon crisis fuels brain drain

Lebanon suffering its worst economic crisis since civil war

BEIRUT: When Lebanon's protests erupted in October, thousands found a renewed commitment to their homeland and vowed to fix a country that has long fed its best and brightest to the diaspora. Then the economy unraveled. Students and young professionals who had mobilized en masse to demand better opportunities in their home country started filling in immigration forms and applying to universities abroad.

Mothers on bustling protest squares who had been complaining about their children living far away have since seen even more leave. With no clear path out of Lebanon's worst economic crisis in decades, the will to remain has petered out and many are now scrambling for the exit. "I'm leaving and I'm never coming back," said Youssef Nassar, a 29-year-old cinematographer who has booked a one-way ticket to Canada for next month. "Nothing is going right in this country for me to stay here."

Lebanon is suffering its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war and everyone is feeling the heat. Scores of companies have closed, salaries have been slashed, and unemployment rates are skyrocketing. Inflation doubled between

October and November, according to Lebanon's Blominvest Bank, while the Lebanese pound has plunged by a third against the dollar in the parallel exchange market. Nassar criticized the political class for failing to chart a way out of the crisis. "I have developed a hate for this country," he said.

'Won't wait forever'

Nassar used to make a decent earning every month from shooting photo and video campaigns for fashion brands, advertising agencies and even English rock artist Steven Wilson. But since Lebanon's economic crisis accelerated with the start of anti-government protests in October, with banks temporarily closing and later severely limiting withdrawals, he has only been booked once.

Seven of his clients, including a high-profile member of the Lebanese parliament, have so far failed to pay the \$25,000 they collectively owe him for previous projects. "I want to work on my career and my future," said Nassar, who holds a Canadian passport. "I'm not willing to wait forever for the country to get better."

He is not the only one seeking better chances abroad. Information International, an independent Lebanon-based research body, esti-

mates that the number of Lebanese who left the country and did not return in 2019 jumped by 42 percent on the previous year. Google searches from within Lebanon for the term "immigration" hit a five-year peak between November and December, according to Google Trends. The last time the search term was that popular was right after Lebanon's 2006 war with Israel. Immigration lawyers, for their part, say business is booming.

"Demand is up by at least 75 percent," said one immigration lawyer who asked not to be named to protect his business. He said he is currently processing 25 applications. Most are to Canada, which along with Australia is among the most popular destinations for Lebanese emigrants due to their demand for highly skilled people, the lawyer said. The bulk of his clients are educated youths and young professionals working in pharmaceuticals, information technology and finance. "They are leaving because of the economic and political situation," he told AFP.

'Tired of fighting'

Decades of conflict, sluggish growth and corruption have prompted many Lebanese to emigrate - a

fact touted by Lebanese officials who boast the success of the country's expatriates. Although there are no official figures, Lebanon's diaspora is estimated to be more than double the size of its domestic population of four million.

This chronic exodus has drawn the ire of demonstrators, who accuse politicians they view as corrupt of hijacking the country and forcing its people out. "I had been thinking about leaving ever since I was 16 years old," said Fatima, an architect by training who is now 28. "When the revolution started, that was the very first time I ever felt like I belonged, the very first time I ever felt that Lebanon's flag meant something to me."

But last month, Fatima lost a high-paying job at an international NGO after donors cut funding due to the crisis. "This is when everything changed for me," she said. She found an immigration lawyer and is in the process of applying to emigrate to Canada - something she is determined to complete. "I'm tired of fighting all the time," she said. "I don't think I will be failing my country if I leave," she added. "I will be failing it if I stay and get more depressed and do nothing."—AFP

Indian bus crashes into well, killing 26

MUMBAI: Twenty-six people including a seven-year-old girl were killed after the bus they were travelling in crashed with an autorickshaw and fell into a well in western India, officials said yesterday. Emergency crews worked through the night to rescue survivors and retrieve bodies and used a crane to remove the red-and-white bus from the well, as hundreds thronging to the crash site after the accident late Tuesday.

Rescue operations ended yesterday in Nashik district, around 254 kilometers from India's financial capital Mumbai. "We conducted rescue operations throughout the night and recovered 26 bodies. Another 32 injured have been sent for treatment," National Disaster Response Force spokesman Sachidanand Gawde said.

The bus driver was among the dead. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered condolences for the "unfortunate" incident. "In this hour of sadness, my thoughts are with the bereaved families. May the injured recover at the earliest," Modi tweeted. India has some of the world's highest traffic fatalities with more than 150,000 deaths annually due to poor roads, badly maintained vehicles and reckless driving. Experts say many highways and roads suffer from design flaws, making rides a daily risk, particularly during winter when visibility drops considerably. —AFP

India can make Pakistan 'bite the dust' in 10 days

NEW DELHI: India is now capable of making Pakistan "bite the dust" in less than 10 days in any new war with its arch-rival, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said. The nuclear-armed neighbors have fought three wars and last February came close to a fourth with tit-for-tat airstrikes sparked by an attack on Indian troops in Kashmir.

Modi is under pressure after weeks of ongoing protests against a new citizenship law, a slowing economy and the prospect of losing the latest in a string of state elections in New Delhi next month. "Pakistan has already lost three wars. Our armed forces will not take more than 7-10 days to make Pakistan bite the dust," Modi said in a speech to military personnel on Tuesday.

His comments follow last year's incident when an Indian fighter jet was shot down - and the pilot captured - by Islamabad after a rare aerial engagement. Wearing a maroon National Cadet Corps baseball cap at the event in the capital, Modi said India's new prowess was thanks to what he called "youthful thinking". He said that Indian strikes against what New Delhi said were militants in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and inside Pakistan proper in 2016 and last year were evidence of this. "This is 'youthful thinking'. We carry out surgical strikes and take on terrorists in their homes," Modi said.



India and Pakistan have fought three wars: in 1947, 1965 and 1971, as well as in 1999 during the so-called Kargil Conflict. Modi said that Pakistan continues to wage a "proxy war" against India by backing militants in Indian-administered Kashmir where tens of thousands of people have died in recent decades. Kashmir

has been divided between India and Pakistan since Independence from Britain in 1947. In August Modi's government stripped Indian Kashmir of its partial autonomy.—AFP



MUMBAI: Rescue workers gather around the remains of a bus that fell into a well after crashing with an autorickshaw at Meshi Phata on the Malegaon Deola Road in Maharashtra's Nashik district. —AFP

International

Palestinians left with few options against Trump's Middle East plan

Trump's initiative grants Jewish state full control of Jerusalem

RAMALLAH: Palestinians have rejected US President Donald Trump's peace proposals but may struggle to push back if Israel launches the plan on the ground by annexing settlements and keys parts of the West Bank. Trump's initiative grants the Jewish state full control of Jerusalem and allows it to annex the Jordan Valley - a strategic area of the West Bank - as well as the settlements that dot the Palestinian territory.

In exchange, the Palestinians are being offered a form of statehood in what remains of the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the prospect of billions of dollars in aid and investment. Palestinians across the political spectrum have condemned the plan. In a Washington Post op-ed, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat called on other countries to take the lead in negotiating peace. But so far the international reaction has been muted, with few indications of serious outside pressure on the US and Israel.

Israeli officials have said they plan to begin the annexation as soon as possible, maybe before elections scheduled for March 2. "The Palestinians options are limited by several factors," said Hugh Lovatt, Israel-Palestine analyst at the European Council for Foreign Relations.

"Firstly their own divisions, secondly the regional dynamics and thirdly splits among the Europeans."

'Popular response'

The Palestinians are split between Abbas's West Bank-based government and the Islamists of Hamas, which control the Gaza Strip. The two have been at loggerheads for more than a decade, though shared opposition to Trump's deal allowed them to hold a rare meeting on Tuesday. Regionally, Arab states in the Gulf have moved closer to the Jewish state amid shared hostility to Iran.

In a speech Tuesday evening, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said he had heard "promising (international) reactions against the Trump plan. We will build on them." But in reality Saudi Arabia and other regional players said they would study the proposals, withholding immediate criticism. The United Arab Emirates went further by calling

the plan an "important starting point" for peace talks.

The European Union is also split over how tough to respond if Israel goes ahead with annexation, diplomats said. In a meeting yesterday, Erekat met EU envoys and called on them to recognize the state of Palestine, a long-standing demand, two diplomats said. But consensus remains elusive, the diplomats said, with countries such as Hungary opposing measures favored by Sweden, Ireland and others.

"There is an EU position we have expressed previously stressing opposition to annexation and consequences if they do so," one European diplomat said. "But it is fair to say there is no consensus on what those consequences could be." In a neutral reaction, Egypt, whose capital hosts the Arab League, has called on Israel and the Palestinians "to undertake a careful and thorough examination of the US vision to achieve peace".

Abbas is expected to travel to Cairo yesterday for an Arab League meeting before visiting other countries to try to rally support. Abbas will request "support and backing for the Palestinian position to face the (US and Israeli) pressure," Palestinian foreign minister Riyad Al-Maliki said. He said they would take any annexation to the International Criminal Court. Abbas has called for a "popular" movement to oppose Trump's plan, but protests on Tuesday night were relatively small.

Yesterday a few hundred people gathered in the Jordan Valley, a key strategic area the plan gives Israel the right to annex. Abbas, who has been boycotting the Trump administration since 2017 over its unbridled pro-Israel stance, may try to stumble through to year's end hoping Trump loses November elections, said Ofer Zalzberg of the International Crisis Group. "If Israel goes ahead with annexation, though, they will seek to gather Arab opposition, could reduce security coordination with Israel so protests risk turning violent," Zalzberg said.

Gaza escalation?

In Gaza, a few thousand demonstrators gathered Tuesday



MUKHAYYAM AL 'ARRUB: An Israeli soldier fires teargas towards Palestinian demonstrators during a demonstration in Al-Aroub Palestinian refugee camp, between the West Bank towns of Hebron and Bethlehem yesterday. —AFP

to oppose the plan. Hamas has fought three wars with Israel since 2008 and is considered a terrorist organization by the United States and other Western powers. But analysts say the group has little desire for another devastating conflict with Israel. "Hamas and Islamic Jihad will keep away from it for now and maintain joint work with President Abbas," said Jamal al-Fadhli, a politics professor in Gaza. —AFP

Syria's Maaret Al-Numan: From protest hub to ghost town

BEIRUT: For years, Syria's Maaret Al-Numan was a defiant hotspot for anti-government protests, before increased regime bombardment reduced it to a graffiti-daubed ghost town. Here is a brief profile of the strategic northwestern road hub, which the Syrian army said it had recaptured on Wednesday after more than seven years of rebel rule.

'Revolution'

The second largest town in Idlib province, in 2011 Maaret Al-Numan was one of the first centers in the region to rise up against the government of President Bashar al-Assad. It became a hub for demonstrations, attracting the disenfranchised from villages all around. It was "the town of the revolution", said media activist Ezzeddeen Al-Idlibi. "Residents from most surrounding villages would flock there to demonstrate." Rebels overran the town in 2012, attracting deadly government air strikes, but the revolutionary fervor lived

on. On Fridays after noon prayers, demonstrators took to the streets waving the three-star flag of the uprising, chanting against the government and its Russian ally.

Their slogans later turned against increasingly powerful jihadists. In March last year, after Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate cemented its influence over the wider opposition bastion, demonstrators flocked together to mark eight years since the start of the anti-Assad uprising. "Maaret Al-Numan lived through nine years of revolution in all senses of the word," said former resident Bilal Makhzoum. "To me it was water and air. I don't know how I will carry on without it."

Key highway

Maaret Al-Numan is the latest town to fall as government forces chip away at the country's last major opposition bastion. Weeks of deadly bombardment had forced most of its 150,000 inhabitants to flee. The town's recapture brings the regime a step closer taking full control of the wider jihadist-run stronghold and a key commercial artery running through it.

Maaret Al-Numan lies on the M5 highway linking the capital to Syria's second city and former industrial heart Aleppo. The recapture of the town is the latest symbolic blow to Syrian rebels in the agricultural region, where previous defiance has now been reduced to lingering graffiti.



IDLIB: Photo shows a tank covered with a plastic sheet on the road between the villages of Deir Sharqi and Talmans on the eastern outskirts of Maaret Al-Numan in Syria's northern western province of Idlib. —AFP

"The olive trees will not rest until the jasmine is freed," reads one message in the town. "The revolution continues," claims another, its author likely long gone.

Sandbagged mosaics

But nestled in a UNESCO-listed region of ancient villages, Maaret Al-Numan is also notable for its historic sites-chief among them a mosaics museum. Among the museum's most prized works is a depiction of the birth and life of Hercules, said former Syrian antiquities director Maamoun Abdul Karim. In 2012, rebels posed inside for an AFP photographer, in front of a wall of tiny colored cubes

depicting a hunting scene.

As conflict escalated, volunteers did their best to preserve the Roman and Byzantine-era mosaics from air strikes and shelling, including by heaping sandbags against them. Former employees "also played a great role in protecting the museum from looting," Abdul Karim told AFP. In 2015, the museum, housed in an Ottoman-era caravanserai, was seriously damaged in a government barrel bomb attack, according to the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology. A government rocket strike also hit the buildings the following year, another non-governmental organization said. —AFP



HAMRA: Israeli soldiers patrol past a field near Al-Hamra checkpoint in the Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank. —AFP

and had already pledged to annex the territory before Trump's plan was announced.

His main election rival Benny Gantz of the centrist Blue and White Party also supports annexation, but his timetable for doing so would be slower. Palestinians say

annexation would make it impossible to form a coherent Palestinian state, effectively marking an end to the two-state solution. They see annexation as part of Israeli attempts to cut the West Bank into segments, dividing the Palestinians and weakening their cause. —AFP

Jordan Valley: Key area in Middle East conflict

JORDAN VALLEY: US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace proposal announced on Tuesday gives Washington's consent for Israel to annex the Jordan Valley, a strategically vital area. Here are some key facts about the territory, which constitutes around 30 percent of the West Bank and has played a central role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Demolitions

The Jordan Valley is a narrow strip of land running along both banks of the Jordan River, which in turn demarcates Jordan on one side and Israel and the Palestinian territories on the other. On the Israeli/Palestinian side, it runs from the

Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south — the lowest point on earth. Much of that is inside the West Bank, a key part of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 Six Day War. Temperatures in the arid area reach up to 50 degrees in the summer.

Settlements

Around 65,000 Palestinians live in the Jordan Valley, including 20,000 in the city of Jericho, according to the Israeli rights NGO B'Tselem. Around 10,000 Israelis live in settlements in the area. B'Tselem says Israel already bans Palestinians from using around 85 percent of the land and the area is a hotspot for Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures.

Two-state solution

While the population is small, the area is strategically vital to both sides of the conflict. Israel says it needs to control the area for security and to protect against any potential incursions from Jordan. Rightwing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has long vowed that Israel must keep control of the Jordan Valley,

has been renewed focus on safeguarding the venues.

Nearly 10 years into the decades-long clean-up some progress has been made, with potentially dangerous spent fuel removed from the top of one damaged reactor building and removal underway from another. But the melted fuel inside the reactors has yet to be extracted and areas around the station remain closed to residents. Some towns have been reopened further away but not all residents have returned. This time I was taken to the site's water treatment building, a cavernous hall where huge machines called Advanced Liquid Processing Systems (ALPS) are used to filter water contaminated by the reactors.

On my first visit in 2012 I had to wear full protective gear put on at an operations base located in a sports facility about 20 kilometres south of Fukushima Daiichi called J-Village, where the Olympic torch relay will start in March, then taken to the site by

bus. This time I was driven by van from a railway station in Tomioka, a town re-opened in 2017, about 9 kilometers away with no precautions. More than 90% of the plant is deemed to have so little radioactivity that few precautions are needed. Nevertheless, reporting from there was not easy. Before entering the plant itself, which is about the size of 400 football fields, I was asked to take off my shoes and socks, given a dosimeter - a device that measures radiation levels - three pairs of blue socks, a pair of cloth gloves, a simple face mask, a cotton cap, a helmet and a white vest with clear panels to carry my equipment and display my pass. I put on all three pairs of socks and the rest of the gear given to me, later including rubber boots. I was to change in and out of different pairs of these boots many times - I lost count - colour coded according to the zone we passed through, each time putting them in plastic bags that would be discarded after use. —Reuters

Middle East peace plan prompts some praise, Arab anger

JERUSALEM: US President Donald Trump on Tuesday proposed the creation of a Palestinian state with a capital on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Below are some of the reactions to the US plan for ending decades of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Israeli Prime Minister

"And on this day, you too have charted a brilliant future, a brilliant future for Israelis, Palestinians and the region, by presenting a realistic path to a durable peace." "I know that there'll be opposition. There's always opposition. I know there will be many obstacles along the way, much criticism. But we have an old Jewish saying: 'If not now, when? And if not us, who?'"

Palestinian President

"I say to Trump and Netanyahu: Jerusalem is not for sale, all our rights are not for sale and are not for bargain. And your deal, the conspiracy, will not pass."

Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas official

"Trump's statement is aggressive and it will spark a lot of anger ... Trump's statement about Jerusalem is nonsense and Jerusalem will always be a land for the Palestinians ... The Palestinians will confront this deal and Jerusalem will remain a Palestinian land."

Jordanian Foreign Minister

"Jordan supports every genuine effort aimed at achieving just and comprehensive peace that people will accept." Safadi said the only path to a comprehensive and lasting peace was the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on pre-1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Iranian Foreign Minister

"The so-called 'Vision for Peace' is simply the dream project of a bankruptcy-ridden real estate developer. But it is a nightmare for the region and the world. And, hopefully, a wake-up call for all the Muslims who have been barking up the wrong tree."

UN Secretary-General

Guterres is committed to helping Israel and the Palestinians broker peace on the basis of UN resolutions, international law, bilateral agreements and the vision of two states based on pre-1967 borders, his spokesman said.

Egyptian Foreign Ministry

"Egypt calls on the two relevant parties to undertake a careful and thorough consideration of the US vision to achieve peace and open channels of dialogue, under US auspices, for the resumption of negotiations."

UAE Ambassador to Washington

The United Arab Emirates believes the Palestinians and Israelis can achieve lasting peace and genuine co-existence with the support of the international community, and the plan offers an important starting point for a return to negotiations within a US-led international framework, the ambassador said.

Hezbollah group

"The settlement project under this deal is one of the biggest dangers and aims to do away with the right of return and to rob the Palestinian people of the right to their land ... and to create social and demographic tension and sedition that only serve the enemy's interests and expansionist goals."

Turkish Foreign Ministry

"This plan is an annexation plan that is aimed at killing the two-state solution and stealing Palestinian lands."

Houthi Movement

"Trump's deal is blatant US aggression on Palestine and the nation, and it is a deal funded by Saudi (Arabia) and the UAE (United Arab Emirates) to cement Israeli occupation."

Israeli Far-Right Defense Minister

"We will not allow the government of Israel to recognize a Palestinian state in any eventuality." ?

British Foreign Secretary

"This is clearly a serious proposal, reflecting extensive time and effort... We encourage them (the Israeli and Palestinian leaders) to give these plans genuine and fair consideration, and explore whether they might prove a first step on the road back to negotiations."

Saudi Arabia Foreign Ministry

"The kingdom reaffirms its support for all efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue." "The kingdom appreciates efforts by President Trump's administration to develop a comprehensive peace plan between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and supports starting direct peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel under US auspices." —Reuters

Inside the destroyed Fukushima plant: The radiation and the risk

OKUMA: Reuters was recently given exclusive access to Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant, where three reactors melted down in 2011 after a powerful earthquake and tsunami overwhelmed the seaside facility. It was my fourth visit to the plant since the disaster to report on a massive clean-up. Work to dismantle the plant has taken nearly a decade so far, but with Tokyo due to host the Olympics this summer - including some events less than 60 kilometers from the power station - there

International

Battle for witnesses looms; defense rests in Trump trial

Trump's lawyers call the abuse of power charges 'politically motivated'

WASHINGTON: The fight over calling witnesses to testify in President Donald Trump's impeachment trial intensified yesterday after Trump's lawyers closed their defense calling the abuse of power charges against him politically motivated. Democrats sought to have the Senate subpoena former White House national security advisor John Bolton to provide evidence after leaks from his forthcoming book suggested he could supply damning evidence against Trump.

But Republicans threatened to demand that Democratic presidential hopeful Joe Biden and his son Hunter also testify, in a move aimed at damaging the party's possibly best chance of defeating Trump in the November election. "If people want witnesses, we're going to get a lot of witnesses," said Republican Senator Lindsey Graham. At only the third ever presidential impeachment trial in US history, Trump's lawyers closed out their three-day defense in the Senate by calling for a speedy acquittal of Trump and accusing Democrats of bringing politically motivated charges in an attempt to reverse his 2016 election victory.

"What they are asking you to do is to throw out a successful president, on the eve of an election, with no basis and in violation of the constitution," Trump's lead counsel Pat Cipollone said. "The American people are entitled to choose their president," he told the senators sitting as the jury. "We urge the Senate to reject these articles of impeachment."

Low bar

Trump is accused of cheating in his 2020 reelection

effort by pressuring vulnerable ally Ukraine to announce investigations into both Bidens and a spurious conspiracy theory, promoted by Russia, that Kiev helped the Democrats in 2016. The impeachment charges say the president froze vital military aid to Ukraine for two months last summer to pressure President Volodymyr Zelensky to publicly announce the probes, illicitly drawing a foreign nation into US electoral politics.

Trump's lawyers mostly steered clear of those specific allegations. Instead they argued that the impeachment case was rooted in "policy differences" and that the charges against him, abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, are too weak and thinly-sourced to justify his removal from office. They said a conviction would set a precedent for US politics that would result in retribution-driven political battles for years to come.

"The bar for impeachment cannot be set this low," said Jay Sekulow, another Trump lawyer. "If partisan impeachment is now the rule of the day... future presidents-Democrats, Republicans-will be paralyzed the moment they are elected," he said. Adam Schiff, the head of the Democrats' prosecution team, said that Republicans' arguments were "not particularly relevant to the charges against the president." "The president's lawyers ... really did not, cannot, defend the president on the facts," he said.

Battle over Bolton

The trial, which began in earnest seven days ago, turns now to senators submitting written questions to

the prosecution and defense through presiding Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts over Wednesday and Thursday. On Friday they are expected to take up the issue of calling witnesses, which Republicans originally believed they could defeat and bring the trial to a swift close with their 53-47 majority in the Senate. But leaks from Bolton's coming book, suggesting he could provide evidence of Trump's wrongdoing appear to have convinced several Republicans to support calling witnesses.

Bolton reportedly says Trump told him in August that aid to Ukraine, totaling almost \$400 million, would stay frozen until Zelensky announced investigations into Democrats, including the Bidens. Late Tuesday Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told Senate Republicans they did not have enough votes yet to block a witness call-implying that at least four Republican senators would cross party lines and side with the 47 Democrats in an expected vote.

Trump and his supporters have pummeled Bolton in the media. But Trump's former White House chief of staff, retired general John Kelly, said Tuesday that he trusts Bolton on the matter. "If John Bolton says that in the book, I believe John Bolton," he said in Florida. Senator Graham told Fox News that he expected Republicans would still be able to defeat the witness vote on Friday and the trial would be finished before the annual State of the Union speech which Trump is to deliver to Congress on Tuesday.

"This, to me, needs to end, end now," Graham said. Trump himself, at a campaign rally in New Jersey, said



WASHINGTON: This combination of pictures shows US National Security Advisor John Bolton (left) and US President Donald Trump at the White House campus in Washington, DC. —AFP

the Democrats were carrying out "deranged partisan crusades." But Graham, one of Trump's strongest defenders in the Senate, also threatened to make Democrats pay a price if they are determined to call Bolton. Republicans would insist on subpoenaing the two Bidens as well as others linked to the Ukraine case. He said they would want to know "was it legitimate for the president to believe there was corruption and conflicts of interest on the Bidens' part in the Ukraine?" —AFP

Sadness and hopes for future at EU's post-Brexit centre

GADHEIM: In the tiny village of Gadheim in northern Bavaria, a lovingly laid out garden marked with regional, German and European flags marks the spot that will stand at the geographic centre of the European Union after Brexit. Wrapped up in a woolly hat and scarf against the January cold lying over the bare fields, farmer Karin Kessler says the few dozen inhabitants have "very mixed feelings" about the new distinction.

When she heard in March 2017 that the EU's centre would shift to Gadheim, she believed it was a far-fetched April Fool's joke nine months after the British voted to quit. But the spot-nine degrees, 54 minutes and seven seconds east and 49 degrees, 50 minutes and 37 seconds north-was calculated precisely by France's IGN geographic institute using a "centre of gravity" model taking into account the bloc's remaining territory.

"My son found the coordinates and sent me a picture on WhatsApp," Kessler remembers. "I zoomed in and said, oh, that's on our neighbor's field. And he replied, no, it's on our land!" Since then, the municipality and the local landscape gardening school have pitched in to help shape the plot marking the new centre, even during the many months of suspense over when Brexit would come-or whether it would at all. "I definitely followed the debate in Britain, I was always getting the news on my phone. It was like a never-ending story," Kessler says.

"I sometimes thought, don't the British have anything else to do but Brexit? So many people were demonstrating to stay after all that the outcome seemed really open, we really didn't know whether it would be for or against the EU." Britain's departure prompted fears for the future of the EU among local people, Kessler says. Her father, who passed away in 2019, had been a soldier in World War II and saw the bloc as a guarantor of peace and stability on the continent in the post-war decades. "I think there's plenty of people, especially those still with us who experienced the war, who can identify with that."

'Limited time only'

Now a boulder of local limestone marks the post-Brexit centre, with a tilted red-and-white striped pole pointing to the previous location, some 60 kilometers to the northwest in Westerngrund. Brigitte Heim, mayor of the municipality there, has had an equally "nerve-racking" time watching the back-and-forth in Britain. But at least "now each country can look to the future for itself, and maybe that will bring people back together a little in England," she hopes. People in Westerngrund always saw the centre of the EU as a "gift for a limited time," Heim says. "We see it as part of our history, our story," although "perhaps if the Scots manage to break free, the centre could come back," she jokes.

Hope for the future

Even in Gadheim, "part of us hoped Brexit wouldn't happen, so we could keep Europe the way we've known it," says Juergen Goetz. The mayor of nearby Veitshoechheim-Gadheim is too small to have a mayor to itself-Goetz adds that locals are "happy" to be named centre of the EU, talking up the area's ties to the rest of Europe. Veitshoechheim has partner cities in Italy, France and the Czech Republic. A blog about its links with Pont L'Evêque proudly displays pictures of visitors from the Norman town enjoying recitals from the children's choir and a visit to a local vineyard in 2017.

And in a major gas pipeline and a section of the centuries-old pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, infrastructure both ancient and modern links Veitshoechheim to neighboring countries. Looking ahead, "you can't know what effects Brexit will have for Britain and for the rest of Europe," Goetz muses. "It'll depend on whether Britain manages to profit so much economically from leaving that there could be imitators. Of course, I hope no-one else leaves."

One thing is certain for the Gadheimers: for all their meticulous preparations, the village-like other spots that have previously marked the EU's centre-won't be the centre of the world forever. "So far only new countries had joined, there's something historic about the centre of the EU moving because a country is leaving," Goetz says. "I hope the next time it moves, it happens because a new country has joined us again." —AFP

'Did a plane hit?' Big earthquake shakes Miami, Caribbean

KINGSTON: A major earthquake struck south of Cuba on Tuesday, sending shockwaves as far as Miami and sparking panic in the Cayman Islands where it ripped open sinkholes, but did not do serious damage to people or property, initial reports said. The magnitude 7.7 quake hit in the sea between Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and Cuba, at a depth of 6.2 miles. Several aftershocks, including one of 6.1 magnitude much nearer to the Cayman Islands, followed the principal quake. Cindi Welcome, 27, a trainee travel agent in Cayman capital George Town, said she first thought her blood pressure was playing up when the tremors struck. Then she screamed.

"The building was shaking like paper," she said. "The panic was real. This was the worst we have ever felt." Residents reported drains blowing open and sinkholes appearing, one of which swallowed half a car, said Jewel Hydes, a 44-year-old risk manager on the islands. "It was really, really horri-

fic. Everyone on the island is still in shock," Hydes said. "We kept seeing tons of people praying, running out of buildings, 'cause they were swaying."

In Miami, Florida, several downtown buildings were evacuated as office workers streamed outdoors to safety. Miami personal injury attorney Eli Stiers was in his 29th floor office when he suddenly started feeling queasy. "I was like: 'Did I have some bad sushi?'" he said. Then he noticed his office door swinging back and forth. "We were like, did a plane hit the building? A sinkhole open up? Then it hit us that it was an earthquake. You don't expect that in Miami."

The Miami-Dade Fire-Rescue department responded to multiple calls about high-rise buildings swaying. The department said it had no reports of injuries or structural damage. To varying degrees, that message was repeated across the region, despite the strength of the quake. Angie Watler, a spokeswoman for police on Cayman Brac, the island nearest the epicenter, said members of the public had reported some damage to buildings and to a swimming pool at the Carib Sands resort on the south of the island.

Videos from Jamaica and the Caymans showed water sloshing out of pools during the quake. Watler said there were no reports so far of injuries but that authorities were still making



MIAMI: People wait outside after evacuating office buildings after an earthquake struck south of Cuba on January 28, 2020. —AFP

checks. The International Tsunami Information Center said a threat of a tsunami wave had largely passed. Minor sea level fluctuations up to 1 feet (30 cm) were still possible, it said.

The quake was also felt in several provinces across Cuba, the government said. However, it was not strongly felt in the capital of Havana, according to a Reuters witness. Don Blakeman, a

geophysicist at the National Earthquake Information Center, said the impact of quakes was hard to predict but that it happening at sea appeared to have helped. "The good news is really that it waded out into the ocean," Blakeman said by telephone. "It would have been a much different story if it had been right in Kingston." —Reuters

US Health care: For a family, \$300,000 debt nightmare

BROOKLYN PARK: The Maccoux family receive visitors to their beautiful home in a Minneapolis suburb with an infectious warmth that belies the fact their youngest daughter Olivia has had more than 140 brain surgeries, all by the age of 24. Mom Cathy smiles tenderly as she scrolls through photos of Olivia on hospital beds at various ages, from a baby to toddler to a teen.

"That's just a hole in her skull from one of the shunts, isn't that crazy?" she says. And dad, Dan, is close to laughing as he reads from bills sprawled out on a table cataloguing medical costs going back to 1996 - including parking tickets and hospital meals. "Very surprisingly, very few people have a love of records," says the 57-year-old independent consultant in the semiconductor industry.

The family's case is a telling illustration of the flaws of the US health care system, which Democratic candidates for the White House have promised to overhaul or scrap ahead of their first primary contests in February. Despite spending the most on health care in the world, 27.5 million Americans are without any health insurance. And for the "lucky" insured, sky high costs can lead many to bankruptcy, or as in the case of the Maccoux, indebted for life. Olivia was born three months early, which is at the root of her misfortunes.

She has a rare condition called hydrocephalus, meaning fluids build up in the cavities of her brain that require valves and catheters to drain down toward the abdomen. But the devices have needed to be changed dozens of times - not to say anything of the epilepsy she experiences, among several other neurological conditions. "I grew up with no hair," she says of her childhood. But the Maccoux family are fortunate in one respect: Dan has a six figure income, and has always had health insurance. When he worked for a company, his

insurance coverage was "gold," he says.

The problem is that in the US, coverage rarely covers 100 percent of people's needs. The system is largely privatized, and reimbursements to patients depend on negotiations between a hospital or pharmacy and the insurer. The level of reimbursement varies from case to case. There are different levels of "deductibles" - the amount paid by the patient before the insurance kicks in, as well as "copays," the fixed amount of out-of-pocket costs for doctor visits or drugs once the deductible has been met. "It was the copays I think that killed us because we had so many appointments," said Cathy. "We were drowning for a while because it was just constant, constant."

Advised to divorce

Dan sat with an AFP team and added up the columns on spreadsheets he has used to calculate costs since 2005, the year he began documenting expenses in detail (before that, he has estimates). Across a total of 15 years, it came to \$100,000 for out-of-pocket costs, \$22,000 for prescription copays, \$15,000 for meals during hospitalization...with provider co-pays and parking thrown in, totaling \$192,000.

From 1996 to 2004, he estimates the costs were around \$130,000 - with the two figures combining to around \$322,000. "Considering the catastrophe, we did relatively good," said Dan. "We probably had a couple dozen times where a provider turned it over to a debt collector and those situations were probably the hardest to deal with." The house in which they live has served as a piggy bank for their debts: the family has borrowed money by remortgaging it, a permanent financial juggle.

In 2001, their woes multiplied when their second youngest, Traci, was diagnosed at the age of 11 with complex regional pain syndrome, a rare affliction that started in her leg and spread to her arms (their eldest, Amanda, is fine). The family has on occasion turned to GoFundMe to raise money for the two: the platform has become indispensable for Americans trapped in medical debt. "We've had people tell us you should get a divorce," said Cathy, as a financial strategy. Under this plan, she would have taken custody of the children and, without being employed, would have



Cathy Maccoux looks at a photo on her cellphone on January 16, 2020 in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. He may be insured and has a six-figure salary but after spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on care for his daughter Olivia, Dan Maccoux expects to be in debt for the rest of his life - victim of a ferociously expensive US health system that Donald Trump's challengers for the presidency have pledged to overhaul or scrap. —AFP

benefited from public coverage.

The couple never considered it. Obamacare, the insurance reforms enacted by former president Barack Obama in 2010, helped the family by removing lifetime caps previously imposed by insurance companies on their payouts. It also prevented insurers from refusing patients coverage on the basis of having a pre-existing conditions - something that would have made the family pariahs when Dan left his company and went freelance. In the last few years, things have improved markedly, said Dan. Olivia and Traci are still sick, but have successfully moved to state health insurance, a more comprehensive package that reduces the burden of out-of-pocket costs on the family.

Olivia finished college last year. "Neurologically I'm doing a lot better," she said. But the system isn't finished yet with the parents. While Obamacare helped the family in some ways, it also sent their insurance premiums soaring. For this year, Dan and Cathy are paying \$1,261 a month. Any reimbursements won't kick-in until they reach their annual deductible of \$6,400 each. "We all have to laugh," said Dan. While his friends are discussing their retirement plans, "I'm like, I'll never be able to retire!" —AFP

International

Ministries buy more air purifiers as India capital battles toxic air

Six ministries spent \$70,353 on air cleaners in 2018-19

NEW DELHI: India's government has stepped up the purchase of air purifiers over the last two years, taking the number of devices in ministries to protect against deteriorating air quality to nearly 300, government data seen by Reuters showed. Six federal ministries - including the health, foreign and home affairs - bought at least 159 air purifiers during 2018-2019 at a cost of 5 million rupees (\$70,353), according to previously unpublished data obtained under a Right to Information (RTI) law.

That compares with at least 140 air purifiers bought for \$55,000 during 2014-2017 for the six ministries and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office, as previously reported by Reuters. The latest data on purchases for Modi's office was not available. The purchases come as the federal and city governments faced criticism for failing to address the problem of worsening air pollution, especially in the winter, and drew criticism from one activist.

"It's absolutely criminal to spend taxpayers' money in buying air purifiers for government officials," said environmentalist Vimlendu Jha, who is a member of a government panel tasked with solving Delhi's pollution crisis. In November, the level of pollution in the capital forced authorities to shut schools, restrict the use of cars and declare a public health emergency.

A senior official at the environment ministry, which bears the most responsibility for tackling pollution, said there was no particular drive to buy purifiers to protect

civil servants. "The government is not spending a fortune by buying air purifiers. And it's not that officials don't get to inhale toxic air by confining themselves to their offices," said the ministry official. The six ministries and Modi's office did not respond to requests for comment. Air purifiers can cost up to nearly \$1,000 and are too expensive for most Indians.

Per capita income in New Delhi, a city of more than 20 million, is about \$400 a month and thousands of homeless people endure the cold and the toxic air while sleeping on the streets. Reuters requested for data using the RTI law from the six ministries as it had comparable numbers previously reported in 2018. These were the ministries of foreign affairs, tourism, agriculture, health, home affairs and the federal think-tank Niti Aayog. Of the total of 159 devices bought by the ministries, the home affairs ministry topped the list with 103 of them in 2018 and 2019, the data showed.

"All the air purifiers have been installed in various offices/rooms of this ministry," the ministry said in its RTI response, adding the amount spent was 3.1 million rupees (\$43,619). In October and November, when New Delhi saw some of its worst air pollution last year, the foreign ministry bought 12 purifiers. Four of them - bought for the minister's office - were priced at nearly \$1,000 each. The federal health ministry bought 23 air purifiers in the last two years, including 14 in 2019, its highest annual purchases since 2015, the data showed. — Reuters



Govt has been increasing purifier purchases



NEW DELHI: A medical staff member wearing protective clothing to help stop the spread of a deadly virus which began in Wuhan, works at an isolation ward in New Delhi yesterday, as 3 patients are under observation after returning from different part of China. — AFP

Novel coronavirus breeds false claims

PARIS: A deadly coronavirus outbreak, which has infected thousands and spread around the world since emerging in China, has also spawned many false claims on social media. Here's a selection of misinformation debunked by AFP's Fact Check service.

Sydney food not contaminated

In Australia, multiple Facebook posts shared hundreds of times claimed to show a list of foods and locations in Sydney which have been contaminated by the new coronavirus strain first discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late December. One post, published on January 27, identified different types of rice, cookies and onion rings that allegedly contain traces of the virus. It also claimed that a "bureau of diseasology" had run tests and discovered the strain in several Sydney suburbs. But the local health authority told AFP the locations listed posed no risk to visitors, and the foods named did not appear in the New South Wales food authority's list of recalls and advisories.

Not Wuhan market

A video viewed more than 88,000 times on Facebook purported to show the market in Wuhan where the virus strain materialized. In reality, it was filmed at an Indonesian market. The misleading post was published on an account in the Philippines on January 26, 2020. The footage showed bats, rats, snakes and an assortment of other animal meat products being sold at a bustling market. However, a reverse image search using key frames extracted from the video led to another identical YouTube clip uploaded on July 20, 2019. AFP was able to confirm the video was in fact captured at the Langowan market in Indonesia's North Sulawesi province.

Fake death projections

In Sri Lanka, a Facebook post shared thousands of times claimed doctors were projecting that the entire population of Wuhan - a city of 11 million people - would likely die of the novel coronavirus. This is false; Chinese authorities have made no such projection. There is currently no vaccine for the new strain of coronavirus. But the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that most people will recover on their own. The post also claimed the virus could be caught by eating the meat of the Chinese cobra but this has not yet been established.

In Wuhan, luxury hotel feels haunted by virus outbreak

WUHAN, China: The receptionist's seat is empty, the five-star hotel's restaurant is no longer serving customers and staff flee at the sight of any guests. Welcome to the Marco Polo in Wuhan that is haunted by the spectre of the deadly novel coronavirus that has infected nearly 6,000 and originated in this central Chinese city. Wuhan and its 11 million residents - plus anyone who was visiting - are now cut off from the rest of the world, quarantined until the government in Beijing can get a handle on the outbreak.

The luxury Marco Polo is one of the few hotels to have remained open as the crisis erupted, despite fears about human-to-human transmission. But the minute you step foot in the hotel on the banks of the Yangtze River, it's clear that this is not business as usual. The lobby desk is unstaffed and the silence is eerie - a strange contrast with the brightly colored Lunar New Year decorations celebrating the Year of the Rat.

The usually bustling, modern hotel is more or less empty, and the staff struggles to combat sheer boredom - when they're not confined to a room for mandatory periods of rest. To keep active the staff engage in group exercises at 10am daily to try and stay healthy. "After doing it we feel much more relaxed," said one hotel staffer, Zhu Juhua. "This kind of activity can enhance our physical resistance as well as our mental resistance," said another, Xiao Fan.



DUBAI: Tourists wearing surgical masks search for seashells on a beach next to Burj Al Arab yesterday. The United Arab Emirates announced the first confirmed cases of the new coronavirus in the Middle East, with a four-member Chinese family from Wuhan found to be infected. — AFP

Salt water can't kill virus

Multiple posts on Weibo, Twitter and Facebook shared in January claimed top Chinese respiratory expert Zhong Nanshan had told people to rinse their mouths with salt water solution to prevent infection from a new virus outbreak. But the claim is bogus; the expert's team said saline would not "kill" the new virus and urged people not to believe or share medically-inaccurate online rumors. The World Health Organization also told AFP there was no evidence that saline solution would protect against infection from the new coronavirus.

Conspiracy theories

Multiple posts on Facebook and Twitter alleged that the novel coronavirus was created on purpose - with theories including that it was manufactured by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The posts included patents to buffer their claim. But these were in fact patents registered in an effort to combat different strains of coronavirus, for example by developing vaccines.

Hospital not built in record time

A photo shared hundreds of times on Twitter and Facebook claimed to show a new hospital in Wuhan that was built in just 16 hours especially for coronavirus patients. In reality, it is a stock image of a random building that has circulated online since at least January 2019. Although a new hospital is being built in Wuhan, AFP visited the construction site on January 27 and found it was still in the very early stages of development.

False alarm in France

In France, several social media posts have circulated with claims that people had been contaminated with the novel coronavirus in the departments of Val d'Oise, Savoie, Lot-et-Garonne and Pyrenees-Orientales. These false reports were accompanied by images made to look like they were screenshots from several French news sources - including AFP. However, these images were digitally manipulated. No cases have been confirmed in these departments. — AFP



WUHAN, China: A hotel employee stands at a makeshift desk ready to take the temperature of guests and anyone who enters the building yesterday. — AFP

Fever checks

The threat posed by the virus has prompted some changes in usual behavior at the high-end hotel. All guests must wear face masks on the property, and whenever anyone goes out they are looked upon with the utmost suspicion. Every time someone enters or leaves the hotel, a security guard checks his or her temperature for any signs of fever. "It's ok if the temperature is within 37.3," says Xiao, who is in charge of measuring the temperature of staff and guests. "If it is higher than 37.3 we will take necessary measures." Adding to the sense of fear, an ambulance took a child suffering from fever out

of the hotel earlier this week. Guests are asked to fill out forms explaining their movements. One of the questions asks, "Have you been in contact with anyone infected with the coronavirus in the past two weeks?" - a reference to what is believed to be the maximum incubation period.

The Marco Polo has 356 rooms, and is usually about 80 percent full during the busy Lunar New Year period, an employee told AFP on condition of anonymity. But now, only about 20 guests remain, the employee said. Most of them are simply stranded because the city is under quarantine, with no travel in or out by road, rail or air. — AFP

No hot meals, blankets, magazines as airlines step up fight on virus

BANGKOK: Passengers on some flights to China will have to make do without hot meals, blankets and newspapers, as airlines step up measures to protect crew and travelers from a new virus that has killed more than 130 in the country. Seeking to contain the spread of the coronavirus by reducing personal contact, Taiwan's China Airlines said it was encouraging passengers to bring their own drinks bottles and would limit re-usable items by replacing them with disposables.

The airline and its regional arm Mandarin Airlines stopped from Monday serving hot meals and have replaced tablecloths and napkins with paper towels on cross-strait and Hong Kong flights. They have also stopped providing blankets, pillows, towels, magazines and newspapers, while drinks and disposable headphones are supplied only on request.

"The seat back pocket will only contain the aircraft safety card and sick bag," said Tigerair Taiwan, also a member of China Airlines group, adding duty-free sales were also not available. Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd said yesterday amenities such as hot towels, blankets and magazines would not be offered on flights to and from mainland China from today until further notice.

Thai Airways is spray-disinfecting the passenger cabin and cockpit on all flights returning from China and high-risk destinations. "Because we have in-flight entertainment which mean the LCD screens are being touched all the time, so we deep cleanse every flight before departure," an executive told a news conference on Tuesday. Its video showing staff in hazmat suits spraying down a cabin drew praise on social media for the flag carrier's efforts, although some were alarmed by it. "Where are all the passengers on board? I think all the passengers are supposed to be kept and be monitored for one week," social media user John Honesty posted on Facebook. "I suggest to stop all flight from China for at list 30 to 60 days. — Reuters

Poetry, rap highlight the rift over India citizenship law

MUMBAI: On a recent balmy evening at a Mumbai sports ground, writer Varun Grover, a pink flower tucked behind his ear, read his new poem to thousands of people protesting against a citizenship law. "Dictators will come and go. We will not show our papers," Grover, who has written lyrics for several Bollywood musicals and was the writer of Netflix's flagship Indian show "Sacred Games", told the crowd.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new law grants citizenship to followers of non-Muslim religions fleeing persecution from India's three Muslim-majority neighbors - Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. But critics say the law is Islamophobic and a threat to India's secular constitution. The government says the law seeks to help persecuted minorities and it accuses its opponents of misconstruing it.

The nearly two months of protests, spearheaded by students, represent the most concerted challenge to Modi and his Hindu-nationalist government since he was first elected in 2014. The campaign has been championed by musicians and poets, both Hindu and Muslim, highlighting the stand much of India's liberal intelligentsia and artistic commu-

nity has taken against the government. "In the short term, songs or poems bind the protesters and keep the camaraderie going," Grover, 40, told Reuters.

"In the long term, which I think is more important, it reminds those of us who are voicing our opposition why we aren't like those who support this government." Grover's Hindi-language poem, "We Will Not Show our Papers", which he first posted on social media on Dec 21, has become a rallying cry for the demonstrators. It has been translated into several Indian languages, and is recited at rallies, and hashtagged on Twitter. Rap and folk musicians have also rallied to the anti-government cause.

"There is a strong element of resistance to rap music - it was a symbol of protest against white supremacy, and it also feels relevant to the mostly student protesters," said Shumais Nazar, a student at New Delhi's Jamia Millia University, who has written rap songs for the campaign and performed them at rallies. Nazar was at the university last month when police stormed in, firing tear gas shells as scores of students took shelter inside, in a night of violence that shocked many and galvanized the protests. — Reuters

Analysis

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Post-Brexit UK faces '3D chess game' in world trade

The day after Brexit, "Global Britain" was meant to regain the buccaneering spirit of imperial times past and adopt a new vision for foreign trade. Reality has proven messier. After its divorce from the European Union takes effect on Friday night, Britain will be free to negotiate its own trade pacts for the first time since joining the bloc in 1973, and will take an independent seat at the World Trade Organization.

For now, until a transition period expires on Dec 31, Britain will remain inside the EU's customs union and single market, which takes nearly half of all British exports including cars, meat and pharmaceuticals, accounting for millions of jobs. "We are passionate believers in free trade. The UK has been for a long time," finance minister Sajid Javid said in Davos last week. He vowed that a new deal with the EU itself "absolutely can be done" before the transition period ends, but also warned anxious British business chiefs to prepare for the two sides to diverge in their regulatory regimes.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson insists the deadline will not be extended, and envisions "a Global Britain running a truly global foreign policy", shorn of its EU shackles and profiting from its world-class financial services, technology and creative industries. But Irish premier Leo Varadkar laid bare Britain's dilemma this week, warning it will have to concede a "fish for finance" compromise in the EU talks, allowing foreign boats in UK waters in return for unfettered access for its all-important financial sector.

'Second after midnight'

That would undermine one of the promises by Brexiteers in Britain's 2016 referendum campaign. And the picture with the rest of the world doesn't look much more promising. "Doing multiple trade deals at the same time is like playing three-dimensional chess," according to Jill Rutter, senior research fellow at The UK in a Changing Europe, a think tank in London. "There are difficult trade-offs. Ministers seem notably reluctant to acknowledge that," she told AFP.

Former international trade secretary Liam Fox said in 2017 that Britain could easily copy and paste all 40 of the EU's external trade deals "the second after midnight" on Brexit day, which was then set for March 2019. Three postponements later, as Brexit Day finally approaches this week, the government concedes that only half that number will be ready, covering a single-digit proportion of Britain's overall trade.

Britain will look to craft brand-new deals with bigger partners such as the United States, China and Japan. If history is any guide, those could take years, although the US administration is talking up prospects for an agreement in 2020. Fox's successor, Liz Truss, said in parliament last week that the aim was to forge agreements with countries accounting for 80 percent of British trade within three years. "This is clearly unrealistic, because it would require signing agreements with more than 12 countries within a time-scale which has rarely been achieved for a single agreement," the British Trade Policy Observatory at the University of Sussex wrote.

Choices, choices

Enacting multiple new deals will be a particularly tall order for a country that, since 1973, has outsourced its trade negotiations to Brussels. Japan, which in the 1980s chose Britain as its carmaking hub inside the EU, is reportedly keen on a rapid deal to maintain some stability. "Since Britain wants to show results after Brexit, it is likely to speed up trade talks with many countries. There is the possibility that Japan will be the first major country reaching an accord with Britain," said Mitsuo Fujiyama, senior economist at the Japan Research Institute in Tokyo.

Speaking alongside Javid in Davos, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said Washington was "disappointed" not to be first in line. The two sides are also at odds over Chinese telecoms firm Huawei and Javid's plan to impose a digital tax on tech companies. The United States represents less than 12 percent of Britain's foreign trade, a distant second to the EU share. China is next with about five percent and Japan has less than two percent.

Other nations, such as Britain's former colonies Australia, Canada and India, have made clear they will drive a hard bargain. One hard-fought area will be immigration. For all the talk of Global Britain, the government faces a politically unpalatable decision between competing regulatory blocs, the EU and United States, with China also a looming presence. "There's always a mismatch between the rhetoric versus the reality," Rutter said. "You have to choose." — AFP

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This combination of file pictures shows (from left, top to bottom) 2020 Democratic presidential candidates Joe Biden; Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Amy Klobuchar, Tom Steyer, Michael Bloomberg, Tulsi Gabbard, John Delaney, Michael Bennet, Andrew Yang, Pete Buttigieg and Deval Patrick. — AFP

Democrats storm Iowa with all to play for

The race to take on Donald Trump begins in earnest Monday in Iowa with Democrats struggling to identify a clear-cut presidential challenger, as the crowded contest heads to a photo finish in the heartland state. Liberal Senator Bernie Sanders and the more moderate former vice president Joe Biden, both in their seventies, are setting the pace days before the first-in-the-nation Iowa caucuses.

But the two frontrunners' divergent political views suggest Democrats remain undecided on which path - revolution or realism - their party torchbearer should take as they battle to avoid a Trump re-election in November. With many Iowa voters still undecided, the race remains fluid, bringing uncertainty to a contest watched closely by voters nationwide, and no doubt by Trump himself. As 12 Democrats make their final pitches to voters, Sanders this week jumped into a narrow lead in Iowa polling over Biden, the 77-year-old national frontrunner.

The vote in the sparsely populated, snow-covered Midwestern battleground serves as the starting gun for the long election slog ahead, when Democrats decide whether to nominate a far-left firebrand like Sanders, 78, or tack towards the political center. Monday will likely be a springboard for the top-performing candidates who can claim all-important momentum heading into the race's next chapters: New Hampshire on Feb 11 and Nevada Feb 22.

Pressure to perform is intense: A poor showing in Iowa is likely to send a candidate packing. A handful of hopefuls have a realistic shot at winning the state. South Bend, Indiana's centrist ex-mayor Pete Buttigieg is polling in third in Iowa, followed by Senator Elizabeth Warren, 70,

who more closely aligns with Sanders and who has lost some polling steam in recent weeks. Pragmatist 59-year-old Senator Amy Klobuchar from neighboring Minnesota is a wild card looking to score a major upset, as is tech entrepreneur Andrew Yang, 45.

Trump 'scared'

With polls fluctuating and the race tight, few observers are making definitive forecasts. On Tuesday, a center-left thinktank warned Americans against choosing Sanders, a self-described Democratic socialist, to challenge Trump. If Democrats nominate Sanders, "Trump's odds of winning a second term go up dramatically, which is why Team Trump has labeled him their 'ideal' nominee," the group Third Way said in an open letter to Iowa Democrats.

Biden claims Trump is terrified of facing him in November, and the former vice president points to Trump's pressure on Ukraine last year to investigate Biden and his family - an accusation at the heart of Trump's impeachment - as evidence. Trump's defense team repeatedly focused on Biden this week as it argued its case in the Senate impeachment trial, saying calls to investigate the Bidens were appropriate because Biden's son Hunter served on the board of a Ukrainian gas company accused of corruption.

"The whole impeachment trial for Trump is just a political hit job to try to smear me because he's scared to death to run against me," Biden told a campaign rally Tuesday in Muscatine, Iowa. Whether Trump's anti-Biden effort will swing the candidate is yet to be determined. But the impeachment process has weighed on Iowa in another

way: Senators Sanders, Warren and Klobuchar are pinned in Washington during the trial, forcing them to campaign for Iowa votes with one hand tied behind their back.

Klobuchar made a point of high-tailing it back to Iowa Tuesday after the trial adjourned, seizing the overnight break to campaign in Council Bluffs. Meanwhile others were barnstorming the state unencumbered by Washington duties. They include Buttigieg, a 38-year-old gay military veteran, who was urging voters to "turn the page" - apparently not just from Trump, but the ageing Democratic establishment too. "If we want to win... we've got to be ready to do something different, and I think the biggest risk we could take is to try to recycle the same old approach," he told reporters in Ottumwa.

'Moral responsibility'

With everything to play for, campaigns have deployed thousands of volunteers to knock on Iowa doors in a bid to enlist support. Television advertising is incessant. But Iowans are used to face-to-face intimacy with candidates, who spend countless hours personally courting individuals in the months-long run up to the vote.

Iowa Democrats participate in caucuses, meetings where candidates are selected through a cherished if convoluted process that includes sales pitches from a presidential hopeful's representatives, and sometimes extensive debate, before votes are cast. Some Iowans "actually feel they have a moral responsibility to push the candidates to take positions and explain themselves," Iowa State University professor Steffen Schmidt told AFP. Caucus participants "take politics very seriously". — AFP



(Left) Saroj Ahire, a domestic worker, poses outside her house in the Colaba fisherman colony in Mumbai on Jan 22, 2020. (Center) Shopkeeper Aslam Malkani poses for a picture inside his shop in Mumbai on Jan 27, 2020. (Right) Migrant laborer Munna Singh, 45, waits for work along with others at a junction in Mumbai on Jan 24, 2020. — AFP

Economic burnout: India's struggling workforce

India's government releases its 2020 budget on Saturday, facing stuttering growth and record unemployment and a jump in inflation that has further widened India's wealth gap. A botched nationwide tax rollout, the 2016 shock cash ban, and a sharp liquidity crunch in the vast shadow banking sector all played their part in creating the crisis that roils Asia's third-largest economy, AFP spoke to Indians from different sections of society about the impact of the economic slowdown, which has put Prime Minister Narendra Modi under considerable pressure.

Unemployed millennial

An engineering degree from a prominent university followed by a job that paid 42,000 rupees (\$590) a month: Rahul thought he was set for life. But when the slowdown struck and companies laid off thousands, Rahul - whose name has been changed at his request - lost his job and has been struggling to land another. "I am constantly sending my resume hoping to get an interview call but companies barely respond. The situation is depressing," he said. The 27-year-old told AFP he now relies on his father's savings and pensions to keep their household running.

Drowning in debt

At 50, Saroj Ahire was forced to take two jobs and

work through the night to earn 15,000 rupees a month, simply to keep her head above water. But the increase in income is no match for inflation, she said. "By the 25th of every month, I run out of cash and have to buy rice on loan from local shopkeepers," the domestic worker said. With rising prices prompting her to think twice about what she eats - onions are now a luxury rather than a staple - planning for the future is impossible. Working for wealthy households only makes her feel worse, said Ahire, who shares a cramped one-room shanty with four family members. "Watching them enjoy good food while I clean their homes... it causes a bit of heartburn for sure," she said. "We also want to live a good life and eat well."

What about the wealthy

Not everyone is faring poorly. India's stock markets have been hitting record highs, bringing cheer to investors with enough cash to plough into equities. A report by the charity Oxfam published last week said the wealth of India's top one percent increased by a staggering 46 percent over the past year. "Select stocks have done very well and since rich people have higher allocation of their wealth in equities they would have gotten richer," R Venkataraman, managing director of financial services firm IIFL Securities said. "Otherwise it's very difficult to give a figure of 46 percent increase in wealth in

an economy like this." Reliance Industries, helmed by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, became India's most valuable company with a market capitalization of more than 10 trillion rupees in 2019.

'Just too scary'

As the "feel-good factor" evaporates for everyone in India except the super-rich, consumers are cautious about spending on non-essential goods. Shopkeeper Aslam Malkani, whose Mumbai store stocks smartphone accessories, told AFP sales had plunged more than 80 percent over the past eight months. "We open the shop and wait but there are no customers," the 36-year-old said. "I have been working since I turned 16 and have never seen this extent of slowdown. It's just too scary."

'Hope is dimming'

For some, the slowdown has made already difficult lives even more precarious. Every morning, Munna Singh joins hundreds of migrant workers waiting at a crowded Mumbai junction, all hoping to be picked up for a job - from masonry to construction to cleaning sewage pipes. Singh, 45, left his village in northern India six months ago, desperate to earn a living. "Every day, from 6 am to noon, we wait for some work but hope is dimming," he said, adding that he sometimes goes two or three days without a meal. "Where are the jobs?" — AFP

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Business

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LONDON: People take in the view of the towers and offices at Canary Wharf from the viewing area in Greenwich Park in London. With Britain's EU exit, the City loses "passporting" rights that has allowed a powerful driver of Britain's dominant services sector to operate freely across the bloc. — AFP

London's 'City' is banking on its global appeal

City to eventually lose 'passporting' rights after Brexit

LONDON: London's powerful "City" financial sector, facing reduced access to mainland European markets following Brexit, is banking on its global appeal to forge new ties and remain an international force.

With Britain exiting the EU tomorrow, the City will eventually lose "passporting" rights that has allowed the driver of Britain's dominant services sector to operate freely across the bloc.

The long-standing bilateral arrangement, which has convinced especially large US and Japanese lenders to set up massive operations in London, formally ends with the conclusion of a Brexit transition period due December 31. Britain must now move onto so-called "equivalence", whereby financial firms agree to meet EU rules to maintain access to its market. But the new set of rules are not without risk for City companies working out of London skyscrapers nestled among

medieval buildings. "Equivalence is not ideal for the City... because it can be revoked very easily and it has in the past been very politicized," noted Kay Daniel Neufeld, head of macroeconomics at the Centre for Economics and Business Research.

"There will have to be trade-offs" between London and Brussels, Neufeld added, as he referenced recent rows between non-EU member Switzerland and the bloc over third-party equivalence agreements concerning Swiss financial services.

'Step in the right direction'

UK finance minister Sajid Javid's recently insisted that Britain's future trade in financial services with the EU should be on the basis of "outcome-based" equivalence of rules. In other words, Britain should have its own rules producing the same outcomes as current EU

arrangements existing between the bloc and non-member countries. While British industry, notably the food and car sectors, voiced concern about Javid's insistence that there would be "no alignment" with the European Union after Brexit, his comments were welcomed by the City of London Corporation, or local government authority for the capital's financial district.

Its policy chair Catherine McGuinness said the current third-party equivalence system the EU offers to countries such as Japan is "patchy and prone to politicization". "Securing an 'outcome-based' equivalence of rules... would be a step in the right direction," she added.

McGuinness was this week visiting India "to highlight the fundamental strengths of London and the UK's financial sector", the City of London Corporation said. Large financial institutions, including British bank

HSBC and US giants JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley, have decided to move some London staff to the continent because of Brexit-but the number of workers has been small.

Around 2.3 million people are employed within Britain's financial sector, providing more than 10 percent of the country's tax revenues at £75 billion (\$98 billion, 89 billion euros). While the capital is home to global banks and major markets and exchanges, cities outside of London are notable for employing thousands of workers in financial support services.

London meanwhile is also at the forefront of raising funds for technology start-ups. "Can the City survive Brexit?" The Economist magazine questioned last year. "For a country that is losing friends fast, having a global, sophisticated industry is a blessing, not a curse," it concluded. — AFP

Apple delivers best-ever quarter, powered by iPhones, services

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple yesterday posted record results for the final three months of last year delivered by gains in iPhone sales even as the company transitions to digital services and wearables.

Striking a somber tone on an earnings call, chief executive Tim Cook said the company is closely watching the deadly viral outbreak hitting China, where Apple has customers, partners, suppliers and employees. "Our thoughts are with all of those that are affected across the region," Cook said.

Apple gave a wider than usual revenue forecast range of \$63 billion to \$67 billion for this quarter, citing uncertainty regarding how the outbreak will affect its business.

"We're donating to groups that are working to contain the outbreak; we're also working very closely with our team and our partners and we have limited travel to business-critical situations as of last week," Cook said.

Impact unclear

Some of Apple's suppliers are based in the area near Wuhan, the Chinese city at the center of the outbreak, and Cook said that the company is work-

ing on "mitigation plans" to make up for production loss with alternate sources. "With respect to supply sources that are outside the Wuhan area, the impact is less clear," he said.

Apple said it had closed one of its Wuhan stores and added that some retail partners have shuttered their shops or cut hours of business.

"We're taking additional precautions and frequently deep-cleaning our stores as well as conducting temperature checks for employees," Cook said. "While our sales within the Wuhan area itself are small, retail traffic has also been impacted outside of this area across the country in the last few days," he added. The SARS-like virus has killed more than 130 people in China and the number of confirmed cases across the country stands at nearly 6,000.

Apple ecosystem thrives

Net profit hit an all-time high of \$22 billion on record quarterly revenue of \$91.8 billion, the tech giant said of the results which were far stronger than most analyst estimates.

Revenue was "fueled by strong demand for our iPhone 11 and iPhone 11 Pro models, and all-time records for services and wearables," Cook said. Apple's net income in the holiday quarter ending December 28 set a new record for the California-based company, according to chief financial officer Luca Maestri. The results come with Apple seeking to shift its revenue mix amid a slumping smartphone market and growing competition in the segment, and as it relies more on services such as music, streaming television and other digital content.

"With each Apple product that a customer buys, I think they get tighter into the ecosystem," Cook said.



The apple logo is projected on a screen before the start of a product launch event at Apple's headquarters in Cupertino, California. — AFP

Apple stopped reporting unit sales for the iPhone, which has been the main cash-generator for the company in recent years, but revenue for its smartphone sales was up nearly eight percent in the quarter at \$55.9 billion. Services revenue rose 17 percent from a year ago to \$12.7 billion, driven by the launch of its Apple TV+ service and its new credit card.

Paid subscriptions to Apple services hit 480 million in December, causing the company to expect to eclipse its 500 million target in the months ahead and eye hitting 600 million by the end of this year.

The Apple TV+ on-demand streaming service launched in more than 100 countries at \$4.99 per month, at a price lower than those offered by rivals such as Netflix. — AFP

British government allows Huawei in its 5G roll-out

Victor Zhang, Vice President at Huawei, has made the following statement: "Huawei is reassured by the UK government's confirmation that we can continue working with our customers to keep the 5G roll-out on track. This evidence-based decision will result in a more advanced, more secure and more cost-effective telecoms infrastructure that is fit for the future. It gives the UK access to world-leading technology and ensures a competitive market.

We have supplied cutting-edge technology to telecoms operators in the UK for more than 15 years. We will build on this strong track record, supporting our customers as they invest in their 5G networks, boosting economic growth and helping the UK continue to compete globally.

We agree a diverse vendor market and fair competition are essential for network reliability and innovation, as well as ensuring consumers have access to the best possible technology."



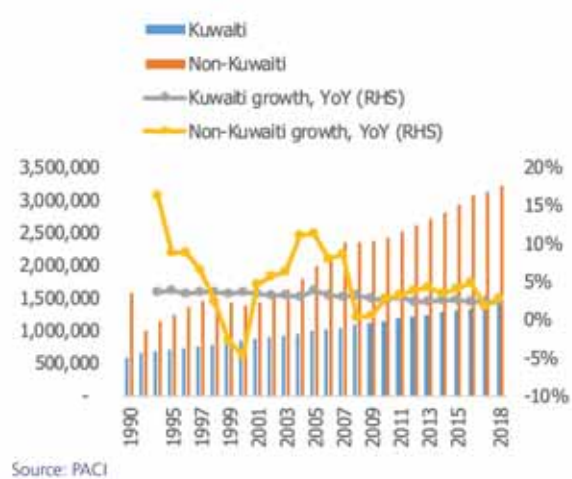
Victor Zhang

Business

Expatriate debate: A balancing act in which technology, skills form key to solution

Economic Insight Report by Gulf Bank Research Unit

Exhibit 1: Kuwait's Population over the Years



Source: PACI

Exhibit 2: Demographic indicators: GCC, 2018
(in Thousands, unless specified)

Country	Total Population	Nationals	Non-Nationals	% of Non-Nationals
UAE	9,457	1,085	8,372	88.53%
Qatar	2,744	348	2,395	87.30%
Kuwait	4,622	1,403	3,219	69.65%
Bahrain	1,503	689	813	54.11%
Oman	4,601	2,579	2,022	43.95%
KSA	33,414	20,769	12,645	37.84%

Source: Bahrain, Oman, KSA Government authorities; Qatar, Kuwait: Gulf Research Center; UAE: The media lab.

Exhibit 3: Comparison of Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis, 2018
(in Thousands unless specified)

Key Indicators	Kuwaiti	Non-Kuwaiti
Population	1,403	3,219
Percentage of Males	48.90%	70.00%
Percentage of Females	51.10%	30.00%
Age structure		
Up to 14 years	34.90%	12.40%
15 to 24 years	19.10%	8.50%
25 to 59 years	39.40%	75.80%
Greater than 59 years	6.60%	3.30%

Source: PACI

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti population grew at the annual rate of 4.2 percent since 2000; this was driven mainly by the steady arrival of expatriates (non-Kuwaiti), whose population grew at an annual rate of 4.8 percent in comparison to the national population growth of 2.9 percent. The inflow of expatriates rose continuously over the years, and now, they account for 70 percent of the total Kuwaiti population of 4.6 million (as of 2018), as against 62 percent in 2000.

The other GCC countries where foreign nationals outnumber the local population are UAE, Qatar and Bahrain. UAE and Qatar have a significant expat population, around 88.53 percent and 87.3 percent of the total population respectively.

The demographic and economic disparity between the GCC and the developing countries of Asia have encouraged the movement of workers from where they are available in surplus. Kuwait's private sector and the domestic labor market employ a large number of foreign nationals. Moreover, expats from western countries significantly employed in sectors such as hospitality, finance and banking. Unchecked reliance on expatriates, particularly those lower in the skill value chain, may have a long-term structural impact on the Kuwaiti economy.

Workforce's structural imbalance

Following the oil boom in the 1970s, urbanization began to take place in most GCC countries, including Kuwait. The need to develop its infrastructure and provide other services to cater to the growing demand and increased economic activity was restricted by the size of the native workforce. Thus, the influx of the non-Kuwaiti labor provided a good and cost-effective solution to the worker shortage. The shortage of workforce due to lower population of nationals and large-scale need for labor led to continued dependence on expatriates; while expatriates were encouraged by the higher standards of living and better income opportunities compared to their native country. Especially the Asians have flocked to Kuwait. Among them, Indians alone represent 31.45 percent of the total non-Kuwaitis. In the case of expats from Arab countries, Egyptians constitute a significant share (20.83 percent of the total non-Kuwaitis).

Nationals constitute just 4 percent of the workforce in the private sector (excluding the 'domestic workers' subgroup). Kuwaitis employed in the public sector are mainly in professions such as inspector of government department, military army as soldiers, corporal or sergeants, secretary or general clerk, correspondents and passport representatives. Conversely, non-Kuwaitis are employed in sectors such as household activities, construction, in wholesale, retail and low-skill roles. They are mostly employed as cleaners, drivers, servants, and caretakers in the household sector. Other professions in which the majority of non-Kuwaitis are employed include electrical workers, vehicle drivers, and nursing.

With regard to highest educational qualification, more

• In Kuwait, the disparity in the population's composition has long been an economic as well as a social problem.

• The imbalance can be seen in the large number of expatriates compared to the locals as well as the high number of low-skilled expatriates.

• This imbalance has taken the spotlight lately with the predominant view that expats reduce the job opportunities available for citizens and put a strain on infrastructure and public services.

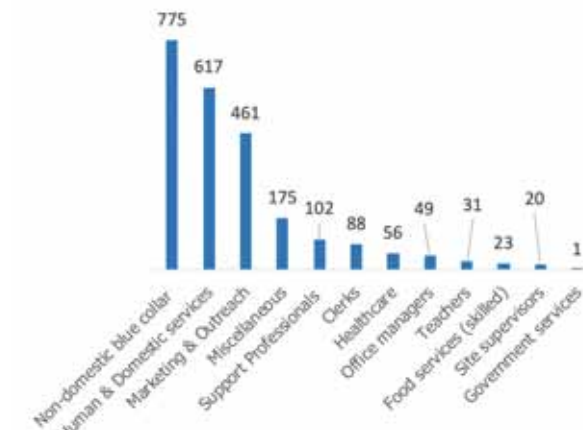
• The solution to this problem should be measured: it should balance the economic needs, jobs and resources for citizens, and the growth needs, of a growing and competitive economy.

• Reducing low-skilled expat population through technology and increasing citizens' participation in the private sector by bridging the skill gap should be at center of any solution.

than 80 percent of non-Kuwaitis have received only intermediate or primary education, which sharply contrasts with Kuwaitis, who on average have secondary education or above. The expatriates in the country are largely male, unskilled and employed in low-skill and low productivity jobs, as the household and private sectors are the largest employers of expatriates (IMF). The rest benefit from being employed as teachers and professors in the educational sector, medical staff and doctors in hospitals and managers in various corporates.

Evaluating regional and international models Regional observations

The GCC countries aiming to transform into a knowledge-based economy are keen on attracting and retaining high-skilled expats. The region is also establishing business friendly policies on immigration to foster the economic growth of the countries. Among the GCC countries, Saudi Arabia unveiled the Privileged Iqama (residence permit) scheme, popularly known as the Saudi 'Green Card'. This offers a number of benefits for wealthy and highly skilled expatriates. The UAE launched a 'Golden Card' system to grant permanent residency for expat investors, entrepreneurs and researchers who could positively contribute to the success of the UAE economy. The introduction of such special residence permits facilitates

Exhibit 5: Expatriate Workforce by Occupation
(in Thousands; Rounded)

the admission of innovative entrepreneurs, attracting global talent to the region.

International observations

Drawing insights from countries such as Canada and Singapore, which have also largely relied on migrant workforce for development, could be useful. Most migrant-receiving countries target the entry of high-skilled foreign workers to boost productivity while low-skilled workers help in overcoming the shortage of labor. For instance, as Singapore developed and its citizens became educated, the income levels rose, and the lower-level blue-collar jobs such as construction laborers, sanitation staff and domestic helpers were avoided by the nationals. It had to rely on its Asian neighbors for labor and imported workforce from Philippines and India to deal with the issues.

On the other hand, Canada, in its attempt to attract skilled workforce, adopted the point system for residence permits. In this system, those with high levels of education, requisite work experience, and language skills were rewarded with higher points, and their arrival was encouraged. Similar to Canada, developed countries such as UK, Japan and Australia use point-based system to select skilled workers, for residency, based on characteristics such as their educational qualifications, work experience and occupation. On the contrary, on the workforce-rebalancing front, a key concern is Kuwaitization, defined by the Kuwait Labor Market Information Systems (LMIS) as a greater role for nationals in the labor market in general and especially in the private sector labor market. This ties in with the national economic development plan to make the nation a regional trade and finance hub. This type of knowledge economy paradigm, naturally, requires a very skilled labor force. A key indicator of such professional

skills is a post-secondary level of education. This can, in turn, be a key driver of Kuwaiti labor productivity, which means that the Kuwaiti private sector companies should look to boost investment per worker in learning and development.

The solution should aim to balance national interests with economic needs

Though the need for a non-national workforce is highly likely to continue over the coming years, Kuwait must address the imbalance between the expat and local population considering the demands of economic expansion and socio-economic needs. A criteria-based approach focusing on the range of available opportunities can aid the country's economic growth. Such an approach will strategically redirect resources and skills, increasing the nationals' participation in the labor force in the private sector and also attracting foreign talents to reduce the imbalance.

Recommendations

- Companies/firms can apply technologies to automate their process; this could potentially reduce the large influx of low-skilled laborers into the country.
- Alternatively, Kuwait can adopt a new labor market strategy that balances both national and economic interests; for instance, the International Labor Organization (ILO) suggests that GCC governments should link their economic visions with labor market policies in order to enhance internal labor market mobility and increase productivity.
- Labor reforms should focus on stemming the illegal labor force due to 'visa trading'.
- While on the one hand, Kuwait should reduce the low-skilled workers through use of better technology, on the other, Kuwait also needs to attract high-skilled expats in its pursuit to transform into a knowledge-based economy. Kuwait could draw insights from other countries' approach to attract high skilled workers. It could also explore the residency point-based programs (Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) of various countries to encourage the inflow of talented foreign workers with advanced and specialized skills.
- As Kuwait attracts a considerable number of high-skilled expats, improvements in management would increase non-oil GDP growth. In addition, the economy would benefit from higher purchasing power of high-skilled expats with higher disposable income.
- Transformation to knowledge economy and attracting high-skilled expatriates should be connected with making Kuwaitis 'skill ready' in due course of time. This will require considerable investment in training the youth in skills that will be demanded by the knowledge economy.

Implications of Brexit on the GCC countries

By Giles Coghlan

If you thought 'Brexit blues' were over for the GBP, think again. In 2016, the UK voted by a majority of 51.9 percent to leave the EU. It was expected that the UK would leave the EU in March 2019, but the UK was unable to vote a withdrawal agreement through UK Parliament. Theresa May tried and failed, Boris Johnson tried and failed, and finally, to break the deadlock, Boris Johnson called for a general election and the Conservative party finally secured an 80-seat majority in December 2019. With the Withdrawal Agreement finally agreed the UK is due to officially exit the European Union on January 31st, 2020. But that's not the end of the story.

February 1st marks the start of EU and UK trade talks

The issue is that the trade relationship between the EU and the UK is still to be agreed upon. Under Boris Johnson's trade deal, the UK has until the end of December 2020 to finish its negotiations. So, what's the problem? The problem is that trade agreements can take years to reach. A one-year timetable is wildly optimistic. So, we will now have the coming year with the GBP being moved on how close - or how far - the EU and the UK are to striking a deal. Although Brexit woes are better for the UK, they are not yet over. This was the reason that GBPUSD was capped at 1.3500 on election night. Yes, part 1 of Brexit was over; however, 'part 2' was just beginning.

The UK's weakening domestic picture in January

The GBP has been further pressured as we start 2020 from weak data points and Bank of England members' bearish outlook. First, we had a string of warnings from Bank of England members: Broadbent, Carney, Tenreiro,



Giles Coghlan

Vlieghe, and Saunders were all sounding the alarm in favour of weaker interest rates coming for the UK. Now, at the last BoE meeting, there were only two bank members voting for cuts. That number has risen, and the odds of a rate cut at the January 30th rate meeting were greater than 60 percent during the week starting January 13th.

Secondly, the weak data points I alluded to earlier have made a rate cut much more likely. Month on month GDP was down to -0.3 percent vs 0.0 percent expected. Month-on-month manufacturing was down in January to -1.7 percent vs -0.3 percent expected. Inflation data was a bad miss too with 1.3 percent printed vs an expectation of 1.5 percent. In my opinion, the bad retail sales miss of -0.6 percent was the final blow which put a rate cut front and centre for the Bank of England. This retail sales point included Black Friday sales and historically this retail sales point, at this point of the year beats expectations. However, this year it missed them. This is a very poor signal and acknowledgement that the UK consumer is cautious over Brexit concerns. Pounds are being kept in wallets and purses as Brexit uncertainty impacts UK consumer spending.

How does this impact the GCC region?

It may not be immediately apparent how this impacts the GCC region, but this is how Brexit woes could be felt in the Middle East. According to the UK's Office for National Statistics, the UK exports £10.6 billion to the UAE and £8.4 billion to Saudi Arabia. The UK imports £6.6 billion from the UAE. Of course, the UK has trade relationships with all the GCC members, but these were the largest figures for the individual breakdown of imports and exports. So, due to trade relations, a lower pound will make the UK's exports more competitive to the GCC region. A lower pound will encourage UK exporters to seek out new export partners in the GCC

region in the event of a no-deal trade agreement. As part of Brexit preparation, the UK has explicitly stated a national ambition to transform current levels of 30 percent GDP exports to 35 percent. According to Dr. Liam Fox, "90 percent of global economic growth is expected to come from outside the EU in the next 10 to 15 years". The UK will be seeking to expand its export market to meet this ambition. Any weakening in the GBP will only help the cause of UK exporters as the price of their goods will become more competitive the lower the GBP falls. This is also why some key FTSE 100 companies benefit from a weaker pound as they receive their revenues in dollars. A weak GBP/USD exchange rate essentially makes for a pay raise for these companies. However, if the UK fails to get a trade agreement with the EU there will be a considerable trade fallout. With a world of integrated supply chains and cross-border trade, it will be hard to accurately forecast what all the impacts will be but expect there to be 'winners' and 'losers' in such a scenario.

Impact on oil

If the UK does leave the EU without a trade agreement and can't agree to one, then we will likely see a rush into risk assets. JPY, CHF, and gold bids will flow into the market and we will see a fallout in terms of global growth expectations. In this scenario, oil would be pressured since it is sold off in risk-off markets on global growth concerns. The less growth, the less demand for oil to power machinery and transport goods. With the GCC region such a key exporter in oil this would inevitably impact the GDP of the GCC countries. In 2019, the World Bank forecast overall GDP growth in the GCC to drop to 0.8 percent compared to 2 percent in 2018. This was due to both muted oil prices and excess supply. An added EU-UK trade concern could make a bad situation, worse. So, if you thought Brexit was over, just remember it isn't. The end of Brexit can much more easily be said to be when the EU-UK trade agreement is finalized and that may well take years, rather than months, to finally agree upon.

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Note: Giles Coghlan is chief currency analyst at HYCM

Alghanim Industries opens Safat Alghanim - Fahaheel

Inauguration held under the patronage and attendance of Ahmadi Governor



Group photo with Chairman of Bukhamseen Group, Jawad Bukhamseen; General Manager of the Public Authority for Industry, Abdulkareem Taqi; Governor of Ahmadi, H. E. Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Sabah; Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries, Kutayba Y. Alghanim; Chairman of Markaz, Dirar Y. Alghanim, Director-General of the General Administration of Customs, Jamal Al Jalawi with guests and dignitaries during the ribbon-cutting ceremony.



Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries Kutayba Y. Alghanim giving his opening speech during the inauguration of Safat Alghanim – Fahaheel.



Guests touring the new X-cite showroom.



Firqat Al Fintas performing a traditional dance while receiving the guests.

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, one of the largest privately owned companies in the region, inaugurated Safat Alghanim - Fahaheel, its brand new flagship complex located in Ahmadi Governorate. The new location includes some of the most renowned brands Alghanim Industries represents, such as Chevrolet, Cadillac, Ford, Lincoln, in addition to X-cite by Alghanim Electronics and Safat Home, providing customers with an enriched experience and a wide variety of products and services that complement their lifestyle.

The Governor of Ahmadi, Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Sabah; Director-General of the General Administration of Customs Jamal Al-Jalawi; General Manager of Public Authority for Industry Abdulkareem Taqi; Assistant Undersecretary for the Commercial Surveillance and Consumer Protection Sector at the Ministry of Commerce, Eid Al-Rashidi; and other guests and dignitaries attended the opening of the complex, which includes showrooms as well as service facilities.

Reiterating the company's commitment to customer-centricity, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries Kutayba Y Alghanim said: "We are honored to open our new flagship complex in Fahaheel, a location that is not only significant in Kuwait's trade history, but also in our company's history. We

launched our first store in Fahaheel in the 1980s, with a Chevrolet showroom, and have since expanded our presence in the area. Today, I am excited to join you in this shopping complex, which brings even more of our iconic brands closer to our customers."

He added: "The inauguration of this shopping complex is reflective of Kuwait's economic activity and growth. In line with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's 2035 Vision, Alghanim Industries is proud to play its part in contributing to the development and continued prosperity of our nation."

Alghanim thanked the Governor of Ahmadi, Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, and all government sector entities that supported the completion of this project. He concluded: "I would also like to thank our customers, new and old, who have been and continue to be the root of our success and our impetus to deliver the best."

Meanwhile, Governor of Ahmadi, Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Sabah thanked the Chairman of Alghanim Industries, Kutayba Y Alghanim, as well as the employees for their dedication to making this large project a success. The governor also noted that the diverse product range and innovative displays impressed him during his tour. He con-

cluded by congratulating the residents of Ahmadi Governorate on another exciting opening, which supports the growing population in an area that is witnessing an increase in housing development projects.

The new flagship complex, located in Al-Dabbous Street in Fahaheel, features more than 7,500sq m of retail space, and includes showrooms for Chevrolet, Cadillac, Ford, Lincoln, in addition to a Safat Home furniture store, and X-cite by Alghanim Electronics. The plot area of the complex is 6,000sq m, with a construction area of 20,000sq m. The project utilized 1,400 tons of steel from Kirby Building Systems, an Alghanim Industries company. It consists of two basements, a ground floor and mezzanine floor. The first basement is designated for service centers, while the second basement is designated for car parking. The ground floor houses showrooms for Ford, Lincoln, X-cite by Alghanim Electronics, Cadillac, and Chevrolet, while Safat Home, Alghanim Industries' furniture brand, is located in the mezzanine floor.

Six brands under one roof

Safat Alghanim Fahaheel includes a Ford Alghanim showroom, spread across 1,100sq m displaying a wide range of vehicles that caters to all car shoppers in Kuwait, in addition

to a full service center located in the basement.

Safat Alghanim - Fahaheel also houses the second Lincoln Alghanim showroom in Kuwait, in a 400sq m space, serving customers looking for exclusive luxury paired with powerful performance in an iconic Lincoln layout. The complex also houses the 30th X-cite by Alghanim Electronics showroom, spread across 1,500sq m with a collection of over 300 global brands, catering to all customers looking for quality consumer electronics.

The new shopping complex also includes a 2700sq m Safat Home showroom, the fifth in Kuwait, bringing 35 international home furnishing brands to Ahmadi's growing families. The new 400sq m Cadillac Alghanim showroom boasts a sophisticated, bold interior designed to take customers on 'Extraordinary Journeys.'

Chevrolet Alghanim's new 1,100sq m showroom in the Fahaheel complex is the first of its kind in the region, boasting several exciting features to elevate the distinctive Chevrolet experience. Chevrolet also has a separate service center in the basement, spread over more than 2,500sq m, with 19 mechanical bays and a team of 30 technicians, and service advisors and quality controllers, ensuring a seamless customer journey throughout the entirety of car ownership.



Revealing Ford's rare and most powerful supercar, the GT Heritage Edition, during the tour of Ford Alghanim's new showroom in Fahaheel.



From left to right: General Manager of the Public Authority for Industry Abdulkareem Taqi; Director-General of the General Administration of Customs Jamal Al Jalawi; Chairman of Integrated Holding Co., Jassim Mustafa Boodai; Chairman of Markaz, Dirar Y. Alghanim; Governor of Ahmadi H. E. Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Sabah; Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries Kutayba Y. Alghanim, and Chairman of Bukhamseen Group, Jawad Bukhamseen.



Guests and dignitaries in attendance.



A photo of the new Safat Alghanim - Fahaheel complex.

Business

NBK becomes first bank in Kuwait to launch Fitbit Pay

Al-Othman: We strive to introduce our clients with top-notch digital payment solutions

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has yesterday announced that Fitbit Pay is now available to its customers, which will enable them to make contactless payments via select Fitbit (NYSE:FIT) devices; thus becoming the first bank locally to offer this service.

Fitbit helps people lead healthier, more active lives by empowering them with data, inspiration and guidance to reach their goals. NBK is committed to offering its clients easy-to-use, enhanced payment solutions, as it continues to stay at the forefront of emerging technology meant to meet customers' ever-changing needs. Launching Fitbit Pay illustrates how the bank is taking steps to meet the growing demand for innovative ways to pay for goods and services.

Fitbit Pay will provide NBK customers with seamless and secure one-touch payments directly on their Fitbit Ionic, Fitbit Versa 2, Fitbit Versa 2 Special Edition, Fitbit

Versa, Fitbit Versa Special Edition and Fitbit Charge 3 Special Edition. Commenting on the new service launch, Mohammed Al-Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait said: "We are committed to offering our customers the highest-quality tech options to guarantee an easy and secure payment experience."

"Users can make faster and secure payments for their purchases anywhere that offers contactless payments by adding select credit cards to their Fitbit Wallet via the Fitbit app," Al-Othman added.

NBK customers with the applicable Fitbit devices can now conveniently use the free Fitbit app (Android and iOS) to add up to six cards to their Fitbit Wallet. Paying for products in stores that accept contactless payments could not be more straightforward: simply press the left button on the tracker or smartwatch until

the card appears on the screen, and then hold your wrist next to the payment terminal until confirmation is displayed on the watch's screen. Fitbit Pay transactions feature enhanced security measures, requiring users to create and use a PIN code to activate Fitbit Pay.

NBK provides its clients with an exceptional banking experience, aligned with its well-established position locally, and in the GCC region, as the provider of the most outstanding financial services.

The bank constantly updates the NBK Mobile Banking App to offer a safe and secure way for customers to conduct transactions such as opening accounts, applying for loans, cards and credit card limit increase, advanced payment features like e-payments to enable online payment for purchases and NBK Quick Pay for fast and easy transfers, managing the accounts and credit cards while travelling, checking

their NBK Miles and NBK Rewards Points, activating dormant accounts, establishing standing orders, finding the nearest NBK Branch, ATM or CDM in Kuwait and abroad, requesting an account statement or new checkbook, and many more services that make using NBK Mobile Banking App the perfect companion in Kuwait and when travelling.

NBK was awarded the "Best Consumer Digital Bank" and the "Best in Mobile Banking" in Kuwait by Global Finance Magazine for 2019.



Mohammed Al-Othman

Huawei named one of top 10 most valuable brands by Brand Finance

KUWAIT: Huawei yesterday announced that Brand Finance, a leading brand valuation and strategy consultancy headquartered in UK, has named Huawei one of the top 10 most valuable brands for the first time ever. In the recently published Brand Finance Global 500 2020 report, Huawei is the third Chinese company on the list with a brand value of \$65.084 billion, up 4.5 per cent year-on-year.

"Clearly the next big opportunity for the telecoms industry, the 5G space is inviting fierce competition, with Huawei expanding into markets traditionally covered by Western providers. Despite sparking controversy, the Chinese giant is making clear headway, and with a brand value of \$65.1 billion, now counts among the world's top 10 most valuable brands for the first time," writes Brand Finance in the report.

With 205 companies accounting for 45.4 per cent of the top 500, US is the most represented economy in the ranking with a combined brand value of \$320.4 billion. China follows closely with 70 companies, equivalent to 18.9 per cent, and a combined brand value of \$133.4 billion.

The technology sector continues to draw the most attention as the most valuable sector. Of the 500 most valuable brands, 46 of them - or 14 per cent - originated from the tech sector. Together, they have a combined brand value of \$986.5 billion. Huawei is the sole Chinese tech brand among the top 10 most valuable brands.

Huawei's brand value growth can be attributed to its commitment to innovation to continually improve product competitiveness and consumer experience. In 2019, Huawei predicted that it would ship 240 million units of smartphones and retain its position as the world's second largest smartphone manufacturer. The company shipped more than 44 million units of its Huawei Mate

Brand Finance Global 500 (USD m).

The world's top 500 most valuable brands 1-50

2020 Rank	2019 Rank	Brand	Country	Sector	2020 Brand Value	Brand Value Change	2019 Brand Value	2020 Brand Rating	2019 Brand Rating
1	1	Amazon	United States	Retail	\$220,791	+17.5%	\$187,905	AAA	AAA
2	3	Google	United States	Tech	\$159,722	+11.9%	\$142,755	AAA	AAA
3	2	Apple	United States	Tech	\$140,504	-8.5%	\$153,634	AAA	AAA
4	4	Microsoft	United States	Tech	\$117,072	-2.1%	\$119,595	AAA	AAA
5	5	Samsung Group	South Korea	Tech	\$94,494	+3.5%	\$91,282	AAA-	AAA-
6	8	ICBC	China	Banking	\$80,791	+1.2%	\$79,823	AAA	AAA+
7	7	Facebook	United States	Media	\$79,804	-4.1%	\$83,202	AA+	AAA-
8	11	Walmart	United States	Retail	\$77,520	+14.2%	\$67,867	AA+	AA+
9	14	Ping An	China	Insurance	\$69,041	+19.0%	\$57,926	AAA-	AAA-
10	12	Huawei	China	Tech	\$65,084	+4.5%	\$62,278	AAA-	AAA-

Brand Value by Economy



Country	Brand Value (USD bn)	% of total	Number of Brands
United States	3204.6	45.4%	205
China	1334.2	18.9%	70
Japan	483.2	6.8%	36
Germany	415.8	5.9%	21
France	312.3	4.4%	32
United Kingdom	193.1	2.7%	20
South Korea	171.2	2.4%	7
Canada	126.8	1.8%	17
Other	814.0	11.5%	92
Total	7055.2	100.0%	500

Series and HUAWEI P Series flagship devices, recording a 50 percent increase year-on-year. Winning critical and popular acclaim for their technological breakthroughs, Huawei's 5G smartphones recorded 6.9 million unit shipments as of December 2019.

Last year, Huawei also built out its all-scenario experience by introducing a range of new products spanning multiple categories, including tablets, PCs, wearables and IoT devices in the HiLink ecosystem, all of which exhibited a certain

degree of growth.

Looking at the future, Huawei remains committed to the all-scenario strategy. Richard Yu, CEO of Huawei Consumer Business Group, said: "The all-scenario strategy will remain the primary focus of Huawei for the next five to 10 years. We are steadfast in our commitment to creating an integrated ecosystem, in which tablets, PCs, VR devices, wearables, smart displays, smart speakers, cars and IoT devices are all connected to smartphones to deliver a truly seamless user experience."

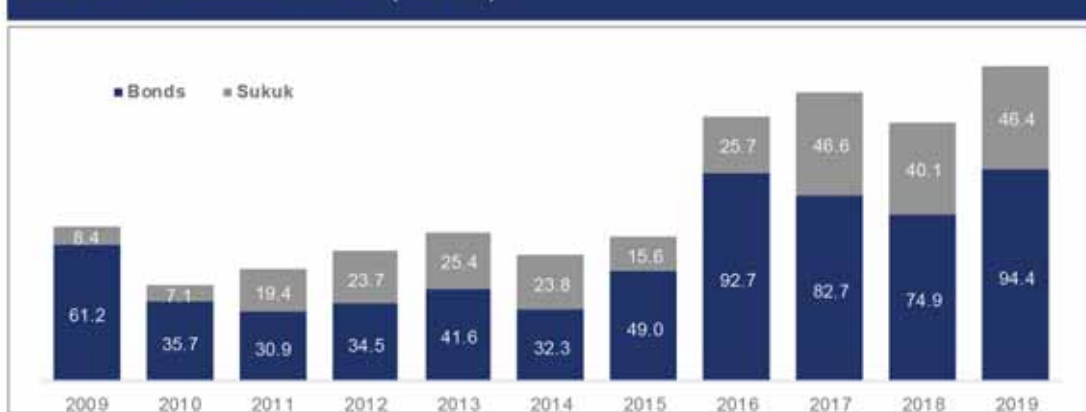
KAMCO GCC Fixed Income Market 2019

GCC fixed income issuance growth robust in 2019

KUWAIT: GCC fixed income issuance growth was back in the green during 2019 with record issuances during the year as compared to a y-o-y decline in the previous year. Total issuances reached \$140.8 billion during the year as compared \$115 billion during 2018 led by higher issuances of both bonds and sukuk with double digit growth rates vs. the previous year. Bond issuances during the year reached \$94.4 billion as compared to \$74.9 billion during 2018, recording a growth of 26 percent. On the other hand, Sukuk issuances increased by 15.8 percent during the year to reach \$46.4 billion as compared to \$40.1 billion during 2018.

Total fixed income issuances for the MENA region increased by 13.2 percent to reach \$179.8 billion in 2019 as compared to \$158.8 billion during the previous year. The y-o-y increase in 2019 was solely led by GCC countries that more than offset the decline in issuances by non-GCC MENA countries. There were no sukuk issuances in the five non-GCC MENA countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunis) in 2019 as compared to marginal issuance of \$0.3 billion in 2018 coming from Morocco and Jordan. Bond issuances from the five countries declined for the fourth consecutive year in 2019 and stood at \$38.9 billion in 2019 witnessing a decline of 10.6 percent from a total issuance of \$43.5 billion in 2018. For the MENA bonds market, USD-denominated bonds topped at \$84.2 billion followed by EGP and QAR at \$10.0 billion and \$8.3 billion, respectively. In terms of currency of issuance, MYR-denominated sukuk topped the global sukuk issuance market at \$48.3 billion followed by USD and SAR at \$28.8

Fixed Income Issuances in GCC (USD Bn)



Source: Bloomberg, Kamco Research
Note: Bond and sukuk issuances in the report includes instruments with original maturity >1 year and Country of Domicile/Country of Risk is for the specified region.

Fed Fund Rate vs. GCC Key Rates

	Dec-17	Dec-18	Dec-19
US Fed Funds Rate	1.25%-1.50%	2.25%-2.50%	1.5%-1.75%
Saudi Arabia REPO Rate	2.00%	3.00%	2.25%
UAE REPO Rate	1.75%	2.75%	2.00%
Kuwait CB Disc Rate	2.75%	3.00%	2.75%
Qatar REPO Rate	5.00%	5.00%	4.25%
Bahrain O/N REPO Rate	3.50%	4.50%	4.00%

Source: US Federal Reserve, Bloomberg

Date indicates end-of-period target rates/ranges. Source: US Federal Reserve, Central Bank of Kuwait, Bloomberg

billion and \$18.3 billion.

The increase in issuances in the MENA region came on the back of declining oil revenues, especially in the case of the GCC countries, that led to a deterioration of fiscal performance. As per IMF, GCC fiscal deficit is estimated to have increased to 2.4 percent of GDP in 2019 and is further expected to increase to 3.3 percent in 2020. Governments are increasingly seeking private sector participation in improving the economic balance by growing non-oil revenues. This led to higher borrowing by corporates. Furthermore, debt issuance market got a big boost in 2019 with

almost 75 bps decline in benchmark rates that motivated governments and corporates to take the debt route along with privatization of state-owned enterprises.

For 2020, we expect sustained levels of issuances from GCC corporates as lower rates entice fund rising via bonds and sukuk. However, the expected positive equity market performance in the region is expected to offset some of the impact of lower rates. Governments are also expected to tap the privatization route, although with rising deficits amid lower oil prices may lead to marginal increase in debt issuances.

Gulf Bank demonstrates ongoing commitment to customer care

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to improve its customer service experience, Gulf Bank has spearheaded a variety of efforts and improved major processes, demonstrating the Bank's ongoing commitment to customer support and satisfaction. In implementing a number of customer care efforts, Gulf Bank effectively decreased customer complaints by over 35% during 2019 as part of a multi-faceted approach that enhanced major systems and improved various processes throughout the year.

In an effort to further enhance customer satisfaction, Gulf Bank underwent major systems enhancements, effectively providing customers with a more tailored banking experience. Gulf Bank customers are now more likely to have products recommended to them based on their profiles and preferences. As part of these efforts, the Bank also shifted its focus to customers residing outside of Kuwait, improving their banking experience through the various channels available to them.

Commenting on Gulf Bank's customer care achievements, Shatha Al-Zaid, Assistant General Manager of Service Quality & Complaint Management at Gulf Bank, said: "We are proud to witness a variety of accomplishments in our customer service division, as demonstrated by our ongoing commitment to customer support. Through a combination of efforts, we have proudly improved our service experience at every customer touchpoint at Gulf Bank, from our branches to our customer call center. At Gulf Bank, we believe that customer care is a vital part of driving business success, and we are proud to demonstrate an exceptional commitment and unique approach to customer excellence. We are proud to wrap up 2019 with customer care scores that reflect our progress in improving the Gulf Bank experience, and are already in the process of launching even more initiatives in 2020."



Shatha Al-Zaid

Adrian McDonald to become EMEA president for Dell Technologies

DUBAI: Adrian McDonald will become EMEA President for Dell Technologies tripling the size of his current organization. In his new role, he will be responsible for all businesses, including PCs, server, storage and services, across the Europe, Middle East & Africa region.

McDonald is a passionate and vastly experienced leader with over 30 years of IT industry experience. With a deep understanding of the territory, having lived in and held leadership roles in many of the key hubs, such as Milan, Zurich, Johannesburg, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Vienna, Frankfurt, and London, he is perfectly placed to lead Dell Technologies in EMEA and to guide and serve the boardrooms of Europe on how to succeed in the digital age through technology investment.

"In a time of great change, Dell Technologies are ideally positioned to add value into Customer and Partners," said Adrian McDonald, President EMEA, Dell Technologies. "I'm incredibly excited for the future. We are at a tipping point for technology innovation. Computing will be more intelligent, personal and accessible in the 2020s, and this is going to have an even bigger impact on the world than the last decade, transforming how we live and work. Our customers understand this. They are not only looking to reimagine their businesses with the opportunities digital brings, but in many cases, undertake a dramatic transformation and I am looking forward to working with them and our partners to enable them to achieve this."

As EMEA President for Dell Technologies, McDonald will also continue his role as global lead for the Mosaic Employee Resource Group at Dell Technologies, which represents and promotes cultural inclusion and the benefits of cultural intelligence. Adrian McDonald's appointment follows the news in December that the Company was making an organizational change to simplify and unify its sales structure under one leader globally, creating a \$91 billion unified sales organization led by Bill Scannell, and with Aongus Hegarty taking the role of President of International Sales responsible for all markets outside of North America.



What's On

Embassy of Lebanon in Kuwait announces students' art competition

Supported by Ministry of Education, the General Coordinator of this competition announces that more than 10,000 students from 232 schools participated in a painting competition under the slogan of "Lebanon History & Culture". The contest aims to educate students in Kuwait about the heritage, cultures and civilizations of Lebanon. The contest's slogan motivates students to express their knowledge of Lebanon through art.

The art competition's theme is "Lebanon History & Culture", which is focused on encouraging students to express their knowledge of Lebanon by taking them on a journey to discover Lebanon's culture and how the Lebanese people emerged from various civilizations over thousands of years. It was home to the Phoenicians, and was subsequently conquered and occupied by the Assyrians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, the Arabs, the Crusaders, the Ottoman Turks and the French.

This variety is reflected in Lebanon's diverse population, composed of different religious groups, and features in the country's festivals, musical styles, literature, cuisine of Lebanon and architecture of Lebanon.

The famed Cedars of Lebanon are frequently cited as a symbol of beauty and strength. In addition to the many Biblical sites located in southern Lebanon, the Qadisha Valley, also known as the "Holy Valley," reveals a wealth of hidden, rock-cut monasteries, grottoes, and sacred sites from the earliest days of Christianity.



Participating students will draw anything related to the above theme using any material they prefer. They will create and provide the best artwork to enable them to enter in the competition. Drawing sheets are offered to participants free of charge. Selection of winners: The committee will

consist of expert artist who will select the best artwork by category. There will be 10 winners from each category and 10 from "special effort". Criteria will include creativity, amount of effort and technique.

The top 10 winners from five categories will be given valuable prizes and certificates by their names. Furthermore, the competition is open for art teachers and participating schools will be given certificates. The last day to submit art sheets will be on 19th March. The closing event will be hosted at Holiday Inn-Salmiya, an IHG hotel under the patronage of Lebanon



embassy. Invitation is open for all sponsors companies as follows: Asia electro mechanical company, Saba Group Int, Alrefai company, Beidoun company, M2R advertising, Al Hoss Engineering & Transport Company, United Colors.

Schools principals and art teachers, winners and their parents, ambassadors and top VIPs. Also the general coordinator announced that they choose Al Jareeda Arabic newspaper as a strategic partner for this competition.

Sheraton wins the 'Excellence in Customer Service Award'

The Sheraton Kuwait Hotel won the 2019 Excellence in Customer Service Award for the hotel sector in Kuwait during the closing ceremony of the Kuwait Public Relations and Customer Service Prize.

The major event was hosted by the Kuwait Public Relations Association under the patronage of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and was held at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center. The award was received by Mounir Amer, the General Manager of Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait Hotel, presented to him by the Amir's representative HE the Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Ghadeer Asiri, HE Head of Amiri Protocol Sheikh Khalid Al-Abdullah Al Sabah and Jassim Jamal Nasrallah, Head of Kuwait's Public Relations Association.

On winning the Excellence in Customer Service Award, Fahed Abushaar, Complex



General Manager of Sheraton Kuwait, spoke about how proud he is of the hotel's achievements especially the awards it receives, which enhances the persistent work related to customer service and expressed his gratitude for the trust of the award giving body which consists of local and international experts in the field of public relations and customer service that selected the winners based on the highest international standards. A company which focuses on customer service, active social programs, important media activity and other

standards, he also praised the great efforts of the executive management and employees in always providing exceptional service.

It is worth noting that the Sheraton Kuwait Hotel is currently undergoing a phased renovation of its guest rooms and suites. This renovation is a key milestone for this iconic hotel and reiterates our commitment towards creating an elevated brand experience for our guests which will make it more an ideal destination for an exceptional experience enjoying luxury hospitality.

Get the HUAWEI Mate 30 Pro 5G exclusively at stc

Kuwait Telecommunications Company stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, is now offering the all new HUAWEI Mate 30 Pro 5G exclusively through its postpaid plans to its customers in Kuwait.

stc customers have the exclusive opportunity to get their hands on the latest smartphone 7 days before the nationwide launch. The top-end super spec device is available through stc's postpaid plans starting from KD 31. The variety of specialized plans of the HUAWEI Mate 30 Pro 5G include free minutes, ranging data packages, a free HUAWEI 27W Super Charge wireless car charger and a subscription to HUAWEI's VIP service.

Commenting on the exclusive offer, Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) of stc, Ms. Haneen Ibrahim Al-Fulaj, said, "stc aims to offer its customers in Kuwait with the best and most exclusive deals on the latest smartphone devices and the fastest broadband to meet and exceed the growing demand of its diverse customer base. On our path to achieve sustainable growth, we are proud to have strategically partnered with some of the leading tech providers in the world such as HUAWEI, who now offers the world's first second-generation 5G device."

She said, "As we move into the age of 5G, our goal is to offer an array of devices that are capable of utilizing the technology. By offering high broadband speeds, users can enjoy an uninterrupted and seamless online experience, which is why we are offering this

exclusive deal only to our stc customers".

Al-Fulaj added, "We are committed to providing our customers with the latest offers and devices the digital world has to offer to enrich their experience while catering to their needs and exceeding their expectations. With our strategic approach targeting sustainable development, our focus relies on providing our customers with integrated digital solutions that contribute towards enhancing their lifestyles beyond the traditional telecom services."

Expanding horizons with the new iconic HUAWEI

The HUAWEI Mate 30 Pro 5G features a quad camera embraced by its uniquely designed halo ring placed on the back of the device. The modern look integrated with



Haneen Ibrahim Al-Fulaj

the halo ring gives the user a perfect fusion of reflection and refraction with a touch of striking elegance.

The device's 88-degree ultra-curved edge to edge display creates a three-dimensional horizon for an immersive viewing experience. The encircled glass coupled with the advanced design engineered to balance aesthetic and comfort. The ultra-curved screen also offers a wider area for interactions which also replace the physical buttons for a seamless design. While gripping the device,

users can naturally adjust the volume or enjoy a quad-finger gaming experience with the innovative side-touch interaction.

Leading the 5G era

HUAWEI made sure to include the latest technology when engineering the premium device, as the world's first flagship 5G SoC powered by 7nm+ EUV2, the Kirin 990 5G chipset achieves significant performance with lower power consumption. The high performing chip supports Standalone and Non-Standalone network architectures, capable of generating peak download speeds and cover a wide range of FDD and TDD frequencies. All these advanced features provide users with superior performance, allowing them to view the world faster, stream online videos and breakthrough the visual boundaries with the device's powerful photography and videography capabilities.

The smartphone allows you to access real-time viewing due to its high download speed, delivering an ultra-fast and smooth 4k livestream experience even if you are in the middle of a crowd. Consider its cameras to be your smart eyes, HUAWEI's new SuperSensing Cine Camera preserves all the beauty and character in every moment through its stunning images and vivid videos, regardless of the time of day and position they are shot in.

40-Megapixel camera

Master the art of filming with HUAWEI Mate 30 Pro 5G's Ultra Low-Light, Ultra-Slow Motion and Ultra Wide Angle Time-Lapse videos. The smartphone also features an 8MP Telephoto Camera with 3x optical zoom, 5x hybrid zoom, and up to 30x digital zoom that brings far-away surprises up close to your eyes, as well as a 3D Depth Sensing Camera.

ICSK Amman commemorates Republic Day of India



ICSK Amman organised commemorative programmes on the occasion of the 71st Republic Day of India. Children presented melodious patriotic songs and danced in colourful traditional attires representing different states of India. To show their love towards their mother country, the little stars of the Primary section danced to the famous A.R. Rehman composition 'Vande Mataram'.

The students showcased an array of performances which thor-

oughly infused the feelings of joy and patriotism towards Motherland India. Their sparkling eyes, contagious innocent smiles and gleeful movements instilled the inherent feeling of happiness and pride that each need to retain.

Principal, Rajesh Nair addressed the special assembly and gave the significance of celebrating Republic Day and asked the children to always retain the spark of patriotism in their mind wherever they are.

Health & Science

Red Sea 'huge source' of air pollution, greenhouse gases

PARIS: Hydrocarbon gases bubbling from the bottom of the Red Sea are polluting the atmosphere at a rate equivalent to the emissions of some large fossil fuel exporting countries, researchers said Tuesday. The gases seeping from the waters — which are ringed by the resorts and ports of several countries, including Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia — then mix with emissions from industrial shipping and turned into noxious pollutants that are very harmful to human health.

The Middle East holds more than half of the world's oil and gas reserves and the intense fossil fuel exploitation that takes place there, and the region releases enormous amounts of gaseous pollutants into the atmosphere.

But during a 2017 expedition around the Gulf, researchers at the Max Plank Institute for Chemistry noticed that levels of ethane and propane in the air above the Northern Red Sea were up to 40 times higher than predicted, even accounting for regional manmade emissions.

The team analyzed possible sources for the gas emissions, including traffic, agriculture, burning of biomass, and power generation from hydrocarbons. They came to an unexpected conclusion: the two gases had to be seeping out of the sea bed after escaping natural subterranean oil and gas reservoirs. They were then carried by currents to the surface, where they mix with another greenhouse gas, nitrous oxide, which is emitted in high amounts by industrial shipping.

The resulting gas compounds are extremely harmful to human health, according to the team's study, published in Nature Communications. "I have to admit that I was surprised myself with these results," lead author Efstratios Boursoukidis said. "We spent almost two years working on this dataset to confidently prove that the emissions were



AL-ULA, SAUDI ARABIA: An aerial picture taken on January 5, 2020 shows the Red Sea coast in Saudi Arabia. — AFP

coming some two kilometers below the sea surface." The team calculated that the rate of ethane and propane leakage was "comparable in magnitude" to those of several hydrocarbon exporting nations, such as the United Arab Emirates or Kuwait. The emissions result in another source of atmospheric methane, a potent greenhouse gas, the study said. The situation is exacerbated by nitrous oxide pollution from the large number of shipping containers passing

through the northern Red Sea, one of Earth's busiest transport lanes. And it's only likely to get worse as the route gets busier.

"In the coming decades, ship traffic through the Red Sea and Suez Canal is expected to continue to increase, with a concomitant rise in nitrogen oxide emissions," said Boursoukidis. "We expect that such increase will amplify the role of this source, leading to significant deterioration of the regional air quality." — AFP

Lassa fever deaths in Nigeria rise to 41

LAGOS: The death toll from Lassa fever in Nigeria since the beginning of January has risen to 41 as cases were confirmed in more regions, Nigeria's disease control agency said. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) said Tuesday that from January 1 to January 26 a total of 258 confirmed cases, including five health workers, were reported across 19 states.

The latest figures marked an increase from 29 deaths and 195 confirmed cases given by the authorities for the period up to January 24. Endemic to Nigeria, Lassa fever belongs to the same family as the Ebola and Marburg viruses, but is much less deadly.

The virus is spread by contact with rat feces or urine. It starts with fever and can, in worst case scenarios, lead to severe bleeding and organ failure. Nigeria declared an outbreak of Lassa fever a year ago and around 170 people died from the virus in 2019.

The number of cases usually climbs in January due to weather conditions during the dry season. The NCDC said that the fatality rate was down to 15.9 percent from 19.7 percent during the same period last year. The agency said although there has been a spike in the number of deaths reported for the week, the figure is still lower than the 42 deaths reported in January 2019. — AFP

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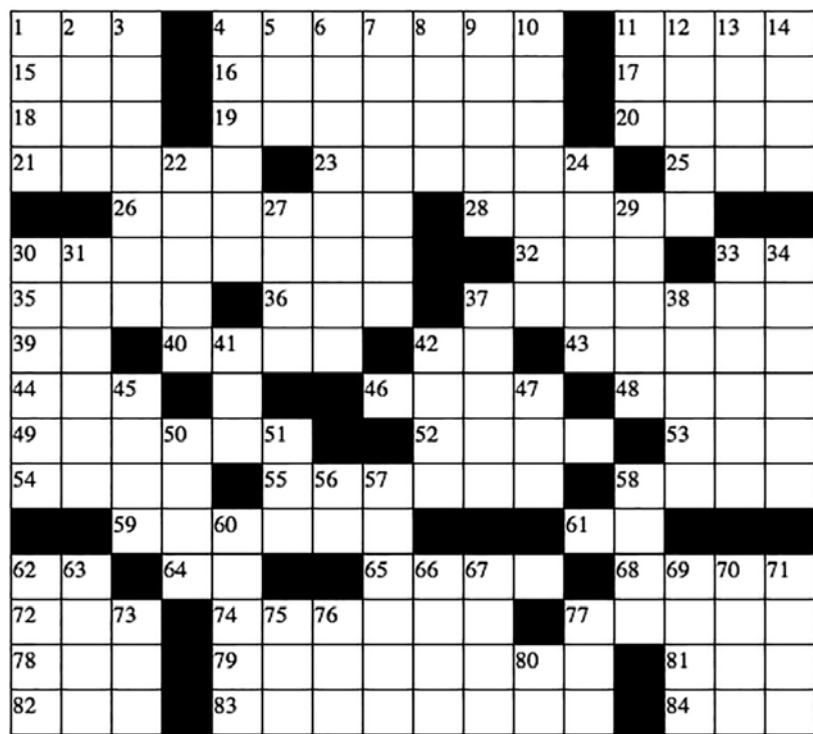
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ACROSS

1. A pilgrimage to Mecca.
4. Inflate again, as of a balloon.
11. A piece of information about circumstances that exist or events that have occurred.
15. A unit of surface area equal to 100 square meters.
16. Heighten or intensify.
17. A Loloish language.
18. The fatty flesh of eel.
19. Cheerful and bright.
20. Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
21. A member of the Dravidian people living in northern Bengal in eastern India.
23. Dividing an animal into right and left halves.
25. An undergarment worn by women to support their breasts.
26. Ancient name for the coastal region of northwestern Asia Minor (including Lesbos).
28. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
30. A place where taxis park while awaiting customers.
32. An inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others.
35. Rounded like an egg.
36. One of the five major classes of immunoglobulins.
39. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
40. A rounded thickly curled hairdo.
43. A genus of bee.
44. (of securities) Not quoted on a stock exchange.
46. Two items of the same kind.
48. (prefix) Half or partial.
49. An Anatolian language.
52. A boy or man.
53. A room or establishment where alcoholic drinks are served over a counter.
54. The biblical name for ancient Syria.
55. A descent down a nearly vertical surface by using a doubled rope that is coiled around the body and attached to some higher point.
59. A member of the Algonquian people formerly inhabiting the Maritime Provinces of Canada.
61. The syllable naming the fourth (subdominant) note of the diatonic scale in solmization.
62. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
64. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
65. English prelate noted for his pessimistic sermons and articles (1860-1954).
68. The front of the head from the forehead to the chin and ear to ear.
72. An ugly evil-looking old woman.
74. The capital of Eritrea.
78. The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
79. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
81. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
82. The cry made by sheep.
83. Low stinging nettle of Central and South America having velvety brownish-green toothed leaves and clusters of small green flowers.
84. Having undesirable or negative qualities.

DOWN

1. A complex red organic pigment containing iron and other atoms to which oxygen binds.
2. A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
3. A loose cloak with a hood.
4. Cause to load (an operating system) and start the initial processes.
5. The compass point midway between northeast and east.
6. Large pink to scarlet web-footed wading bird with down-bent bill.
7. Sweetened beverage of lime juice and water.
8. (often followed by "for") Ardently or excessively desirous.
9. A narrow headband or strip of ribbon worn as a headband.
10. Having ones attention or mind or energy engaged.
11. Extremely pleasing.
12. Jordan's port.
13. A human female who does housework.
14. The basic unit of money in Western Samoa.
22. A unit of magnetic flux density equal to one weber per square meter.
24. Goods (or wreckage) on the sea bed that is attached to a buoy so that it can be recovered.
27. The habitation of wild animals.
29. God of blame and mockery.
31. A new embodiment of a familiar idea.
33. Of the appetites and passions of the body.
34. A way of access consisting of a set of steps.
37. A genus of Intriidae.
38. Naked freshwater or marine or parasitic protozoa that form temporary pseudopods for feeding and locomotion.
41. The law enforcement agency in the Justice Department.
42. United States publisher of magazines (1898-1967).
45. Burrowing marine mollusk living on sand or mud.
47. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 10 liters.
50. Type genus of the Amidae.
51. A rotating disk shaped to convert circular into linear motion.
56. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
57. Minute blackish gregarious flies destructive to mushrooms and seedlings.
58. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
60. A fastener (as a buckle or hook) that is used to hold two things together.
63. A small cake leavened with yeast.
66. A recurring sleep state during which rapid eye movements do not occur and dreaming does not occur.
67. Cassava with long tuberous edible roots and soft brittle stems.
69. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
70. Large genus of African trees bearing kola nuts.
71. A town in north central Oklahoma.
73. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
75. A health resort near a spring or at the seaside.
76. An adult male person (as opposed to a woman).
77. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
80. Being nine more than ninety.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Deep thought and meditation may be in order. The easy way is not always the best way. You may have learned the biggest rewards come with the biggest challenges. All work and no play also can cause your sensitivity to be stifled. Work on finding a balance between your personal life and career. We all need to step back and take a deep breath sometime. This is your time to breathe. Personal growth is a priority. Do not let pursuit of wealth and your career stand in the way of this.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

What a day! It seems as everything is happening all at once. It is all good news. Things just don't get any better than this. Today is a day you will find easy solutions to old problems. A day of happiness. You may find you have a special bond with someone older or in authority. You may feel as if you are living in a fairytale. Enjoy your time to shine.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

It is time to get your affairs in order. Focus on your health. Develop new and healthy routines and stick to them. A new and improved you will be the results of these actions. A healthy body will create a healthier mind. Out with the old and in with the new. Treat every day of your life as if the gift it truly is. If you listen to your body, it will tell you exactly what it needs. Aches and pains are there for a reason. Respect what your body is trying to tell you and provide what it is asking for



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

A desire to fit in and become part of the crowd seems to come over you today. You will find great satisfaction surrounding yourself with others. Playing a part in the lives of those you care deeply for is where you will find the most satisfaction. DifferSent opinions and being able to share your thoughts with others will be very beneficial to you today. Seeing problems from the eyes of someone else always seems to make finding solutions easier and helps you put things into perspective. This should be a very enlightening time for you.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is a time that choices you make concerning your living situation could leave you in a bind. Think long and hard before you act and look for alternate solutions to any problems you are dealing with. You may feel isolated and as if you are not getting the support you need now. A desire for a social life may come over you. Be sure to choose your company wisely. Remember when it comes to friends, quantity is never better than quality. Good times could go south quickly this evening if you make the wrong selection of company. Try to clear your mind and make an attempt to connect with one of your longtime true friends this evening.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Just because something is easy doesn't mean it is the right thing to do or the right way to handle a situation. You may find yourself involved in a situation you need to put great thought into before you act. Actions have consequences. Be sure you are ready to face them. Hard work and determination will help you acquire your goal. Remember, avoid taking the easy way out.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You are pumped. You feel as any and all goals are within your reach. You have the strength and determination to make great things happen. Success is not an option. You feel healthy and natural. A positive attitude is your best quality now. You have found yourself in a sense of diving wanderlust. You are able to deeply explore your feelings now and find yourself in touch with new needs, wants, and emotions. Enjoy this.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

All eyes are on you today and that is just what you crave. You have a great desire to be the center of attention. You crave appreciation for your gifts and talents. This will be a time you are able to look back on with pride. You are drawn to romance. This is a great time to spend with a special someone. Share your passion, whether it be cooking a meal together or painting a picture. Involve the one you love in a project tonight. This may bring you closer and the results good be amazing.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Communication is important. When it is put in writing, what you thought was a compliment could be interpreted as criticism. Something you thought was completely innocent or innocuous may be seen as derogatory. Misunderstandings that are in writing are difficult to overcome. They can result in a lifetime of hard feelings. Be thoughtful about what you put on social media. Consider the possible reactions before you send a text, a tweet, or an email.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You've made a breakthrough in a relationship. Your patience has paid off. Don't take anything for granted though. This one will require continuing cultivation. A small conflict could undo all of your work. You can be assertive without being aggressive. You can make suggestions and not demands. The reward is worth the effort.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

A sense of curiosity is overwhelming today. If you have a tendency for addiction, you want to be aware of your use of the internet. The temptations offered by social media, games, and unhealthy sites can be as real as the lures of alcohol and drugs. You may want to take stock of the time you spend on your electronic devices. Be aware how this time affects your health and outlook. Does it contribute to your mental health? Does it make you feel better or worse? Is it constructive? Social media can be a good thing; but too much of a good thing can become a negative.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Live, laugh, and love. We see this saying everywhere we turn. This is the motto of your day. Your wit and sense of humor attracts others to you today. You are a ray of sunshine in the lives of many. A positive attitude is the only attitude to have. Others admire this about you and are drawn to you. This is an excellent time to present new ideas to others and perhaps ask someone to come on board concerning your most recent venture. Share the wealth and surround yourself with like-minded supportive people.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Winter

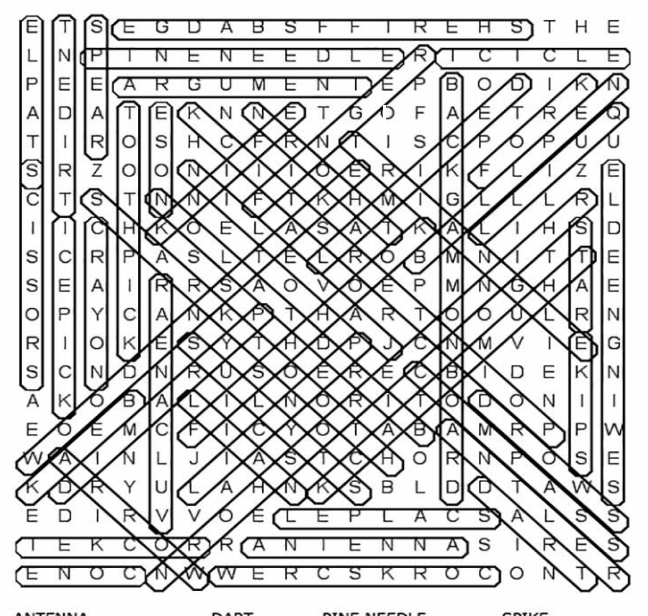
Find and circle all of the Winter related words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a Japanese proverb.



- | | | | |
|-----------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| BLACK ICE | HAIL | SEASON | SNOWBOARD |
| BLIZZARD | HEADBAND | SKATES | SNOWFLAKE |
| BOOTS | HIBERNATION | SKI DOG | SNOWMAN |
| CARNIVAL | HOCKEY | SKI PANTS | SNOWSHOES |
| CHRISTMAS | HOLIDAYS | SKIING | SOLSTICE |
| COLD | ICE FISHING | SLEET | SOUP |
| EGG NOG | ICICLES | SLEW | STEW |
| FIREPLACE | KNIT CAP | SLIPPERY | STORM |
| FIREWOOD | LONG UNDERWEAR | SNOW CASTLE | SWEATSHIRT |
| FOG | MITTENS | SNOW PLOW | TOBOGGAN |
| FREEZE | OLYMPICS | SNOW SHOVEL | VACATION |
| FROST | PARKA | SNOW TIRES | WIND CHILL |
| GLOVES | SCARF | SNOWBALL | WOOL SOCKS |

Yesterday's Solution

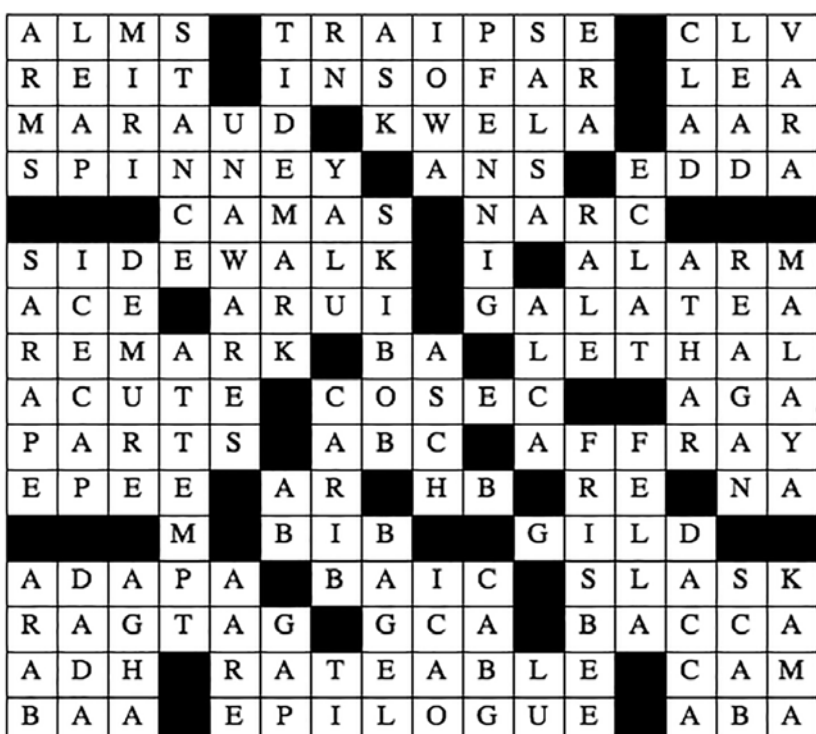
What's the Point?



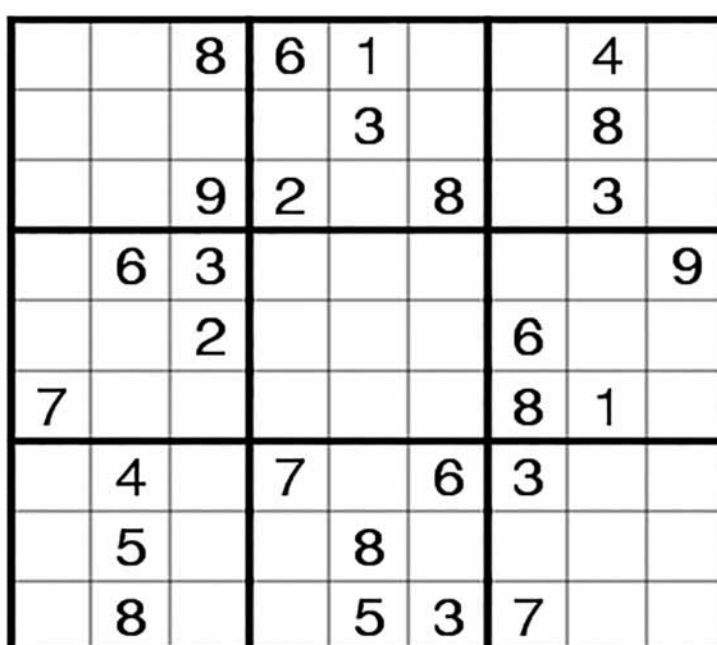
- | | | | |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------|
| ANTENNA | DART | PINE NEEDLE | SPIKE |
| ANTLER | DECIMAL | POINTER STICK | STAPLE |
| ARGUMENT | FINGER | PYRAMID | STAR |
| ARROW | FISH HOOK | QUILL | STYLUS |
| BACKGAMMON BOARD | FORK | RHINOCEROS HORN | SWORD |
| BALLPEN | ICE PICK | ROCKET | THORN |
| BEAK | ICICLE | SCALFEL | THUMBTRACK |
| BIRD TALON | JAVELIN | SCISSORS | TOOTHPICK |
| COMPASS | KNIFE | SEWING NEEDLE | TRIANGLE |
| CONE | NAIL | SHARK TOOTH | TRIDENT |
| CORKSCREW | NOSE | SHERIFF'S BADGE | VULCAN EAR |
| CRAYON | PENCIL | SPEAR | WOODEN STAKE |

The hidden message is: THE POINT OF THIS PUZZLE IS TO PROVIDE AN ENJOYABLE DIVERSION.

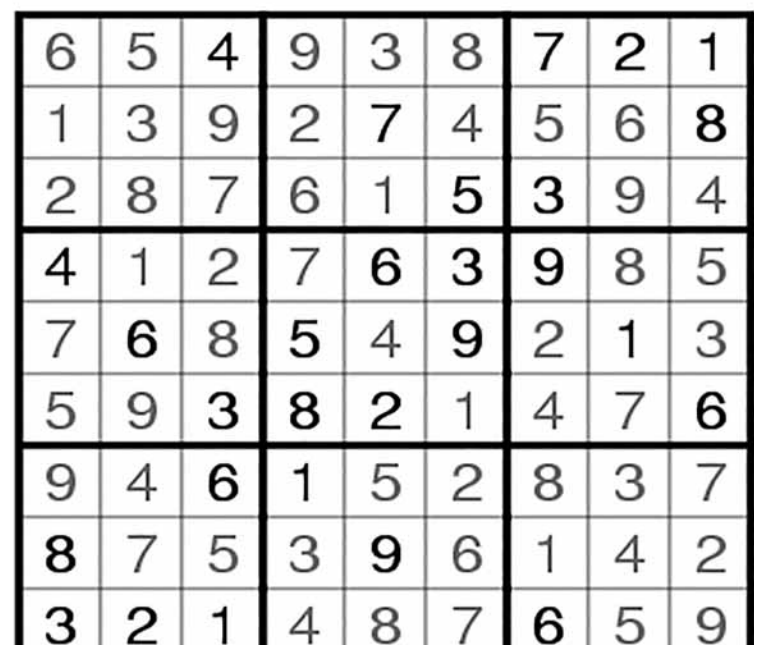
Yesterday's Solution



Daily Sudoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2020



A picture taken yesterday shows a wax figure of Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg with a placard reading "the school strike for the climate" (in Swedish Skolstrejk för klimatet) during its presentation at the Panoptikum waxworks museum in Hamburg, northern Germany. — AFP

BUDAPEST'S BANKSY DISCIPLE SPARKS TREASURE HUNTS AND NOSTALGIA

Drawing inspiration from enigmatic British artist Banksy, a sculptor of tiny bronze statues has gained a cult following in the Hungarian capital Budapest by placing his quirky works around the city for the public to discover. "I look for places which are a little hidden but still easy to find if you know where to look," Mihaly Kolodko, 41, told AFP in his workshop in Vac, north of Budapest. "I never tell anyone in advance where I have put them," he grinned while working on a new figure, bearded beneath a beanie-hat.

While his statues don't have the biting

Many of his works depict 1970s and 1980s Hungarian cartoon figures. Since moving to Hungary in 2016 he has peppered Budapest with over 20 cast metal sculptures measuring just 10-15 centimeters (4-6 inches) tall.

A cheeky talking worm is sat on a rampart on the river Danube opposite the Hungarian parliament. A flying rabbit with oversized chequered ears looks down on the city from a perch near Buda castle. More cryptic pieces include a Marcel Duchamps-style pissoir, and a mysteriously murdered squirrel.

'Guerilla' sculpture?

Kolodko doesn't ask for permission from the authorities to install his metal miniatures, fuelling his reputation as a "guerilla" sculptor, a tag he shrugs off. "I just follow my feelings. I'm not a lawyer, if I had to spend time and money asking for permits I'd lose the urge to make art," he told AFP. "I communicate with people through statues, it's my first language." Thousands of Kolodko devotees are running a Facebook fan page, swapping tips on hunting the statues and debating the meaning of the more abstract works.

"These are the statues of our 30 to 40-something generation," says 40-year-old Szilvia Liptai, who organizes regular "Kolodko tours" for runners, which take in a dozen of the bronzes. "He triggers our childhood memories," she told AFP, as runners took selfies beside the talking worm-now sporting a winter scarf and bobble hat knitted for him by an anonymous donor. Kolodko was trained in monumental sculpture in the Ukrainian city of Lviv by teachers who designed gargantuan statues of Lenin during Ukraine's Soviet peri-



Ukrainian-Hungarian parents' child, sculptor Mihajlo (Mihaly) Kolodko poses next to his small-size, 15 centimeter tall sculpture 'Lisa', a character of the American cartoon 'The Simpsons', in Budapest, Hungary.



Ukrainian-Hungarian parents' child, sculptor Mihajlo (Mihaly) Kolodko places his new small-size sculpture, the 'Axe' nearby the Soviet monument of the World War II at the Freedom square of Budapest. — AFP photos



A sculpture depicting German Nobel Prize-winning physicist Albert Einstein, stands in the studio of Ukrainian-Hungarian parents' child, sculptor Mihajlo (Mihaly) Kolodko.

satire of Banksy's work, they have been provoking some heated debate—as well as nostalgia. Kolodko, whose grandmother was Hungarian, grew up in western Ukraine where he could watch TV from nearby Hungary.

od-and nationalist heroes after the country gained independence.

But he found his artistic voice in less time-consuming and cheaper, smaller-scale works, sculpting the mini-statues in his hometown of Uzhhorod near the Hungarian border. It was Hungary where the father-of-two's work found the best reception, winning commissions like one from Budapest airport for a diminutive Franz Liszt or memorials for historical events such as the Holocaust.

Thrown into the Danube

"Banksy inspired me to use the language of sculpture the way he does for painting," Kolodko said, beside a statue of US cartoon character Lisa Simpson bound to a lamppost

in downtown Budapest—a "Joan of Arc" commentary on the "oppression of American culture". Not everyone gets his messages though. A statue of another 1970s children's favorite, a hapless handyman goat, was widely seen as a critique of shoddy workmanship on a recently renovated main square in Budapest. "I meant to show that you can be lovable even if things don't work out, and also reflect on the Ukrainian guest workers who used to gather here in mornings for odd-jobs," he said.

Then last November an ultra-nationalist politician interpreted Kolodko's statue of a Russian "ushanka" fur ear-flap cap with a red star on it as approval of a nearby Soviet World War II memorial. After filming himself

cleaving it from its place with an axe, the politician said it was "the symbol of a dictatorial system" and threw it into the Danube. "I don't mean to be provocative," Kolodko told AFP. "The ushanka was actually trying to say the past is still with us. "Some people just look at things differently. After the statues go public they take on a life of their own, I say goodbye to them." Three of his pieces have been removed or stolen so far, he added. Earlier this month, the latest "Kolodko" suddenly appeared, the artist's answer to the recent act of violence: a tiny bronze axe where the ushanka once rested. — AFP

By Toutatis! France unveils statue to Asterix creator

A statue of French comic book legend Rene Goscinny, the creator of Asterix and the cowboy Lucky Luke, was unveiled in Paris. The life-sized bronze of the writer close to his former home features him holding some of his most famous creations, including Asterix, the plucky Gaul who refused to bend the knee to Julius Caesar and his legions. Goscinny, who died of a brain haemorrhage at 51 in 1977, stands on a bookcase plinth that contains some of his best-loved works.

The statue is the first ever in the

French capital to a comics creator. Graphic novels both for adults and children have a massive readership in France and neighboring Belgium, with Goscinny and his illustrator Alberto Uderzo now 92 — regarded as gods of the genre. Their catchphrases like Asterix's "By Toutatis!" — an expression of surprise which references a real Gallic deity — have gone down in comic book history. The "Asterix" and "Lucky Luke" books are still huge bestsellers across Europe, with new writers and illustrators taking up the stories. The latest "Asterix" adventure,

"The Daughter of Vercingetorix", has sold more than 1.5 million copies in France alone in two months.

Goscinny, who grew up in poverty before falling into the magic potion of comics after serving in the French army at the end of World War II, already has a street named after him in Paris close to France's National Library. The French Ministry of Culture has declared 2020 the "Year of the Graphic Novel". — AFP



TRANSFORMERS DEVELOPING TWO NEW FILMS



The 'Transformers' franchise is set to be revamped by Paramount with two new films. According to Variety, two simultaneous scripts based around the popular franchise are now in development, one written by James Vanderbilt and the other by Joby Harold. Details behind both scripts are vague, but sources say they present an opportunity to build out multiple storylines within the franchise. No directors have been attached to the project as of yet, but it is likely that the films will feature brand new casts. Vanderbilt has recently penned the Netflix comedy 'Murder Mystery', whilst Harold has served as an execu-

tive producer on 'John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum', as well as writing Zack Snyder's 'Army of the Dead'. Paramount Pictures have previously made six 'Transformers' movies, five of which were helmed by Michael Bay and were considered to be their own series. The sixth and most recent installment was spin-off movie 'Bumblebee', which was directed by Travis Knight and released in 2018. 'Bumblebee' was produced on a smaller budget to the previous projects and proved popular with critics and audiences, giving Paramount the opportunity to continue the franchise. The studio still views 'Transformers' as a top priority and is hoping to attach filmmakers to

each script as soon as possible. Travis, 46, previously revealed that he had ideas for a 'Bumblebee' sequel and had plans for the main characters, Charlie Watson (Hailee Steinfeld) and Bumblebee (voiced by Dylan O'Brien). He said: "When I get to the end of one of my movies, I always imagine what's next for the characters. And so, in my mind, I've got all these scenarios and adventures that play out, both with Charlie and with Bee and everyone else. We'll see if the world wants more. Maybe we'll explore some of those things."

Dern 'couldn't have asked' for something more 'fun' than Marriage Story



Laura Dern "couldn't have asked" for something more "fun" than 'Marriage Story'. The 52-year-old actress starred alongside Adam Driver and Scarlett Johansson in the award-winning movie and has revealed it took 18 months of conversations with director and screenwriter Noah Baumbach to perfect the role. Speaking about her role in the hit movie, which earned her a Golden Globes Award and Screen Actors Guild Award, as well as an Oscars nomination, she said: "It was a good year-and-a-half of conversations. And I remember the night he said, 'I want to tell a love story through the lens of divorce.' I laughed and I was in awe at the same time. It was months later, as we all shared our experiences, our longings, our heartbreaks and our parenting struggles that he started to solidify characters and asked me would I want to play the divorce lawyer. And I couldn't ask for something more fun as an actor." And Laura has also praised her other movie 'Little Women' for "moving" her as she praised its director Greta Gerwig's "revolutionary" script whilst also crediting 'Marriage Story' filmmaker Noah for being "so flawless and inventive". Speaking about the similarities between the two movies, she added to Screen Daily: "I feel so moved that in both collaborations the writing is the god, because they are so meticulous and love language so much, so differently. Noah is so flawless and inventive and tells you everything you need to know on the page. And with Greta, it's about taking someone else's words and finding a modern, raw, messy rhythm to that language that was really revolutionary."

Sony to reboot Anaconda?

Sony Pictures are in talks to reboot the 'Anaconda' franchise. 'Divergent' writer Evan Daugherty has been hired to script the project, but it hasn't been set up with a producer, director or actors, according to The Hollywood Reporter. The original horror-thriller movie was released in 1997 starring Jennifer Lopez, Owen Wilson and Jon Voight, and the motion picture was popular with audiences, spawning four sequels. The first film focused on Lopez's character, Terri Flores, heading a documentary film crew looking for a long-lost tribe along the Amazon River, only to see the expedition taken over by a nefarious snake hunter, played by Voight, leading to several horrific encounters with a massive green serpent. Sources are describing the movie as "reimagining" of the original concept rather than a sequel or remake, and the new version could be inspired by the 2018 film 'The Meg', which pits Jason Statham's character up against a giant shark. It is unclear whether Lopez will return to the franchise, and the 'Hustlers' star has previously admitted that she is "quite particular" about the roles she takes on. She said: "I'm quite particular. I've been offered a couple of movies over the past couple of years but unless it's the right thing and I get the right types of opportunities, I'd rather create them. That's mine and [producing partner] Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas' mantra. We don't force things, but we don't wait around either... If no one is giving us the stories that we want to tell, then we'll create them ourselves."



Whishaw suggests No Time To Die will sum up Craig's time as Bond

Ben Whishaw has suggested that 'No Time To Die' will "sum up" Daniel Craig's time as James Bond. The 39-year-old actor reprises his role as Q in the upcoming movie - which is due to be released in April - and has said the project will connect the previous four Bond movies lead by Daniel, in order to give his version of the suave spy a proper send off. Ben told Collider.com: "It's Daniel's last film as James Bond, so I think what they can look forward to is a kind of summing up. I guess, of all of the previous Bond films that Daniel's done. There are strands from all of the films in it, kind of reaching a conclusion." 'The Personal History of David Copperfield' star also discussed the "chaotic" approach of director Cary Joji Fukunaga. When asked about working with Cary, Ben said: "It was great. And you know what was amazing is that he treated it, or was able to approach it, it felt to me almost as if it were an independent film. You know? "And it was quite improvisational... we didn't do many takes. It was very light. Sometimes quite chaotic, but I'm very excited to see how he's constructed the final film." 'No Time To Die' is Daniel's fifth and final appearance in the franchise, but he previously doubted that he was "physically capable" of playing Bond after being injured whilst filming a fight scene during 'Spectre'. The 51-year-old actor said: "I finished that movie with a broken leg. I had to question myself: Was I physically capable of doing [another one] or did I want to do another one? Because that phone call to your wife saying 'I've broken my leg' is not pleasant." 'No Time To Die' will hit cinema screens on April 2, and will also star Rami Malek, Lashana Lynch, Naomie Harris, and Ralph Fiennes.

Henry Golding says Snake Eyes doesn't rely on CGI

Henry Golding says 'Snake Eyes' relies on physical stunts for its action scenes rather than CGI. The 32-year-old actor plays the titular ninja in the film and he says the origin story of the silent character's complex backstory has lots of old-fashioned stunt work which he is sure will wow audiences. He told MTV News: "We have an authenticity to this. Which no one will ever have seen in a 'G.I. Joe' franchise ever. "The amount of physical stunts that we do outweigh that of any of the CGI. Generally speaking, it's all physical stunts." The 'Crazy Rich Asians' star - who was born in Malaysia before moving to England as a child - admits that his body has taken a battering on set because he has been prepared to shoot so many of his own stunts. He said: "I had a few injuries. I'm not gonna lie - I blew out my hip, I tore my quad, my meniscus like tore." Henry insists his injuries have been beneficial for his performance, as being "put through the wringer" brought an honest "tenacity" to his "susceptible" and "volatile" alter ego. Henry star alongside Andrew Koji as Storm Shadow and Samara Weaving as Snake Eyes' love interest Scarlett in the upcoming blockbuster, whilst Iko Uwais and Ursula Corberio will also feature. 'Snake Eyes', which will be released in October 2020, is a spin-off to the previous two 'G.I. Joe' films, 2009's 'The Rise of the Cobra' and 2013's 'Retaliation' - both of which are inspired by the hugely popular military inspired toy range of the same name. The story will focus on Snake Eyes - who was played by Ray Park in the first two films - and his quest for vengeance after his father's death and his training alongside enemy Storm Shadow (Andre) under the tutelage of Hard Master (Iko). Robert Schwentke will direct the film, with the script penned by 'Beauty and the Beast' screenwriter Evan Spiliotopoulos.



Carrey would consider making a sequel to The Mask

Jim Carrey would be tempted to make a sequel to 'The Mask' - as long as it was helmed by a "visionary" director. The 58-year-old actor played the titular lead role in the 1994 film, which tells the story of down-on-his-luck bank clerk Stanley Ipkiss, whose life is transformed after he discovers a magical wooden mask which turns him into an anarchic green-faced alter ego. A sequel, 'Son of the Mask', was released in 2005 but did not feature Carrey and was panned by critics. Carrey admits that he would not rule out reprising his role as Stanley but it would depend on the filmmaker that was bringing the franchise back to the big screen. Speaking to Comicbook.com: "The Mask, I think, for myself, it would depend on the filmmaker really. I don't want to do it just to do it. But I would only do it if it was some crazy visionary filmmaker. Sure." The 'Dumb and Dumber' star also suggested that his latest film 'Sonic the Hedgehog', in which he plays villain Dr. Ivo Robotnik and is based on the iconic Sega video game series of the same name, would be more suited to a sequel. Jim said: "I don't think in terms of sequels and stuff like that, I mean, this one is kind of right for it because we have not evolved the character (Dr. Eggman) fully yet." Mike Richardson - the founder of Dark Horse Comics who created the character of The Mask - has previously suggested that he would want to reboot the franchise with a female lead. He said: "I'd like to see a really good physical comedian in the role. I have one in mind, but I'm not gonna say her name... You never know what's coming in the future. We have some ideas." 'Guardians of the Galaxy' star Karen Gillan has been linked with the potential remake, but she recently denied being approached about the proposed project. She said: "I can definitely confirm that I haven't heard anything about 'The Mask'. I don't know anything about that."

Emily Blunt 'gobsmacked' by A Quiet Place reaction

Emily Blunt was "gobsmacked" by the response to 'A Quiet Place' by audiences. The 36-year-old actress - who starred opposite and was directed by her husband John Krasinski in the horror movie - was not only taken aback by how popular the film proved to be but also how much conversation it sparked concerning theories surrounding deeper themes. She said: "I was gobsmacked. "Not only by just how many people went to see it and then told their friends to see it, and then it had this meteoric life that was not expected by me... "But also the very deep metaphorical themes that people pulled out of it, some of which were intended and some of which really weren't. "They found it really involving and exciting." John and Emily expected demand for a sequel but were initially resistant to being involved. John

admitted: "You know, I wrote the first one to be one thing. "And then when it did well and [the studio] were like, 'We're going to do a sequel', I thought, 'Great. Go find someone else. It'll be great. Enjoy it.'" Emily added to Total Film magazine: "We were aware that the studio was probably going to make a sequel, with or without us. "There was a sense of protection of this baby that John had created. "And I think that ultimately he was always going to maybe grandfather the next one. "But we were both very steadfast about not being involved. "And then all of a sudden that mad reaction happened and he was suddenly like, 'I have an idea. I don't know. It's just a beginning of an idea...'"



Lifestyle | Gossip



Courtney Love to receive Icon Award

Courtney Love will receive the Icon Award at the NME Awards. The Hole rocker will follow in the footsteps of previous recipient Shirley Manson in accepting the accolade at the O2 Academy Brixton in London on 12 February and admitted the honor "means a lot" to her. She said in a statement to NME: "Thank you so much for this award, it means a lot. "You were there at the beginning and whilst we've sparred like siblings over the years I've always had a huge respect for what you do, and been very grateful for the support. It's going to be a great night." Organizers have also confirmed Katherine Ryan and Julie Adenuga will host this year's show and the Beats 1 presenter is thrilled to be working with the comic. Julie said: "Co-hosting the NME Awards with Katherine is like three dreams coming true at once! "I've always had a list of award ceremonies that I'd love to host and now I get to tick this one off. I knew I had to work with Katherine after watching her Live at the Apollo and getting stomach cramps from laughing so hard, and finally, stepping into my tenth year championing UK music in a room with all of the nominees feels like the perfect way to celebrate how far all of this has come." However, Katherine has ulterior motives for taking the job. She quipped: "I hope to get pregnant by a rock star." AJ Tracey has been added to the performers list alongside Yungblud, Beabadoobee and The 1975. It was announced last week that the Godlike Genius Award will be presenter to Glastonbury organizer Emily Eavis this year.



Impala made no money from Coachella

Tame Impala "didn't make any money" from headlining Coachella. The 'Feels Like We Only Go Backwards' hitmakers stepped in to top the bill at the Californian festival last year after Justin Timberlake pulled out and though frontman Kevin Parker loved the gig, it wasn't particularly profitable because of the cost of putting on a great show. He said: "[Coachella is] equal parts festival gig and promo. We spent a lot of money, got a creative director, just had to dive in headfirst. I think we pulled it off. Didn't make any money." Kevin loves performing at Glastonbury because of its "universal good vibes". He told the Times newspaper: "It's utopia. "I've never been to a place on Earth where there are more universal good vibes. Even if you're not wasted. "You're equally likely to see kids walking down the mud path off their heads as you are parents pushing a pram. Everyone is included, and that's not the case with all festivals." The multi-instrumentalist insisted he isn't as confident as people think he is but he doesn't believe he's a perfectionist either. He admitted: "I look confident, but inside I'm actually a trembling mess. "[Am I a perfectionist?] I don't think so. I just don't wanna put stuff out that's s**t. "Well, there might not be [a difference]." The 34-year-old singer's dad was an accountant who also played in bands in his spare time but advised his son not to make being a musician his career. Kevin said: "He lived just long enough to realize he was wrong. But I wouldn't be a musician if it wasn't for him."

Mac rule out Buckingham reunion

Fleetwood Mac have no plans to ever reunite with Lindsey Buckingham. The guitarist was fired by the band in 2018, and now Mick Fleetwood has ruled out the possibility of seeing the 'Go Your Own Way' legends reuniting with him in the future. Asked if he could see a scenario where Lindsey was welcome back into the fold, he told Rolling Stone magazine: "No. Fleetwood Mac is a strange creature. "We're very, very committed to [guitarist Neil Finn and Mike Campbell], and that passed away a long time ago, when Lindsey left. "And it's not a point of conversation, so I have to say no." However, Mick insisted the group's remaining members - including Stevie Nicks and couple Christine and John McVie - would never try to play down the impact Lindsey has had on their "legacy". He added: "It's a full drama of Fleetwood Mac, no doubt. His legacy is alive and well, and as it should be. "A major, major part that will never be taken away, and never be down-spoken by any of us. Neil and Mike have tremendous respect for Lindsey. "The situation was no secret. We were not happy. It was not working, and we parted company. And that really is the all of it." Lindsey was ousted from Fleetwood Mac in January 2018 and he later filed a lawsuit alleging breach of fiduciary duty and breach of oral contract but they later settled the lawsuit. He said: "We've all signed off on something. I'm happy enough with it. I'm not out there trying to twist the knife at all. I'm trying to look at this with some level of compassion, some level of wisdom."



Capaldi will 'quit music' if he doesn't get number one this week



Lewis Capaldi jokes he's quitting music if he doesn't top the charts this week. The 'Before You Go' hitmaker is facing stiff competition from The Weeknd and Eminem - with their respective tracks 'Blinding Lights' and 'Godzilla' both in the running - but he's still hoping to find himself at number one when the singles rankings are revealed tomorrow. Taking to Instagram, he said: "I am literally just back from the Grammys and I'm already at rehearsals, working hard. "But I'm looking at recruitment websites because we're so close to Nol in the UK this week and if we don't get it, I'm giving it up and I'm getting another job. "There's clearing jobs, there's jobs in shops, there's reception jobs, I'll happily pick up those phones. I'm not drunk, I just came off an 11-hour flight." The 23-year-old singer was unsuccessful at the Grammy Awards over the weekend, as his huge hit 'Someone You Loved' missed out on the Song of the Year prize with Billie Eilish's 'Bad Guy' earning her the trophy. She told the audience: "Wow, wow, wow, wow! So many other songs deserved this. I'm sorry." Meanwhile, Lewis recently insisted he wasn't actually expecting to win at the prestigious ceremony. He said: "I'm not going to win the Grammy; it's cool. It's not the end of the world." Lewis hadn't even prepared a speech in case he did win, because he was convinced one of the other nominees - including Billie, Lizzo, Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift, Tanya Tucker, H.E.R., and Lana Del Rey - would snap up the trophy instead. When asked if he has a speech ready, he said: "No, because I'm not going to win. I'm completely okay with it. Even when we got the nomination, I was like, 'Oh that's amazing, we'll get to go and see Billie Eilish.' I haven't written a speech because I won't need to use it. But no, whoever wins - whether it's Billie or Lizzo or Lady Gaga or whoever - I'll be there cheering them on."



Sting wishes he'd collaborated with Juice WRLD

Stig wishes he'd worked with Juice WRLD before his death. The 'Shape of My Heart' singer - whose track was sampled in the late rapper's hit 'Lucid Dreams' - has opened up about the "very special" rendition of his song, and admitted he was "horrified" when the young star passed away last month at the age of just 21 from an accidental overdose. Speaking to Billboard, he said: "Well, first of all when I heard it, I recognized something very special in that interpolation. I thought it was a wonderful interpretation, interpolation. And so of course I was supportive of it. "I never met the man, and was horrified when he died so unnecessarily and so tragically. I think he was a great great talent and we miss him. I'd love to have worked with him. "But as a tribute we sing his song as part of the original 'Shape of My Heart'. I think they fit together beautifully." In a statement at the time of Juice's passing, Sting praised Juice as "a unique and precious talent". He said: "This is such a tragic loss for the world of music, a young life with so much potential and a unique and precious talent. "Lucid Dreams' was my favorite of all the many interpolations of 'Shape of My Heart', it will resonate for many years to come. My sincere condolences to the family." The 68-year-old star once joked the royalties from the sample used in 'Lucid Dreams' would "put [his] grandkids through college", and he went on to sue for a reported 85% share of the song's earnings. Juice had claimed the percentage was higher, but admitted: "I don't care about that, though. Money is gonna come regardless. "If you doin' this for money, people gonna be able to tell. For me [it's more important that] Sting said my music is beautiful, the fact that he performed my version of the song."

Shazam teases new My Chemical Romance song An Offering

Shazam is recognizing a new My Chemical Romance song. The music platform - which is owned by Apple Music - has started telling users that the orchestral soundtrack to the band's recent announcement video for their UK shows can be confirmed as an excerpt from 'An Offering'. While the app previously indicating there were no matches for the song, it appears now there could be a full release on the way after Shazam has started recognizing the atmospheric tune. The band - who announced their long awaited comeback in October after a six year break - are yet to official confirm any new material. However, a new video on Instagram has teased something special at 16.35 GMT on the group's official YouTube channel, with a clip showing a mysterious hooded figure getting dressed, lighting candles and using an Ouija Board in a pentagram. The possibility of new music and the social media tease comes after the band - comprised of Gerard Way, his brother Mikey, Ray Toro and Frank Iero - confirmed a

third show at the Milton Keynes Stadium after the first two dates sold out. My Chemical Romance will headline the venue on June 18, 20 and 21 this summer, and they previously thanked their fans for the overwhelming support. Announcing the second show on Instagram, they wrote: "This is incredible. Thank you all so much." The 'Teenagers' rockers also have a number of international gigs confirmed, including stops in Australia, Japan and New Zealand. As per the emo legend's agency Paradigm, their sold out reunion gig in Los Angeles in December grossed \$1,451,745 - a record for the Shrine Auditorium & Expo Hall venue. The group secretly reunited in 2017, before announcing to fans their big reunion in October. They tweeted in December: "In 2017, we got in a room together to see what would happen. A couple more jam sessions and 39 days of rehearsals later, we're ready to show you what we've learned. See you soon."



Massive Attack to headline All Points East Festival

Massive Attack have been announced as the latest act to headline All Points East. The dance group - comprised of Robert '3D' Del Naja and Grant 'Daddy G' Marshall - will top the bill at the east London festival this summer on May 24, alongside Tame Impala and Kraftwerk, who headline the event at Victoria Park on May 23 and May 29 respectively. Massive Attack's All Points East slot was announced via the official All Points East Twitter account in a tweet that read:

"Love, love is a verb Massive Attack are your next headliners, joining us Sun 24 May with Nils Frahm, Young Fathers & more." The festival takes place across two weekends with the 10-day event comprised of a three-day festival followed by a community focused midweek entertainment program and standalone shows. Also joining the 'Teardrop' hitmakers on the bill are Nils Frahm, Young Fathers, Neneh Cherry, GAIKA and Skinny Pelembe. Last year saw a selection eco-friendly creative workshops, free yoga sessions, street

food, open air movie nights, themed drag shows and film panels. The news comes after Massive Attack announced a "super-low carbon" show in Liverpool. The 'Unfinished Sympathy' group have been working with The Tyndall Centre For Climate Change Research organization by handing over data to show how their gigs are impacting the environment. They are aiming to have a "dramatic reduction" in the carbon footprint left behind from their crew, transport, production, and the way in which their fans travel to and from the

venue. Robert said: "We're looking forward to exploring the social and scientific solutions to the challenges we face in transitioning to a low-carbon society. "This project offers an opportunity to work with new and progressive identities in the planning, energy, technology and transport sectors." He added: "This comes after years of participation in large scale music events that have had questionable sponsors on the ticket and, too often, very little enthusiasm for meaningful change."

'Complex' reality for 'Our Boys' creator

After cementing his reputation as a top producer in the US, Israel's Hagai Levi has sparked controversy back home with his latest TV series "Our Boys". Sitting in a Tel Aviv cafe, Levi takes a drag from his e-cigarette. "I write here," says the 56-year-old, surrounded by warm-coloured walls and low lighting. Following his triumph in the United States with "The Affair", which picked up a Golden Globe for best television series in 2015, Levi says he felt compelled to tell stories about events closer to home. "Our Boys", written for HBO with Tawfik Abu Wael and Joseph Cedar, is based on the real-life abduction and murder of a 16-year-old Palestinian boy.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged a boycott of the drama over its portrayal of the events leading up to the 2014 Gaza war. The series tarnishes the image of Israel, he wrote on Facebook, accusing it of being anti-Semitic. Netanyahu similarly called for a boycott of Channel 12 and its operator Keshet, also a target of the premier's ire for its coverage of his legal

woes, which has seen him charged in corruption cases. "Our Boys" portrays the events surrounding the death of Mohammed Abu Khdeir, whose body was found in a forest in west Jerusalem. The teen had been burned alive.

Three Jewish extremists admitted to the murder, describing the July 2014 attack as revenge for the earlier abduction and killing of three Israeli teenagers by alleged Hamas members in the occupied West Bank. The prime minister criticized the series for focusing on the "shocking but rare" killing of a Palestinian boy and showing only a few minutes of archive footage about the murder of the three Israelis.

Levi defends "Our Boys", which he says shows how the Israeli authorities did all they could to find and convict Abu Khdeir's killers. "But for that, you need to wait for the third episode," he adds. The killing of 16-year-olds Naftali Frenkel and Gilad Shaer, and 19-year-old Eyal Yifrach, shocked the country and prompted a national outpouring of emotion. Calls for revenge also followed, with more



Israeli screenwriter Hagai Levi poses for a picture during an interview with AFP in the Mediterranean coastal city of Tel Aviv. — AFP

than 200 Israelis rampaging through Jerusalem after their burial, dragging people out of cars and chanting "Death to Arabs." "I don't think that these people really wanted to kill Arabs," says Levi.

But words "can be taken literally by people who are psychologically unstable," he adds. The killings were part of a cycle of vio-

lence which culminated in the 2014 war between the Israeli military and Gaza militants that devastated the Palestinian enclave. Filmed in Arabic and Hebrew, Levi says "Our Boys" demonstrates that "reality is complex". "There are victims on both sides," he adds. "It's not about the good and the bad."

Kibbutz cinema

Born in the religious kibbutz of Sha'alvim, central Israel, Levi discovered film at 16, when he worked as a projectionist at the community's small cinema. After graduating from Tel Aviv University, he became a cinema critic before starting his career in Israeli television. At the end of the 1990s, he produced his first series, "Short Stories About Love", before dedicating himself to writing and directing soap operas.

He gradually distanced himself from religion and became interested in psychoanalysis, creating the Israeli drama "Betipul", about a psychologist. Its success sparked Levi's first project with HBO in 2008, when he worked on the American adaptation, "In

Treatment". The show has helped opened doors for other Israeli production in Hollywood and has been adapted into multiple languages. But it was "The Affair"-co-created with Sarah Treem-which cemented his reputation as a leading drama producer.

The series was released in 2014 for the Showtime network and won acclaim for its unusual storytelling style, portraying an event repeatedly from the perspectives of different characters. "Couples and their dilemmas especially interest me," says Levi, who is also working on an adaptation of Ingmar Bergman's 1970s series "Scenes from a Marriage". The screenwriter is also working on a film about the intimate diaries of a Holocaust victim. Etty Hillesum, a Dutch Jew, left a detailed account of her life before being killed at the Auschwitz death camp, which was liberated 75 years ago this month. — AFP



In this file photo Demonstrators hold banners reading "J'accuse: Polanski Rapist" during a protest against French-Polish film director Roman Polanski outside the "Champo" cinema hall in Paris.

Fury as Polanski's new film tops French 'Oscar' nominations

Roman Polanski's new film "An Officer and a Spy" topped the list of nominations yesterday for the "French Oscars" sparking fury from feminists. The controversial director has been wanted in the US for the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl since 1978 and is persona non grata in Hollywood. His period drama about the Dreyfus affair, which rocked France at the turn of the 20th century, is in line for 12 Cesars, the French equivalent of the Oscars.

The head of the French film academy Alain Terzian said it "should not take moral positions" about giving awards. But their choice was swiftly condemned by feminists and some film critics. "If rape was an art, give all the Cesars to Polanski," tweeted the French women's group, Osez le féminisme (Dare to Be Feminist).



In this file photo French Polish director Roman Polanski looks on stage after the preview of his last movie "J'accuse" (An Officer and a Spy) in Paris. — AFP photos

"By celebrating a fugitive rapist and child sex criminal, we silence the victims," added the group, which said it would demonstrate outside the awards ceremony on February 28. British film critic Caspar Salmon was equally scathing. "The Cesar awards are literally inviting an actor who was a victim of sexual assault by a director when she was a child (Adele Haenel), and a director who sexually abused a child

(Roman Polanski), to be in the same room together for a big celebration of film." Haenel—who was nominated for best actress for her performance in "Portrait of a Lady on Fire"—touched a nerve last year by telling how she was sexually harassed from the age of 12 on her first film. French director Christophe Ruggia was charged with sexual assault on a minor earlier this month.

Cinemas picketed

Polanski, 86, won both best director and the critics' prize at the Venice film festival in August for "An Officer and a Spy", which has been a big hit at the French box office despite a wave of protests. Some screenings had to be cancelled after feminist protesters invaded or blockaded cinemas. The publicity campaign for the film was also halted after French photographer Valentine Monnier claimed that she had also been raped by the director in 1975.

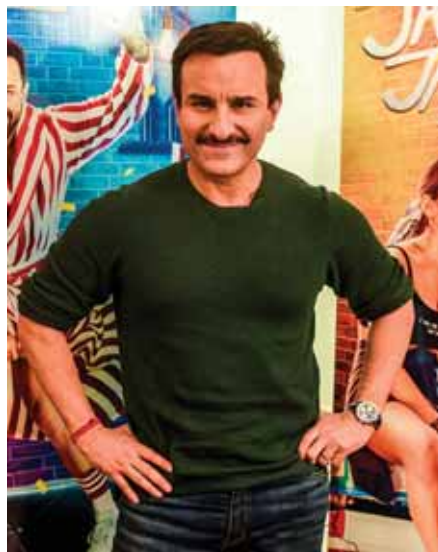
Monnier, an 18-year-old model and actress at the time, said Polanski tried to give her a pill as he beat her "into submission" at his Swiss chalet. Polanski "absolutely denied" assaulting Monnier, pouring scorn on her story. "Obviously I have no memory of it because it is false," he told Paris Match magazine. The director—who sparked uproar at Venice by comparing his "hounding" to the anti-Semitic persecution Dreyfus suffered—blamed the disgraced Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein for his woes.

He said Weinstein had tried to brand him a "child rapist" to stop him winning an Oscar in 2003 for "The Pianist". The Oscars' academy snubbed "An Officer and a Spy" in its nominations earlier this month, but gave another French film "Les Misérables" the nod in the best foreign film category. The drama, set in one of the restive poor suburbs of Paris, picked up 11 Cesar nominations, just behind Polanski's film. — AFP

Saif Ali Khan: A star in Bollywood-and on Netflix

Saif Ali Khan, bonafide Bollywood royalty and star of Netflix hit "Sacred Games", says India's massive film industry does not need international audiences to thrive. But that may not be a good thing, he cautions. The 49-year-old actor, whose latest film "Jawaani Jaaneman" ("Youthful Lover") is out on Friday, has starred in multiple blockbusters over the years, from "Dil Chahta Hai" ("The Heart Desires") in 2001 to "Tanhaji", released earlier this month.

Yet even as foreign films—like South Korean hit "Parasite"—find viewers and awards overseas, Bollywood has remained on the fringes of global entertainment, content to target India's 1.3 billion population and millions of others from the diaspora. "The thing about our culture... is that we don't really need verification, validation, appreciation from an outside culture," Khan told AFP in Mumbai.



"There are so many of us that if we just keep each other happy then we don't financially need anything," he added. But he warned that while such an insular approach may not harm Bollywood's bottom line, it could be "dangerous" for the industry's development. "Cinema is about people meeting, comparing, collaborating because the human condition is quite similar. But if we isolate ourselves... I think we will lose out on something because we will keep catering just to ourselves," he said.

The son of cricketer legend Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi—whose family ruled the former princely state of Pataudi—and actress Sharmila Tagore, Khan has never shied away from taking risks, straddling Bollywood and art-house cinema during his decades-long career. Even so, the opportunity to play troubled policeman Sartaj Singh in "Sacred Games" in 2018 was a turning point. "I think Sartaj Singh did a lot for me. People who don't usually watch Hindi films watched 'Sacred Games'... and working with all those people in that environment helped my acting a lot," he said.

Bollywood 'renaissance'

The first big name from Bollywood to embrace digital entertainment, Khan said the ambition displayed by Netflix and others has the potential to upend the status quo, even in movie-mad India. "Historically the money has been in the big screen, at least in India," he said, "so a lot of mainstream actors... would think twice before doing television". But streaming services are "challenging that notion", he said, while also offering actors greater opportunities and contributing to a "renaissance" in the industry.

For his part, he has played everything from a commitment-shy chef in the 2005 hit "Salaam Namaste" to a murderous drifter in the 2006 black comedy "Being Cyrus" to a Shakespearean villain in "Omikara", an Indian adaptation of "Othello". Describing today's Bollywood as a "big umbrella" that accommodates art-house cinema, crowd-pleasing "masala" musicals, low-key comedies and even zombie movies, Khan said the variety helps him "feel sane". "There's something always to be said for something that challenges you mentally or makes you feel that you are going into some territory that is interesting... I would like to mix it up as much as possible."

Risky business

His latest movie is an out-and-out entertainer, but even here, Khan has departed from the norm by playing father to a 21-year-old woman in an industry where leading men in their fifties routinely romance decades-younger actresses on screen. Yet, despite his openness to experiment with roles, Khan says there are areas where he feels nervous to tread, such as politics, echoing concerns shared by many actors who steer clear of expressing opinions on divisive issues. With India gripped by a wave of protests against the government's new citizenship law, some have bucked convention by speaking out, most notably female superstar Deepika Padukone earlier this month.

But Khan, who is married to top actress Kareena Kapoor, says he prefers to be apolitical. When actors speak out on political topics, all too often, "the issue is completely ignored and the actor who said it is highlighted and abused and trolled," he said. In some cases when religious radicals have taken offence at an actor's comments, stars have faced boycott calls and threats, he said. Theatres have also been attacked, putting livelihoods at risk. "You have to think five times before you endanger other people." — AFP



Javier Bardem hails new treaty for actors' rights

A new international treaty giving new rights to film and television actors will come into force in April, the UN said Tuesday, in a development hailed by Spanish screen star Javier Bardem as "an act of justice". The Beijing Treaty on Audiovisual Performances was adopted in 2012, but is only coming into force now that the minimum required number of 30 countries have ratified it.

"The Beijing Treaty is the most important thing that has happened to actors since the invention of cinema," Bardem said in a video distributed alongside the announcement by the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The treaty gives performers rights over the reproduction, distribution and rental of their audiovisual performances, which could mean they are able to earn more money.

It updates previous multilateral provisions agreed in 1961 for the digital era and extends to actors some of the same protections enjoyed by musicians, giving them more power to decide how their performances are used. Spanish star Bardem said it would allow actors to "participate fairly in the use of our audiovisual work" and would give performers "more dignified lives". "It puts an end to a historic injustice which has prevented actors from receiving the basic rights long enjoyed by musicians and other creators."

"It represents an act of justice for actors, and a show of solidarity that benefits society as a whole," he said. WIPO chief Francis Gurry said many audiovisual performers "could in fact use some support in ensuring the sustainability of their livelihoods." "The Beijing Treaty bolsters AV performers' rights to their work, which translates into rising earnings, and promotes the economic sustainability of the audiovisual industry that delights us all," he said.

China, Japan and Russia are among the 30 countries that have ratified the treaty. But big players including the European Union and the United States have not. "Eventually, we would expect most of the big players to join," Michele Woods, director of WIPO's copyright law division, told AFP. — AFP

Mel Gibson to star in Lethal Weapon 5

Mel Gibson and Danny Glover are set to star in "Lethal Weapon 5", producer Dan Lin has spilled. Lin, who served as executive producer of the "Lethal Weapon" television series, has revealed that he and Richard Donner—who directed and produced the previous four films—is working on bringing the action buddy cop franchise back to the big screen for another outing for Detective Martin Riggs (Gibson) and his partner Detective Roger Murtaugh (Glover), 22 years after the release of "Lethal Weapon 4". In the latest episode of the Producers Roundtable from The Hollywood Reporter, Lin said: "We're trying to make the last 'Lethal Weapon' movie. And Dick Donner's coming back. The original cast is coming back. And it's just amazing. The story is very personal to him."

Lin, 46, says Gibson and Glover are "ready to go" but the script for the project still needs to be finished. He added: "Mel and Danny are ready to go, so it's about the script." The original "Lethal Weapon" was released in 1987 and the popularity of the detective duo meant that it spawned three sequels. The franchise was revived for a television series that lasted between 2016 and 2019, starring Clayne Crawford and Damon Wayans as Riggs and Murtaugh respectively. Lin's announcement comes despite Donner ruling out the prospect of "Lethal Weapon 5" back in 2018 because of issues with Warner Bros. The 89-year-old film legend said: "I'm ready to do 5. It's called 'Lethal Finale'. It's very dark. And we were all set to go, and now Warner Bros. is doing their

Berlin filmfest unveils 2020 line-up amid diversity debate

Films starring Johnny Depp and Sigourney Weaver will be among those premiering at Berlin's film festival next month, organizers said, as they defended a competition line-up with fewer female directors than last year. The 11-day Berlinale, one of Europe's most prestigious film extravaganzas alongside Cannes and Venice, celebrates its 70th anniversary in 2020. The upcoming edition will also be the festival's first under new directors Carlo Chatrjian and Mariette Rissenbeek, after former boss Dieter Kosslick ended an 18-year spell at the helm last year.

Amid furious debate in Hollywood about the dominance of white winners at award shows, the duo said yesterday they wanted the Berlin festival to "embrace diversity". "The history of

the Berlinale is one of awareness... of all the differences that exist not just in the film business, but in life," said Chatrjian. Last year, Kosslick signed the Berlinale up to a so-called "50/50" pledge to achieve gender parity by 2020. Yet of the 18 films that will vie for the Golden and Silver Bear prizes, only six are directed by women, one fewer than in 2019. They include Sally Potter's "The Roads Not Taken", starring Spanish star Javier Bardem. Defending the line-up, Rissenbeek pointed out that "the artistic directors of the festival sections are generally women".

Major female stars at this year's event include Oscar-crowned British actress Helen Mirren, set to be honored with the Berlinale's lifetime achievement award. Fellow British

Oscar winner Jeremy Irons will head the international jury, which organizers said would be announced in the coming weeks. The festival will open on February 20 with Philippe Falardeau's "My Salinger Year", a Canadian-Irish production starring Sigourney Weaver and based on the memoirs of New York author Joanna Rakoff.

The main program also contains two films from the controversial Russian "DAU" project, whose artists made headlines in Germany in 2018 when their application to rebuild part of the Berlin Wall was denied. Also in competition is a modern take on Alfred Doebelin's literary classic "Berlin Alexanderplatz" by German-Afghan director Burhan Qurbanli. — AFP



The new managing director of the Berlinale film festival Mariette Rissenbeek and the new artistic director of the Berlinale film festival Carlo Chatrjian pose during the press conference on the 70th international Berlinale Film festival yesterday. — AFP

Classifieds

Thursday, January 30, 2020



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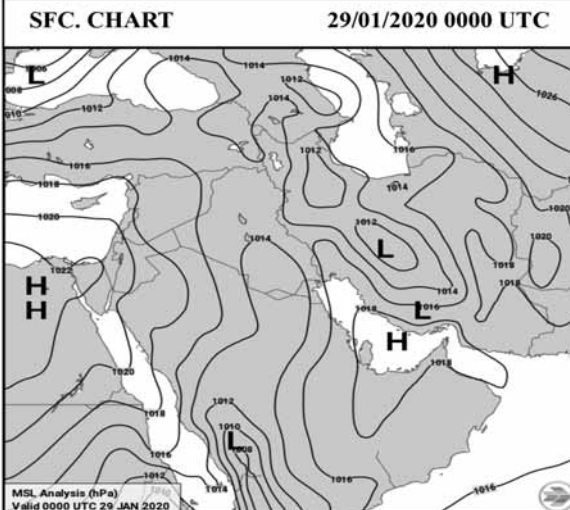


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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Partly cloudy to cloudy and with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 12 - 45 km/h with a chance for scattered rain.

BY NIGHT: Cold and Clouds will decrease gradually with light to moderate south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 10 - 35 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 29/01/2020 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	19 °C	12 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	07 °C			
ABDALY	20 °C	06 °C			
BUBYAN	16 °C	08 °C			
JAHRA	20 °C	10 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C			
SALMIYAH	17 °C	12 °C			
AHMADI	16 °C	14 °C			
NUWAISIB	19 °C	07 °C			
WAFRA	21 °C	06 °C			
SALMY	19 °C	08 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	01/30	Visibility will improve gradually	21 °C	06 °C	N-NE	10 - 40 km/h
Friday	01/31	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for light fog forming at night	21 °C	09 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 28 km/h
Saturday	02/01	Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	22 °C	08 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 32 km/h
Sunday	02/02	Cool	19 °C	06 °C	NW	10 - 32 km/h

PRAYER TIMES		
Fajr		05:17
Sunrise		06:39
Zuhr		12:01
Asr		15:02
Sunset		17:23
Isha		18:43

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT		
MAX. Temp.		20 °C
MIN. Temp.		03 °C
MAX. RH		79 %
MIN. RH		31 %
MAX. Wind		W 18 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.		0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

I Mohammed Amir S/O Esa Amir Perwaz holder of Indian Passport No. Z2519609 & Civil ID No. 280020200199 has changed my name from Mohammed Amir to Mohammed Amir Perwaz hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Mohammed Amir Perwaz. (C 5625) 30-1-2020

I, Chakrapani Megam holder of Indian Passport No. R7680229 at Kuwait on 10-05-2017 have changed my name to given name: Shaikh Mahammad Yousuf here and after in all documents I will be known as Shaikh Mahammad Yousuf. (C 5621)

I, Johan Basha S/o Sowkath Ali, Date of birth: 10.05.1976, (Native District: Cuddalore), residing at Manikkam Nagar, Mangalam Pettai Post, Virudhachalam Taluk, Cuddalore - 606104, shall henceforth be known as John Basha S/o Sowkath Ali. (C 5622)

I, Husain Kakumama Mufaddal Shabbir S/O Shabbir Husain Kakumama R/O Najampura, Sagwara Dist, Durgapur, Rajasthan have changed my given name to Mufaddal Shabbir Husain and surname to Kakumama.

I, Naema D/O Habib Husain Kabir R/O Najampura, Sagwara Dist, Durgapur, Rajasthan have

BASEMENT FOR RENT

Basement for rent in Sharq, Kuwait City Area 200 Square Meter, Central A/C

Contact Number: **99499998**

changed my given name to Naeema Habib Husain and surname to Kabir.

I, Rukaiya Mufaddal Kakumama D/O Mufaddal Shabbir Husain Kakumama R/O Najampura, Sagwara Dist. Durgapur, Rajasthan have changed my given name to Rukaiya Mufaddal and surname to Kakumama. (C 5623) 27-1-2020

LOST

I Abdul Aziz Riaz S/O Riaz Hussain Residence of Salmiya, Kuwait announce through daily newspaper that my SSC/HSSC certificate bearing Roll No. 684345 of the year 2016 issued by Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Islamabad has been lost during transit etc. Whoever finds it, shall send it to the address Pakistan school Salmiya or call on the No. 97200842 Kuwait. (C 5624) 29-1-2020

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

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Thursday 30/1/2020			Departure Flights on Thursday 30/1/2020				
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	KAC	351	Kochi	00:01
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	SVA	503	Jeddah	00:05
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	JZR	215	Jeddah	00:05
PGT	772	Istanbul	00:50	MSC	406	Sohag	00:15
THY	858	Istanbul	00:55	QTR	1093	Doha	00:25
KAC	102	London	00:55	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
KAC	504	Beirut	01:05	JZR	409	Delhi	00:50
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
RJA	642	Amman	01:40	IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	JZR	111	Doha	01:55
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	KAC	677	Dubai	02:10
UAE	852	Dubai	02:15	JZR	773	Istanbul	02:20
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	119	Dubai	02:25
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	JZR	673	Manila	02:30
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	KAC	621	Doha	04:05
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	JZR	713	Sohag	04:30
KAC	796	Madinah	04:40	KKK	1269	Istanbul	04:35
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
JZR	702	Asyut	04:50	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	JZR	101	Bahrain	05:50
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	THY	771	Istanbul	06:40
DHX	332	Bahrain	05:10	JZR	113	Doha	06:40
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	JZR	251	Amman	06:40
KAC	382	Delhi	05:20	RJA	643	Amman	06:55
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:35	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	KAC	413	Bangkok	07:30
KAC	106	London	06:00	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	JPI	3799	Baghdad	08:00
KAC	332	Trivandrum	06:05	IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	KAC	173	Munich	08:20
KAC	362	Colombo	06:30	ABY	120	Sharjah	08:30
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	JZR	001	LGW	08:35
BAW	157	London	07:05	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	KAC	163	MXP	09:00
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:10	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
JZR	120	Bahrain	07:35	BAW	156	London	09:10
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
ABY	129	Sharjah	07:50	KAC	545	Cairo	09:30
QTR	8511	Doha	08:00	KAC	157	Istanbul	09:30
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	QTR	1085	Doha	09:30
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:10	JZR	601	Baku	09:30
KAC	622	Doha	08:30	KAC	671	Dubai	09:35
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	JZR	611	Tbilisi	09:45
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	KAC	101	London	09:45
JZR	102	Bahrain	08:55	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
IRA	667	Esfahan	09:00	KAC	561	Amman	09:45
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	117	Mashhad	09:55
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	KAC	791	New York	10:00
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	8512	Madinah	10:00
KAC	1753	Ahmedabad	09:45	QTR	8512	Doha	10:00
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
NIA	361	Alexandria	09:50	IRA	606	Mashhad	10:00
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
IAW	157A	Al Najaf	10:00	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
JZR	114	Doha	10:20	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
JZR	714	Sohag	11:20	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	QTR	1071	Ahmedabad	10:40
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	IAW	158A	Doha	11:00
KAC	352	Kochi	11:35	QTR	1071	Al Najaf	11:00
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	IAW	158A	Doha	11:00
SYR	341	Dammam	12:00	SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:00	KAC	305	Istanbul	11:10
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
JZR	252	Amman	12:05	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
JPJ	3738	Baghdad	13:00	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	JZR	231	Dammam	12:35
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:50	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10	IAW	158	Al Najaf	13:00
UAE	877	Dubai	14:10	SYR	342	Dammam	13:00
JZR	115	Doha	13:00	JZR	115	Doha	13:00
GFA	210	Bahrain	13:05	MSR	611	Cairo	13:25
KAC	611	Jeddah	13:30	KAC	781	Dubai	13:40
JZR	123	Cairo	13:45	KAC	541	TQD	14:00
KAC	541	Dubai	14:15	UAE	877	Dubai	14:15
JPJ	3735	Abu Dhabi	15:00	AXB	394	Kozhikode	15:00
UAE	877	Dubai	15:00	KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	15:00
QTR	1079	Doha	15:00	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
KNE	382	Taif	15:00	KNE	382	Taif	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:10	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
GFA	222	Bahrain					

News

Kuwait warns against visiting...

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symptoms. "Due to the global nature of travel", it is expected that more cases will appear in other countries, it said. The WHO's regional director, Ahmed Al-Mandhari, urged "individuals to stay calm and take the necessary precautions to keep themselves and their loved ones safe". Gulf airports, including Dubai which is one of the world's biggest aviation hubs, said last week they would screen all passengers arriving from China amid the outbreak of the deadly virus. The disease has spread to more than 15 countries since it emerged out of Wuhan late last year, with the death toll soaring to 132 and confirmed infections nearing 6,000.

All confirmed fatalities have so far been in China. Cases have been reported across the Asia-Pacific region and in North America and Europe, but the infected family in the UAE are the first in the Middle East. Dubai's government said last Thursday that some 989,000 Chinese tourists visited the glitzy emirate last year - a number expected to cross the one million mark in 2020. About 3.6 million Chinese transited through the emirate's main airport in 2019.

Dubai International Airport in 2018 served over 89 million passengers, including more foreign passengers than any other airport worldwide for the fifth year in a row. The UAE's Abu Dhabi International Airport, another major hub, has also begun screening passengers arriving from China. Between them, the two Emirati hubs operate dozens of flights a week serving Chinese cities.

China is the UAE's top trading partner and Abu Dhabi is among the 15 top crude oil suppliers to Beijing. Several hundred Chinese companies have offices in the UAE. 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 humans via the respiratory tract.

The UAE health ministry said it has taken "all the necessary precautions" in line with standards approved by the World Health Organization. It said that the country's health system "works very efficiently and that the ministry is closely following the situation in a way that guarantees the health and safety of everyone."

Foreign airlines began suspending flights to and from China yesterday as global fears mounted over the coronavirus epidemic. The flight announcements came hours after some countries began airlifts of their nationals trapped in Wuhan. Among the 206 Japanese nationals who returned home, 12 were hospitalized for tests and monitoring because they felt unwell or showed flu-like symptoms.

A growing number of governments - including the United States, Britain and Germany - have advised their citizens to avoid non-essential travel to China over concerns about the viral outbreak. China has urged its own citizens to delay trips abroad, with at least 15 countries having confirmed cases of the disease. British Airways was the first major airline to announce a total suspension of

flights to and from China, citing the travel advice of the foreign office. "We apologize to customers for the inconvenience, but the safety of our customers and crew is always our priority," the airline said in a statement.

Indonesia's Lion Air Group, Southeast Asia's biggest carrier by fleet size, then said it would halt services to and from China from Saturday "until further notice". Meanwhile Kazakhstan, an important China trade partner, stopped issuing visas to Chinese citizens and said it would halt cross-border passenger train traffic and suspend regular flights between the neighbors. Airlines from Myanmar and Nepal also announced suspensions of all China routes. Cathay Pacific has reduced flights, citing low demand and the Hong Kong government's response plan against the virus.

In one of the most dramatic measures, the tiny Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea announced no travellers from Asia would be allowed in. Mongolia closed its border to cars from China earlier this week. China has taken extraordinary measures to try and stop the disease spreading, including bans on tour groups travelling overseas, suspending schools and extending the Lunar New Year holiday. Authorities last week banned most street traffic in and around Wuhan in an unprecedented quarantine effort, leaving more than 50 million people shuttered in their homes. "This is the first day since the lockdown that I've had to go out," a man in his 50s told AFP on the mostly deserted streets of the industrial city yesterday. "I have no choice because I need to buy food."

Thousands of foreigners have been among those trapped in Wuhan, now a near ghost-town. Countries have scrambled for days to try and get their citizens out of Wuhan safely, but have faced huge logistical, medical and bureaucratic hurdles. One US charter flight left Wuhan yesterday with 210 Americans on board - including consulate staff - according to US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They will be screened and monitored before arriving at March Air Reserve Base in California, the CDC said, adding that they will be evaluated on landing and then monitored again for symptoms.

Some 250 French citizens and 100 other Europeans will be flown out of Wuhan on board two French planes this week. The Italian government said it would send an aircraft today. Up to 70 Italians are reportedly in Wuhan. France said it would keep its returnees in a holding facility in Paris for 14 days - the estimated incubation period for the virus. Australia plans to house any citizens evacuated on an island normally used to detain asylum seekers.

The number of confirmed cases across China climbed to 5,974, while the death toll nationwide jumped to 132. The virus has rattled global markets and started to dent an already-slowing Chinese economy. Japanese automaker Toyota said it would keep its plants in China closed until at least February 9.

Tech giant Foxconn said yesterday that Taiwan staff at its vast network of factories in China do not need to return to work until mid-February, a move likely to impact global supply chains for tech companies that rely on the Taiwan company to manufacture everything from iPhones to flat-screen TVs and laptops. The virus has also disrupted sporting events, with a women's football Olympic qualifier event moved from Wuhan to Australia. Despite the precaution, the Chinese team was quarantined in a Brisbane hotel after arriving for the competition, according to Australian media. — Agencies

claim to have growing support around the region. Saudi Arabia said it "appreciates" Trump's efforts and called for direct Israeli-Palestinian talks. Saudi King Salman phoned Abbas and stressed "the kingdom's steadfast stance on the Palestinian issue and the rights of the Palestinian people", the SPA state news agency said. The king stands by the Palestinian people and supports "their options and what achieves their hopes and aspirations" it said.

Qatar responded cautiously yesterday. "Qatar welcomes all efforts aiming towards a longstanding peace in the occupied Palestinian territories, appreciating the endeavors of the current US administration to find solutions for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict," the state-run Qatar News Agency reported. "Qatar reaffirms its commitment for supporting the Palestinian institutions, noting that peace cannot be sustainable if Palestinians rights in their sovereign state... including east Jerusalem, and the right of return are not preserved."

Iran said Trump's peace plan amounted to the "treason of the century" and was bound to fail. "The shameful peace plan imposed by America on the Palestinians is the treason of the century and doomed to fail," the foreign ministry said in a statement. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Twitter that the "so-called 'Vision for Peace' is simply the dream project of a bankruptcy-ridden real estate developer", in reference to Trump. "But it is a nightmare for the region and the world and, hopefully, a wake-up call for all the Muslims who have been barking up the wrong tree," wrote Zarif.

Russia, a growing force in Mideast politics, sounded skeptical. "We do not know if the American proposal is mutually acceptable or not," Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov told Russian news agencies. Netanyahu was due in Moscow today to present the plan in person to President Vladimir Putin.

"It is meant to help Prime Minister Netanyahu survive his current political and legal struggles as well as to shore up support for President Trump among pro-Israel voters in his re-election campaign," said Michele Dunne, a former State Department specialist on the Middle East now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "There is no sign whatsoever that the plan will lead to negotiations," she said.

Dunne said the fundamental headline of the plan is that it sets Israel's eastern border all the way alongside Jordan. "All the rest is details. Whatever the plan gives to Palestinians is provisional, conditional and long-term - in other words, probably will not happen," she said. For some observers, the fundamental goal of the Trump plan is to change in the long-term the parameters of a settlement to be more favorable to Israel. Israeli annexation in the West Bank would present a fait accompli to the Palestinians in the guise of a peace plan.

"However weak the Palestinian people or leadership is, they always have the ability to say no, as they will do now," Dunne said. "The real question is where this will push the Palestinian movement. Whether intended or not, this plan seems likely to hasten the day when it changes from a struggle for an independent state to a South Africa-like struggle for rights," she said.

"Palestinians will be tempted to reject plan outright but should resist temptation and agree to direct negotiations where they can advocate as they want," tweeted Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations. "Total rejection could undermine what modest hopes for two-state outcome exist and pave way to annexations." — Agencies

India school faces sedition charges; airlines ban comic for midair rant

NEW DELHI: Indian police have launched a sedition investigation against a primary school over a play that allegedly criticized a contentious citizenship law, officials said yesterday. There have been widespread street demonstrations against the law introduced by the Hindu-nationalist government that grants citizenship to religious groups from three neighboring countries, but excludes Muslims.

Meanwhile, four Indian airlines have banned a top stand-up comic over a midair confrontation with a star political television presenter that has become an Internet sensation. Kunal Kamra was banned for six months by Indigo - the airline carrying him during the incident - while Air India, GoAir and Spice Jet barred the outspoken comic "until further notice".

Police said they were laying initial charges under the British colonial-era law against the principal and the management of the school in Bidar district in the southern state of Karnataka. The probe came after a member of the youth wing of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party filed a complaint against the school. "We have started an investigation into the complaint by an activist who alleged that the play criticized and disrespected Modi," Bidar police chief T Sreedhara told AFP.

He added that the young student actors, aged between nine and 10 years old, were also being questioned, but would not be charged. A school official told AFP they were being "unnecessarily" targeted by the government for expressing their views. The play, which was performed on Sunday, was part of Shaheen Public School's founding day celebrations. A video of the five-minute play shared on social media showed students talking about how they feared the government would ask millions of Muslims to prove their nationality or be expelled from India.

The citizenship law, combined with a mooted nation-

register of citizens, has stoked fears that India's 200 million Muslims will be marginalized. The play ended with a poem written by a Bollywood lyricist that has become a rallying point for hundreds of thousands of protesters across India. The British-era sedition law enacted in 1860 carries a maximum penalty of life in prison. Prosecutions are rare but it has frequently been used against critics of the government of the day.

Dozens of demonstrators have been charged with sedition in the ongoing protests. On Tuesday, New Delhi police arrested a student activist on sedition charges after a video posted on social media allegedly showed him telling a crowd to "cut off" India's north-east to force the government to roll back the law. Last week, women protesters in northern Uttar Pradesh state, which is ruled by the BJP, were charged with sedition for holding a sit-in in the heart of its capital Lucknow. Kamra said that when he saw Arnab Goswami on the Mumbai-Lucknow flight, he "politely asked" to have a conversation but the presenter "pretended to be on a phone call". In a video that Kamra posted on social media, Kamra is seen posing questions and then asks whether Goswami was "a coward or a nationalist" - a phrase often used by Goswami on his shows. Goswami is shown wearing sunglasses with earphones plugged in, ignoring Kamra.

The comedian ends the showdown by referring to Rohith Vemula, a low-caste Dalit scholar whose 2016 suicide sparked protests across India. In the video, Kamra accuses Goswami of harassing Vemula's mother. "I did it for my hero...I did it for Rohith," Kamra wrote. Kamra is an outspoken critic of the rightwing government of Modi. The BJP regularly criticizes him and aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri went on to Twitter to call for airlines to impose restrictions on Kamra. The bans followed soon after. — AFP



NEW DELHI: Protesters from Shaheen Bagh hold a placard as they take part in a demonstration against India's new citizenship law at Jantar Mantar yesterday. _ AFP

Trump Mideast plan, rejected by...

Continued from Page 1

proposals as offering "a strong, viable basis for advancing a peace accord with the Palestinians", in a statement late Tuesday. But the head of Israel's leftwing coalition Labour-Gesher-Meretz, Amir Peretz, condemned Netanyahu's expected move towards "unilateral annexations".

Trump's proposal foresees the creation of a "contiguous" Palestinian state but under strict conditions, including a requirement that it be "demilitarized". On the flashpoint issue of Jerusalem, Trump said Israel should retain control over the city as its "undivided capital". At the same time, the Palestinians would be allowed to declare a capital in parts of east Jerusalem beyond an Israeli security wall, the plan said. The US president also painted a future where some \$50 billion in investments would eradicate the misery gripping Palestinians today.

But the Palestinians angrily rejected the entire plan. "This conspiracy deal will not pass. Our people will take it to the dustbin of history," Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas said. The Hamas Islamist movement, which runs the Gaza Strip, said it could never accept compromise on Jerusalem being capital of a future state. Near the town of Tubas in the Jordan Valley yesterday, protesters waved Palestinian flags as Israeli soldiers looked on.

"If the Americans try to implement this plan the Palestinian people will make it fail," said 63-year-old Khaled Sawaf. A headline in the Palestinian daily newspaper Al-Hayat Al-Jadida summed up the sentiment. "No! A thousand times No!" it read. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged the Palestinians to "come up with a counter offer". "I know the Israelis would be prepared to sit down and negotiate on the basis of the vision that the president laid out," Pompeo said, as he headed to Britain on a five-nation tour.

"It is a non-starter," said Steven Cook, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "The Palestinians have rejected it out of hand as have Israeli settlers who are opposed to any form of Palestinian sovereignty," he said. Abbas has no intention to negotiate over the plan and Netanyahu appears to be counting on Abbas to reject it. Cook said. "At a tactical level there are some good ideas, but without the promise of statehood for the Palestinians, they are meaningless," Cook said.

International reaction was at best cautiously positive. The French foreign ministry yesterday welcomed Trump's "efforts" and pledged to "carefully study" his proposal. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab called it a "serious proposal". Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, however, tore into Trump's deal as "completely unacceptable". "Jerusalem is sacred for Muslims. The plan to give Jerusalem to Israel is absolutely unacceptable. This plan ignores Palestinians' rights and is aimed at legitimizing Israel's occupation," Erdogan said, quoted by CNN Turk broadcaster. "The plan outlined will not serve peace or bring about a solution," he added.

The ambassadors from three Arab nations - Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain - were at the White House, providing some evidence of Trump's

Arab countries in balancing act...

Continued from Page 1

Qatar meanwhile welcomed the initiative but stressed its support for a Palestinian state "including east Jerusalem" as its capital. Jordan stressed that "the only path to peace" would be a Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders.

The US plan grants Israel much of what it has sought in decades of international diplomacy, namely control over Jerusalem as its "undivided" capital, rather than a city to share with the Palestinians. The plan also lets Israel annex West Bank settlements. And though the proposal provides for a Palestinian state, it falls far short of Palestinian hopes for a return of all the territories captured by Israel during the Six-Day War in 1967.

"These reactions were to be expected," said Abdallah Al-Shayeh, a political science professor at the University of Kuwait. The nearly uniform stances are forged by a desire to align with Washington against the perceived threat posed by Iran, he said. Shayeh said the new plan "demolishes" the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative sponsored by Riyadh which specified Israel's withdrawal from Arab territory occupied in 1967 in return for peace assurances and the normalization of relations between Arab nations and Israel. In its response to the Middle East peace plan, Saudi Arabia mentioned the 2002 initiative, long the corner-

stone of its regional policy, without elaborating on whether its stance had shifted.

Ahmed Abd Rabou, a visiting assistant professor at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver, described the responses of Riyadh and Cairo as "very conservative". "They simply didn't want to upset Trump whom they ally with, but they can't upset the general public as well, so they decided to go for a middle-ground solution," he said, adding that the statements implied they disagree with many parts of the plan. Shayeh said that "interest in the Palestinian cause has receded on the 'Arab street' because of divisions among the Palestinians as well as America's dominance".

Views appeared to be divided on the streets of the Egyptian capital Cairo. "I do not expect Palestinians to take the deal," said law student Toqa Ismail. "If they gave up now, it means all the decades of fighting have gone to waste." But 48-year-old teacher Heba Mokhtar said it would be better if the Palestinians made do with less land than they originally wanted - "it's better than nothing".

Elisabeth Kendall, a researcher at the University of Oxford, said the deal could reinvigorate violent jihadist groups. The unveiling featured heavily on the news channel of Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels, as well as that of Lebanon's Hezbollah "who frame it as proof of America's destructive interventions," she said. The Islamic State group has already vowed to shift its focus from the remnants of its "caliphate" towards Israel, in a purported audio message by its spokesman Abu Hamza Al-Quraishi earlier this week that called for the peace plan to be sabotaged. — AFP

in office, she might fall any time in view of the great parliamentary opposition to her appointment," the sources explained, expecting the minister to resign at any moment.

Although the minister has insisted she will not resign, if the number of opponents is definitively confirmed, she will most likely resign and not face the no-confidence motion. If she resigns, Aseeri will join a handful of ministers whose tenure in the Cabinet was extremely short-lived. The sources added the premier might give the replacement of Aseeri the additional portfolio of ministry of state for economic affairs.

Meanwhile, Commerce and Industry Minister Khaled Al-Roudhan yesterday discussed with the Assembly's financial and economic affairs committee a new draft law on bankruptcy. The minister said the new law is modern and advanced, adding that bankrupt people are not criminals and that the law will protect the interests of both debtors and creditors. Head of the committee MP Safa Al-Hashem said that approving the law will make Kuwait among the most advanced countries, adding that the legislation will change the structure of bankruptcy.

Jordan Valley and large areas of the West Bank and settlements to the Zionist entity.

KPM called for activating popular resistance to the occupation to reach a comprehensive uprising, unifying the people's energies, putting an end to the Fatah-Hamas division and disagreements, suspending all agreements signed with the Zionist entity and expanding the campaign boycotting the Zionist entity to rebuild international consolidation with Palestinians and put an end to the occupation of the racist aggressor.

Aseeri denies quitting, but...

Continued from Page 1

The decision was strongly criticized by a number of lawmakers, who said they will support the no-confidence motion. Other MPs accused the minister of making illegal appointments at cooperative societies to appease some MPs and guarantee that they vote for her. According to parliamentary sources and based on lawmakers who have announced their position, more than 25 MPs are highly expected to vote against the minister.

Sources explained that initially, it seemed that the minister would survive the motion. "However, events accelerated and liberals shockingly joined those in favor of the motion although the minister herself is liberal," the sources said. "Both liberals and the government are ready to sacrifice Aseeri, as even if she stays

Kuwaiti activists slam Trump plan...

Continued from Page 1

movement underlined, noting that the deal enhances the Zionist occupation, subjects the entire Palestinian land from the river to the sea to Zionist control and hands the

Sports

NFL's 'fastest man' Tyreek Hill eyes Olympics after Super Bowl

Hill's blistering pace helped him clock a personal best of 9.98secs for 100m

MIAMI: Kansas City Chiefs receiver Tyreek Hill says he dreams of one day racing in the Olympics once he has gotten Sunday's Super Bowl out of the way. The controversial speedster, who escaped suspension last year over an incident which left his toddler son with a broken arm, is one of the main weapons in the Chiefs' formidable offensive arsenal.

The 25-year-old nicknamed "Cheetah" is regarded by many as the fastest player in the NFL, even if he took no part in a made-for-television contest last year to determine the winner of that accolade. Hill's blistering pace helped him clock a personal best of 9.98secs for the 100m when in high school, and he was a competitive track and field athlete in college before he focused on gridiron.

Hill told reporters Tuesday that he is keen to one day resurrect his sprinting career. "Hopefully after the season, if I'm healthy and my mind is still in the right place, I really want to try and like try to qualify for some Olympic teams," Hill said.

"Maybe get a few guys off the team and see if we can put a relay together, and show these track guys that football guys, we used to do this back in high school, man, we still got it, you know?"

While this summer's Olympics in Tokyo are an unrealistic target, Hill's dream may not be as fanciful as it seems. Several NFL players have competed in Olympic sprinting over the years, notably former Tampa Bay Buccaneers running back Jeff Demps, a member of the USA 4x100m relay squad at London 2012.

Former Detroit Lions running back Jahvid Best also ran in the 100m at the 2016 Olympics, representing Saint Lucia. Hill, who signed a three-year \$54 million contract extension with the Chiefs last September, insisted he was serious about taking another crack at sprinting.

"The thing is I'm weighing 195 (pounds) right now," he said. "Back in high school when I ran a 9.9, I was 175," Hill said. "If I do it, it'll be like me changing my whole diet, changing everything that I've been doing to get to this point where I am now."

As he prepares for his first Super Bowl, Hill is simply relieved to be playing at all. He was the subject of a criminal investigation last year after his three-year-old son suffered a broken arm. Prosecutors later declined to press charges, however, after stating they could not determine who was responsible for causing the fracture, Hill or the boy's mother.

The NFL also declined to sanction Hill, who had pleaded guilty in 2015 to a separate domestic violence case. Hill, who was barred from the Chiefs training facility while the NFL investigated the child abuse claim against him, said he never doubted he would return.

"I had no worries about anything," he said. "It kind of sucked being away from the team. But it gave me a chance to look at myself and look at my game a bit more. I talked to a bunch of people, did a lot of training on my own. I was able to still see my son. My son knows what's going on. Having my son around me during those moments was a real big thing I needed." —AFP



KANSAS CITY: File photo shows Tyreek Hill #10 of the Kansas City Chiefs runs with the ball in the first half against the Tennessee Titans in the AFC Championship Game at Arrowhead Stadium on January 19, 2020 in Kansas City, Missouri. —AFP

Gareth Thomas 'upset' by Israel Folau signing

LONDON: Former Wales rugby international Gareth Thomas says he is "really upset" by French rugby league club Catalans Dragons' decision to sign ex-Wallabies star Israel Folau, who was sacked by Rugby Australia for highly publicised homophobic views.

Folau, 30, an outspoken Christian and former poster boy of Australian rugby union, was dismissed last May after a social media post warning "hell awaits" gay people. Catalans announced the signing of the dual-code international on Tuesday.

Thomas, also a dual-code international, but who made his name in rugby union, is gay and said he would refuse to watch any matches involving the Australian. "So Folau has joined the @SuperLeague. Really upset by this as

the game, players, and fans were so good to me," tweeted Thomas, who had an 18-month stint in rugby league after the end of his union career.

"All I hope is that as much as Folau wanted his right to speak, then players and fans alike are (allowed) their right to respond. I will never watch him." Super League executive chairman Robert Elstone condemned the move and Wigan declared their home game against the Catalans in March a "Pride Day" in response.

Folau could make his first appearance for the Dragons in round two of the Super League at English side Wakefield Trinity on February 9. He played rugby league for Melbourne and Brisbane before switching codes to rugby union but Folau was told he would not be allowed to return to the NRL, Australia's major rugby league club competition, following his exile by the Wallabies.

'ABHORRENT VIEWS'

However, the England-based Rugby Football League said it was powerless to prevent Folau's registration, saying the moral responsibility for deciding

whether to sign a player sits with individual clubs.

Wakefield Trinity chief executive Michael Carter said he was not aware of any of the other Super League clubs being consulted on the matter and would have strongly argued against the move.

"I don't believe he should have been allowed in," he told Britain's Press Association. "Are we seen now as a safety net for anybody who has been kicked out of other competitions? I don't think it is the sort of advert we should be putting out for our sport. The views he holds are abhorrent and to hide behind religious beliefs is wrong."

Wigan chairman Ian Lenagan admitted his club considered the possibility of signing Folau. "It did cross our mind but we made no approaches," he told BBC Radio. "We had filled our salary cap — that's the reality."

Wigan's players will wear rainbow socks and laces for the game against the Dragons in an act Lenagan said was a positive move. "We've shown we're proud of our diversity and we're taking positive action to show we want



Gareth Thomas

to be proud of our Pride Day," said Lenagan. —AFP

Jaguares can benefit as star-shorn Super Rugby season kicks off

WELLINGTON: Super Rugby launches its 25th season on Friday but the silver anniversary will lose its shine with the absence of many stars who lit up the World Cup only a few months ago. In the last season of the cumbersome conference system and one that will say sayonara to the no longer wanted Japanese Sunwolves, the talent vacuum will be highlighted from game one when the Auckland Blues host the Waikato Chiefs. The Blues' star signing from the off-season Beauden Barrett — the All Blacks playmaker and double World Player of the Year — has an extended holiday written into his new contract and won't be seen until mid-April.

It's not just the Blues who are suffering, as the Chiefs' Brodie Retallick, another former World Player of the Year, has been excused Super Rugby so he can play in Japan but still be available for the All Blacks.

Retallick's New Zealand second row partner Sam Whitlock, one of five All Blacks missing from the Canterbury Crusaders pack, is in Japan on the same deal. Most of the Springboks squad that lifted the World Cup in Japan are now scattered throughout Europe and Japan.

The Northern Bulls, the best of the four South African clubs last year, have said goodbye to six of their World Cup heroes — including Lood de Jager, Duane Vermeulen and Handre Pollard. The defections continue through every Super side bar the Jaguares — primarily Los Pumas in disguise — who, after losing last year's final to the Crusaders must now fancy their chances of going one better.

The powerful Crusaders forward pack which laid the platform for their consecutive titles over the past three years has been decimated with retirements and sabbaticals for Whitlock, Kieran Read, Jordan Taufua, Owen Franks and Matt Todd along with backline general Ryan Crotty.

'TIME FOR THE NEXT CROP'

But coach Scott Robertson has taken a positive approach to the loss of talent. "Obviously a lot of those guys have been part of the furniture here for a long time, so there is a real fresh feel around the place," he said.

"Naturally, when you lose a lot of leaders it's time for the next crop to come through and take a bit more on their shoulders. I think that's what we've done as a leadership group so far this year."

It's a view shared by ACT Brumbies head coach Dan McKellar who lost 157 Test caps with the departures of David Pocock, Christian Lealiifano, Henry Speight, Rory Arnold and Sam Carter after the World Cup.

Rather than splash out on buying big-name replacements, McKellar said he had confidence in his younger squad members to fill the void. "To bring someone in externally to train them up on what's expected of them on-field and off-field, there's a whole lot of work there and you're not necessarily going to get it right," McKellar said. "So we'll back the young guys. They're young guys but we're backing them because they're ready to go and they'll be ready to go on the 31st."

The Brumbies open against the Queensland Reds who have picked up James O'Connor and Henry Speight to join Jordan Petaia and Samu Kerevi in a potent looking backline.

The Bulls play the Sharks who are without the "Beast" Mlawarira, along with Ruan Botha and the du Preez brothers. The Sunwolves start their final season against the Rebels and the Crusaders play the NSW Waratahs. —AFP

Mahomes relishes battle with history at Super Bowl

MIAMI: Patrick Mahomes will battle against the weight of history as well the vaunted San Francisco defense as he attempts to join an exclusive club of Super Bowl winners on Sunday. The gifted Kansas City star would become only the third quarterback of African-American descent to lift the Vince Lombardi Trophy if the Chiefs prevail in this weekend's NFL showpiece.

Mahomes, the son of former Major League Baseball pitcher Pat Mahomes, will become one of only seven African-American quarterbacks to start in the Super Bowl when he takes to the field at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami.

Only two of that group — the Washington Redskins' Doug Williams in 1988 and the Seattle Seahawks' Russell Wilson in 2014 — have ever gone on to win the coveted NFL title. Mahomes, the reigning NFL Most Valuable Player, said Tuesday he is relishing the challenge of joining Williams and Wilson in the winner's circle.

"The best thing about it is you're showing kids that no matter where you grow up, what race you are, that you can achieve your dream," Mahomes told reporters. "For me, being a black quarterback — having a black dad and a white mom — it just shows that it doesn't matter where you come from. It doesn't matter if you're a baseball player or basketball player, follow your dreams."

"Whatever your dreams are, put the work ethic in and you can be there at the end of the day." Mahomes is in the vanguard of a crop of young African-American quarterbacks who have emerged to dominate the NFL this year.

RACIAL STEREOTYPES

Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson is jostling to succeed Mahomes as the regular season MVP after a record-breaking year, while the Houston Texans reached the second round of the playoffs after a strong campaign from quarterback Deshaun Watson.

Factor in the likes of Seahawks veteran Wilson, the Dallas Cowboys' Dak Prescott and the Arizona Cardinals' talented rookie Kyler Murray, and it's easy to see why 2019 has been billed as the NFL's "Year of the Black Quarterback." It wasn't always thus.

For years, crude, racial stereotyping had steered talented black players away from the quarterback position. A generation ago, a player with the dynamic rushing game of Baltimore's Jackson would quite likely have ended up as a running back.

And while the NFL celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, it was not until 1968 that the league saw its first black quarterback, when Marlin Briscoe started for the Denver Broncos.

A decade later, Doug Williams became the first African-American quarterback to be chosen in the first round of the NFL Draft. Nine years after that came his Super Bowl win with the Redskins.

Mahomes says Williams helped lay the foundations for the current crop of African-American quarterbacks. "My grandpa was a Redskins fan because of Doug Williams, and the way that he was able to be the Super Bowl MVP and do all those different things was impressive," Mahomes said Tuesday.

"Having those guys to pave the way before me and let me be in this seat at this podium at this Super Bowl, it's amazing and I'm glad they did that for us." In an interview this week with The Undeclared website, Texans signal-caller Watson said he believes the latest generation of minority quarterbacks can be similarly influential.

"It feels good to know we're having an impact," Watson said. "Our performance gives the young guys a lot more confidence — seeing us at a young age, especially African-American quarterbacks having all this success we're having in the NFL." —AFP

Ooredoo Kuwait 'Meet Messi' winner meets his hero

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait is proud to support football fans by flying them to Barcelona to meet their favorite star Lionel Messi. Where five football fans from across Ooredoo's footprint had the chance to meet sporting hero and Ooredoo brand ambassador Lionel Messi in Barcelona recently, as Ooredoo's successful "Meet Messi" competition concluded. In which all the winners were rewarded with a trip to meet Lionel Messi in Barcelona, Spain.

The winner of the social media competition Meet Messi in Kuwait "Jasem AlMousa", was lucky to win this trip to meet the world's greatest football player Messi, star forward for FC Barcelona and Argentina National Team. Messi is inspired by Ooredoo's commitment to making a difference in communities around the world, becoming an exclusive global brand ambassador for Ooredoo. In this role, he will be supporting Ooredoo in various programmes to increase the life chances of young people in the Middle East, North Africa and South-East Asia to help them fulfill their hopes and dreams.

Commenting on this sponsorship, Ooredoo Kuwait Senior Director of Corporate Communications Mijbil AlAyoub said: "We're happy to team up with our brand ambassador Lionel Messi once again to inspire young



people and reward our winners. Ooredoo chose to work with Lionel Messi because we believe that Football is a shared passion that unites youth in all our

countries and that the greatest athletes can play an incredible role in inspiring and enriching young people to make the most of their life chances".

Sports

Sharma's six of the best gives India T20 series against NZ

Fourth match is in Wellington on Friday

HAMILTON: Rohit Sharma smacked sixes off the final two balls of a dramatic super over for India to win the third Twenty20 against New Zealand in Hamilton yesterday and wrap up the series. It sealed a man-of-the-match performance from Sharma, the most prolific batsman in cricket's shortest format, who showed his class with 65 to set up India's 179 for five which was matched by New Zealand's 179 for six.

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson had kept his side in the hunt with a classy 95 and when the scores were tied he scored another 11 of their 17 runs batting first in the super over. India only scored eight off the first four deliveries in reply before Sharma smacked Tim Southee for back-to-back sixes to clinch the match and the series with two games to spare.

"It was unbelievable. I thought at one stage we were gone, down and out," a relieved Kohli said. "He (Williamson) played a brilliant innings and they probably deserved to finish the game off the way he batted and the way he led from the front and I feel bad for him.

"But Rohit was outstanding in the first half and the

last two balls as well." India comprehensively won the first two games of the five-match series when they bowled first, which is their preferred option.

BRUTAL SHARMA

When Williamson won the toss in Hamilton he put immediate pressure on the tourists by electing to bowl, forcing India to set rather than chase a total. After a slow start in which Sharma had only 12 runs off 11 balls, he erupted over the next 12 deliveries to reach his half century. In a brutal attack on pace bowler Hamish Bennett he hit three sixes and two fours off five consecutive deliveries.

But when Colin de Grandhomme removed KL Rahul for 27 and Bennett followed with the wickets of Sharma and Shivam Dube, India slumped from none for 89 to three for 96 after 11 overs and were restricted to a further 83 runs in the remainder of the innings.

New Zealand's reply was steady but unspectacular until the back half of the innings when Williamson charged in an attempt to keep the series alive.

His 95 included eight fours and six sixes and with



HAMILTON: India's Rohit Sharma (C) celebrates with his team mates after hitting the winning runs during the third Twenty20 cricket match between New Zealand and India at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the third Twenty20 international between New Zealand and India in Hamilton yesterday:

India		New Zealand	
R. Sharma c Southee b Bennett	65	M. Guptill c sub (Samson) b Thakur	31
K. Rahul c Munro b de Grandhomme	27	C. Munro st Rahul b Jadeja	14
S. Dube c Sodhi b Bennett	3	K. Williamson c Rahul b Shami	95
V. Kohli c Southee b Bennett	38	M. Santner b Chahal	9
S. Iyer st Seifert b Santner	17	C. de Grandhomme c Dube b Thakur	5
M. Pandey not out	14	R. Taylor b Shami	17
R. Jadeja not out	14	T. Seifert not out	0
Extras: (b1, lb2, w2)	5	Extras: (b6, lb2)	8
Total: (five wickets: 20 overs)	179	Total: (six wickets: 20 overs)	179
Fall of wickets: 1-89 (Rahul), 2-94 (Sharma), 3-96 (Dube), 4-142 (Iyer), 5-160 (Kohli)		Fall of wickets: 1-47 (Guptill), 2-52 (Munro), 3-88 (Santner), 4-137 (de Grandhomme), 5-178 (Williamson), 6-179 (Taylor)	
Did not bat: Shardul Thakur, Yuzvendra Chahal, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah		Did not bat: Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Scott Kuggeleijn, Hamish Bennett.	
Bowling: Southee 4-0-39-0 (2w), Bennett 4-0-54-3, Kuggeleijn 2-0-10-0, Santner 4-0-37-1, Sodhi 4-0-23-0, de Grandhomme 2-0-13-1		Bowling: Thakur 3-0-21-2 (2w), Shami 4-0-32-2 (2w), Bumrah 4-0-45-0, Chahal 4-0-36-1 (1w), Jadeja 4-0-23-1 (1w), Dube 1-0-4-0	
		Result: Match tied, India won super over decider.	

four balls remaining New Zealand only needed two to win. Williamson was caught behind trying to edge the winning runs past the keeper and after Ross Taylor and Tim Seifert ran a bye to level the scores, Taylor was bowled on the final ball of the innings sending the match into a super over.

It was the third super over New Zealand have faced in the past seven months and they have lost them all

having gone down to England in the World Cup final and then again in a Twenty20 match in November.

"They haven't been too successful for us," said Williamson. "We'd probably do better trying to win it in regular time. "It was pretty disappointing not getting across the line in the first 20 overs but it's a game of small margins. We must learn from it." The fourth match is in Wellington on Friday. — AFP

Raza put Zimbabwe ahead in second Test

HARARE: Off-spinner Sikandar Raza grabbed career-best figures of 7-113 as Zimbabwe took control of the second and final Test against Sri Lanka at the Harare Sports Club yesterday, but for the second match running the home side suffered a concussion scare.

Zimbabwe are 62 for one in their second innings at the close of the third day, a lead of 175 with nine wickets remaining, after Raza helped them bowl the visitors out for 293 on a pitch that is offering plenty of assistance to the spinners.

Prince Masvaure (26 not out) and nightwatchman Regis Chakabva (14 not out) will resume on day four, with makeshift opener Craig Ervine (13) the one wicket to fall. Ervine was pushed to the top of the order after regular opener Kevin Kasuza had to be stretched off the field when he was hit flush on the helmet while fielding at short leg and was taken to hospital with concussion.

It is the second Test in a row that Kasuza has been concussed fielding in that position and allows Zimbabwe to use the International Cricket Council's new concussion protocols to bring another batsman



HARARE: Sri Lanka's Oshada Fernando (2nd R) watches the ball after playing a shot as Zimbabwe's Regis Chakabva (L) and Zimbabwe's Brendan Taylor (R) tries to catch the ball during the third day of the second Test cricket match between Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka at the Harare Sports Club in Harare yesterday. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Brief scores at stumps on the third day of the second Test between Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka at the Harare Sports Club Ground on Wednesday.

Zimbabwe 406 and 62-1 (P. Masvaure 26 not out; V. Fernando 1-9)

Sri Lanka 293 (A. Mathews 64, D. Karunaratne 44, O. Fernando 44; Sikandar Raza 7-113)

Match situation: Zimbabwe lead by 175 runs with nine wickets remaining

Toss: Zimbabwe.

into the side.

Timycen Maruma has been drafted into the line-up, with his only previous Test against Bangladesh in April 2013. Sri Lanka had resumed the third day on 122 for two, but added only 12 runs before Kusal Mendis (22) crashed the ball into the helmet of the helpless Kasuza and was caught at square leg by Carl Mumba.

Angelo Mathews (64) and Dhananjaya de Silva (42) put on 84 for the sixth wicket, before the latter was caught and bowled by Raza. The prized wicket of

Mathews, who scored an unbeaten double-century in the first test, was claimed by Mumba as he got a tickle to a ball down the leg-side and was caught by wicket-keeper Chakabva with the score on 244.

All-rounder Raza's figures beat the 5-99 he managed against the West Indies in Bulawayo in 2017.

Zimbabwe will want to bat quickly on the fourth day to build a sizeable lead as they attempt to square the series, having lost the first test at the same venue by 10 wickets. — Reuters

Australian opener scratched out of U-19 World Cup

KIMBERLY: Australia opener Jake Fraser-McGurk will return home from the ongoing ICC Under-19 Cricket World Cup in South Africa after being scratched on the face by a monkey at a nature reserve, Cricket Australia (CA) said yesterday.

Fraser-McGurk, who was attacked while on a team outing after last week's victory over England in Kimberley, will undergo precautionary treatment in Australia, CA said.

"We want to make sure that Jake doesn't have any ongoing medical concerns as a result of the incident so we have taken the best course of action," CA Sports Science and Sports Medicine Manager Alex Kountouris said in a statement.

"This involves the player returning to Australia for the treatment required within the recommended seven days of the incident taking place." Australia lost to India in Tuesday's quarter-finals — Fraser-McGurk was run out for a duck in the match at Potchefstroom — but will play two more matches that would determine their ranking at the next under-19 World Cup.

The 17-year-old said he was disappointed to be prematurely leaving the team and that he had learnt his lesson from the episode. "I guess it serves me right for getting too close to the animal enclosure," said the 17-year-old Victorian.

"That's a lesson learned. I look forward to completing the treatment and getting back on the field as soon as possible." — Reuters

Bryant's helicopter not equipped with vital warning system

LOS ANGELES: The helicopter that crashed into a Los Angeles hillside killing NBA legend Kobe Bryant and eight others, was not equipped with vital software that alerts pilots when aircraft are too close to the ground, officials said.

The terrain awareness and warning system (TAWS), which is designed to send a warning when a collision appears imminent, had not been installed on Bryant's Sikorsky S-76 helicopter, the National Transport Safety Board's (NTSB) Jennifer Homendy said.

"Certainly, TAWS could have helped," NBC News reported Homendy as saying, adding that she could not conclude that its use would have prevented the crash. The warning system is not mandatory on helicopters under Federal Aviation Administration regulations, despite the NTSB recommending that it be made so on all helicopters with six or more passenger seats, following a 2004 crash.

Medical examiners identified the body of Lakers star Bryant after recovering the remains of all nine of those who died in the crash near L.A., officials said Tuesday. Bryant's body was officially identified along with three others using fingerprints, two days after their

helicopter crashed into a rugged hillside northwest of the city. Meanwhile federal investigators finished their inspection of the crash site, handing it over to local authorities.

Images showed investigators flying drones over the accident site and manually combing through twisted, charred wreckage, which was scattered over a wide area. Officials also used drones to replicate the helicopter's final, fateful flight path, Homendy said. Earlier Tuesday, the coroner's office confirmed all nine bodies have been retrieved from the site and "transported to the department's forensic science center" for examination.

The bodies of pilot Ara Zobayan, baseball coach John Altobelli and Sarah Chester have also been identified. The remaining five — including Bryant's 13-year-old daughter Gianna — have not yet been officially identified. The death of Bryant — a five-time NBA champion for the LA Lakers and double Olympic gold medalist — has shocked the world, with tributes continuing to pour in Tuesday.

'PRETTY DEVASTATING'

Bryant, 41, was traveling with daughter Gianna and seven other passengers and

crew when the Sikorsky S-76 slammed into a hillside in thick fog. The helicopter was headed to Bryant's Mamba Sports Academy in Thousand Oaks, where his daughter was set to play.

Homendy described the accident as a "high energy impact crash". Investigators have now airlifted the helicopter's wreckage onto trucks, which then transported it to a secure location for further examination.

An iPad, cellphone and maintenance records were found among the wreckage, along with "everything we would expect would be on the aircraft," said Homendy.

She told journalists that the probable cause for the accident may not be confirmed for 12-18 months, when a final report will be issued. A preliminary, fact-based report is expected in 10 days.

'HEARTBROKEN AND DEVASTATED'

The other passengers on the flight — who have not yet been officially identified — have been named as Altobelli's wife Keri, and their daughter Alyssa, who played basketball at the same club as Gianna.

Christina Mauser, an assistant coach of the Mamba girls' basketball team, was also killed along with Payton Chester, Sarah's daughter.

Mourning fans Tuesday placed bouquets of flowers at a makeshift memorial outside the gated community in Newport Beach, south of Los Angeles, where the late NBA great lived.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and



LOS ANGELES: A large drawing shows US NBA basketball legend Kobe Bryant and daughter Gianna at a basketball court in Taguig, south of Manila yesterday. — AFP

Sciences said a tribute to Bryant would be included in next month's Oscars ceremony.

The star, who won an Academy Award in 2018 for animated short film "Dear Basketball," had been honored with a moment's silence at the Oscars nominees' luncheon on Monday.

A petition for the NBA logo to be redesigned with Bryant's likeness had reached two million signatures by Tuesday afternoon. Basketball superstar LeBron James said he

was "heartbroken and devastated" over Bryant's death in an emotional Instagram post, while also vowing to continue his friend's championship legacy with the Lakers.

Serbian tennis star Novak Djokovic donned a jersey bearing Bryant's initials and shirt numbers at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. With the crash site becoming a pilgrimage point for fans, police on horseback and all-terrain vehicles have been brought in to secure the area. — AFP

Sports

Trezeguet sparks wild celebrations as Aston Villa reach League Cup final

Villa snatch victory and a trip to Wembley on March 1

BIRMINGHAM: Trezeguet struck deep into stoppage time to send Aston Villa into their first League Cup final for a decade with a 2-1 win over Leicester on Tuesday to progress 3-2 on aggregate. Matt Targett's early opener put Villa in front, but Leicester enjoyed the majority of the chances and finally found a way past Orjan Nyland when Kelechi Iheanacho levelled 18 minutes from time.

However, Villa snatched victory and a trip to Wembley on March 1 to face Manchester City or Manchester United when Trezeguet connected perfectly with fellow Egyptian Ahmed Elmohamady's cross three minutes into added time.

"It was emotional for everyone when that goal goes in," said Villa boss Dean Smith, a lifelong fan of the club. "Taking this club to Wembley, I will be a very proud man." Defeat ends Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers's unbeaten run of 31 straight domestic cup matches after a dominant spell at Celtic and he rued his side's inability to turn their dominance into goals.

"I thought we were excellent in the game. We played with a nice control and composure, but their goalkeeper has made some outstanding saves," said Rodgers. "I'm gutted for my players because we put so much into the game. I thought at the end there was only one team was going to win it, but we switch off at the last minute."

The visitors started with top scorer Jamie Vardy on the bench as he was eased back into action after a glute injury, but the Foxes still blasted out of the traps. Iheanacho was denied in the first of a string of big saves by Nyland in the Villa goal inside the first three minutes.

James Maddison then had a hat-trick of efforts, two of which brought saves from Nyland. However, it

was Villa who struck first when the impressive Jack Grealish teed up Targett to fire across Kasper Schmeichel 12 minutes in.

Nyland may not even have played if Villa's new number one Pepe Reina had been fit to play, but the Norwegian was inspired as he then produced his best save of the night to turn Yuri Tielemans's piledriver onto the bar.

"He (Reina) wasn't fit so I didn't have to make that decision," added Smith on who would have played. "I knew the quality Orjan has got." Maddison was furious he was not awarded a penalty moments later when he saw another effort repelled by the arm of Marvelous Nakamba.

Mbwana Samatta was making his Villa debut after a £8.5 million (\$11 million) switch from Genk, but his first experience of Villa Park is not one the Tanzanian will remember fondly as he somehow failed to turn home another brilliant Grealish delivery early in the second half. That could have proved the knockout blow for Leicester, but instead they were very much back in the tie when an explosive burst from Harvey Barnes teed up Iheanacho to finish.

Just when both sides seemed to be preparing for extra-time, Leicester were hit with a sucker punch when Elmohamady's cross was volleyed into the bottom corner by his compatriot.

Trezeguet had to be hauled from the field by Villa security personnel after he was mobbed in a pitch invasion following the final whistle as the home fans celebrated a famous win wildly having spent the last three seasons in the Championship.

"I love a trip to Wembley. We're looking forward to it," said Grealish, who has been instrumental to Villa's improved form in the past few weeks. "It shows what character we've got in the team. We were in a sticky



BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa's Egyptian midfielder Trezeguet scores his team's second goal during the English League Cup semi-final second leg football match between Aston Villa and Leicester City at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England. — AFP

patch before Christmas — we couldn't string four passes together, never mind win a game, but we have started the new year in great form."

The exception to that upturn was a 6-1 hammering

at the hands of City and it is Pep Guardiola's men who are likely to lie in wait for Villa in the final as they hold a 3-1 first leg lead heading into the second leg of their semi-final with United. — AFP

Police probe attack on home of Man Utd chief Ed Woodward

MANCHESTER: Police have launched an investigation into an attack on the home of Manchester United executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward as fans' frustrations mount over the plight of the 20-times English champions.

Videos shared on social media on Tuesday show hooded people throwing flares over a gate to a property, while red paint was sprayed on a gatepost. A statement from Cheshire Police said officers were notified of an incident of criminal damage at around 10:45 pm (2245 GMT) on Tuesday.

"Thankfully no one was harmed and officers will liaise with security officials over the coming days to establish the full circumstances surrounding this incident and identify those involved," the statement said.

Woodward, who is married with two young children, is reported to have been away from his home at the time of the attack. United said those responsible would be banned for life from the club. "We know that the football world will unite behind us as we work with the police to identify the perpetrators of this unwarranted

attack," the club said.

"Anybody found guilty of a criminal offence, or found to be trespassing on this property, will be banned for life by the club and may face prosecution. "Fans expressing opinion is one thing, criminal damage and intent to endanger life is another. There is simply no excuse for this."

The atmosphere at Old Trafford has turned toxic in recent weeks, with supporters voicing their anger at United's owners the Glazer family and Woodward, who advised the Americans during their successful takeover of the club in 2005.

Fans reportedly sang "Woodward's going to die" at the recent defeat against Burnley and during Sunday's FA Cup victory over Tranmere.

The supporters, who enjoyed two decades of almost unbroken success under Alex Ferguson, have seen their club fall 33 points behind fierce rivals Liverpool, who look certain to win their first league title for 30 years.

United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is struggling to turn things around, with the club fifth in the Premier League, six points behind fourth-placed Chelsea.

Their record following former United striker's Solskjaer's appointment as permanent manager in March last year is poor, with United having lost 12 Premier League games — one more than they have won — under the Norwegian in that time.

United have not won the Premier League since Ferguson retired in 2013, with far more experienced



Ed Woodward

managers David Moyes, Louis van Gaal and Jose Mourinho all in and out at Old Trafford before Solskjaer took charge.

They now face Manchester City in the League Cup semi-final but are 3-1 down after the first leg. Earlier this month, Solskjaer gave his backing to the Glazers and Woodward after fans voiced disapproval at their handling of the club.

"As a club we've got to stick together, we've got to be united, we are a family," he said. "I can only say from when I've been here I've been backed by the owners, I've been backed by Ed and they're supporting me, so for me, make sure they stick together." — AFP

Leeds back on top of Championship

LONDON: Leeds returned to the top of English football's second-tier after coming back to two goals down to win a dramatic match with Millwall 3-2 at Elland Road as Wayne Rooney scored his first goal for Derby County.

Leeds appeared destined for a fourth straight defeat in all competitions when visitors Millwall led 2-0 at the interval. But Marcelo Bielsa's side hit back after the break with three goals in 15 minutes, Patrick Bamford's double bookending an effort by Pablo Hernandez.

Bielsa, however, refused to credit his half-time team talk for Leeds' revival. "It's not what I said which provoked the change," insisted the veteran Argentinian manager. "Maybe the match looked like it was strange, but it's a copy of all our matches. A lot of chances to make three goals, the opponent's goals were similar to what we normally concede." Shaun Hutchinson's header had given Millwall an early before Jed Wallace's penalty doubled their advantage following Ezgjan Mioski's challenge on Jon Dadi Bodvarsson. But then came Leeds' fightback, with Bielsa's men leapfrogging West Brom into top spot after the Baggies slipped to a 2-1 defeat by Cardiff.

Callum Paterson scored for Cardiff early in the second half before the experienced Charlie Austin equalised with a penalty following a foul by Jazz Richards on Filip Krovinic. Lee Tomlin's free-kick, however, restored Cardiff's lead and extended West Brom's winless league run to seven matches. Only the leading two clubs at the end of the regular season are guaranteed a place in the lucrative Premier League next term, with the third promotion place decided by play-off matches involving the next four teams in the table.

Rooney opened the scoring for Derby but it was not enough to prevent a 3-2 defeat by basement club Luton Town. The Manchester United great, also England's record goalscorer, broke the deadlock in the 63rd minute yet the Hatters still won for the first time since December 7.

Elsewhere, third-placed Nottingham Forest closed the gap on West Brom to two points as Joe Lolley's first-half goal secured a 1-0 win at Brentford, who remain fifth. Bristol City made it three straight victories courtesy of Jamie Paterson's second-half goal in a 1-0 win at Reading.

Jamal Lowe's last-minute header saw Wigan to a 2-1 victory over Sheffield Wednesday and there was similarly late drama as Steve Mounie's stoppage-time header ensured Huddersfield beat Hull by the same score. — AFP

KEFAK inter-district football tournament kicks off in style



KUWAIT: Seventh edition of KEFAK Inter-District Football Tournament got off to a stunning start at Bayan PAYS Ground. Prominent Kuwaiti Businessman Ali Mohammed Dufaila flagged off the event with the presence of Firoze, various district association representatives and KEFAK office-bearers.

In the inaugural Masters League match, Kozhikode overpast Ernakulam by the only goal scored by Zaheer. The matches between Thrissur vs Kasaragod, Malappuram vs Kannur and Palakkad vs Trivandrum were settled in draw. In the exciting soccer league matches, Malappuram defeated

defending champions Kannur by 2-0 with Vaseem and Jaseeludheen scoring goals for winners. Thrissur and Trivandrum settled in a goalless draw in the second match while Ernakulam and Kasaragod shared their points in 3rd match with a margin of 2-2. Palakkad held Kozhikode in a thrilling match which ended up 1-1.

KEFAK inter-district football matches are scheduled to play in Mishref PAYS Ground every Friday starting from 4 pm to 9 pm. According to KEFAK spokesperson, all the necessary arrangements have been made for football lovers to watch the thrilling football extravaganza with their family and friends.



Milan set up Juve cup semi clash

MILAN: AC Milan will meet Juventus in the Italian Cup semi-finals after beating Torino 4-2 in an enthralling encounter on Tuesday to continue their Zlatan Ibrahimovic-inspired revival. Extra-time goals from sub-

stitutes Hakan Calhanoglu and Ibrahimovic sealed passage into the last four for a Milan side who have been reawakened by the return of the Swede last month.

They will be relishing the tie with the Italian champions, who thumped Roma 3-0 in their quarter-final match last week. The superstar striker's second goal since returning to Milan came on a night the club honoured Milan fan Kobe Bryant — who spent much of his childhood in Italy — with the message "Legends never die" on the San Siro big screens.

Milan, who are still down in eighth in Serie A, have

now won five on the bounce in all competitions and are unbeaten in their six matches since the end of the winter break. It was Calhanoglu who saved Milan's skin just after coming off the bench, as the Turk's deflected shot in the dying seconds of normal time took the match to extra time after Torino goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu had held the hosts at bay.

The hosts had dominated most of the match but had found themselves behind to two Gleison Bremer goals with 19 minutes left after Giacomo Bonaventura had given Milan the lead in the 12th minute.

Ibrahimovic missed two chances to snatch the tie after Calhanoglu levelled, first somehow shooting over the bar from inches out, then seeing his smart shot well pushed away by Sirigu. Sirigu was on top form again in extra time when he pulled off a superb double save, first charging out to stop Theo Hernandez before quickly getting up to keep out the rebound. However he couldn't stop Calhanoglu putting his side ahead early in the second half of extra-time, his powerful shot escaping the Italian stopper's grasp before Ibrahimovic slotted home Leao's neat lay-off two minutes later, ending Torino's resistance. — AFP

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Thiem floors Nadal, Wawrinka out



MELBOURNE: Austria's Dominic Thiem hits a return against Spain's Rafael Nadal during their men's singles quarter-final match on day ten of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Dominic Thiem shocked top seed Rafael Nadal and Alexander Zverev ousted former champion Stan Wawrinka as tennis's young pretenders stole a march on the old guard to reach the Australian Open semi-finals yesterday.

Austria's Thiem, 26, beat Nadal 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 7-6 (8/6) — his first win in six attempts at Grand Slams, including two French Open finals — to end the 33-year-old's bid to equal Roger Federer's record 20 Major titles.

Earlier Zverev, 22, beat 2014 champion Wawrinka, 34, to go into a semi-final with Thiem, meaning that one of them will reach

Sunday's final against Roger Federer or Novak Djokovic, who have won 12 of the last 14 Australian Open titles.

Thiem had Nadal's measure in the first two sets and he recovered from dropping the third to win the fourth-set tie-breaker, getting off the floor after falling to win one point and enjoying some luck from the net cord to set up the third and decisive match point. "I was lucky in the right situation — the net cord was really on my side," Thiem said. "But it's necessary because he is one of the greatest of all time. You need some luck to beat him."

Several young players have been knock-

ing on the door of the Big Three of Nadal, Federer and Djokovic, and either Thiem or Zverev will get a chance to kick it open in Sunday's final.

'ALMOST TOO FOCUSED'

Germany's Zverev rallied from a set down to halt three-time Major-winner Wawrinka 1-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 and reach his first Grand Slam semi-final. Big things have been tipped for Zverev since he burst into the top 10 in 2017, but he said that until now he has been pushing himself too hard at the Majors.

"I was doing things in a way too profes-

sional way. I was not talking to anybody. I wasn't going out with friends. I wasn't having dinner. I was just really almost too focused." "I changed that a little bit this week... maybe this is how it should happen," he added.

Wimbledon champion Simona Halep has also benefited from a more relaxed approach as she swept aside Anett Kontaveit 6-1, 6-1 to reach the semi-finals without dropping a set. The Romanian fourth seed, who is spending time away from tennis between matches, said she was finally feeling comfortable on the biggest stage.

"I just feel more confident and I feel like I'm able to do it," said Halep, who is going after her third Major title. "It's just a feeling that you don't see this trophy as impossible anymore." Halep's semi-final is against fellow two-time Slam-winner Garbine Muguruza, who continued her impressive return to form by beating Russian 30th seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 7-5, 6-3.

"I'm excited to play my first semi-final here," said the unseeded former world number one, who won the 2016 French Open and 2017 Wimbledon. "I've known her (Halep) for quite a long time so it's going to be a tough match," she added. —AFP

Khris scores 51 as Giannis-less Bucks explode

MILWAUKEE: Khris Middleton scored a career-high 51 points, Milwaukee recorded a franchise-record 88 first-half points, and the Bucks held off a second-half surge to beat the visiting Washington Wizards 151-131 on Tuesday. Despite playing without reigning Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo, who missed the contest to rest a sore right shoulder, Milwaukee burst to a season-best 42 first-quarter points. The victory was the Bucks' ninth straight, and Milwaukee improved the best record in the NBA to 41-6. Washington fell for the sixth time in eight games despite Bradley Beal scoring a season-high 47. The 88 points smashed Milwaukee's previous season high of 76 first-half points set just 12 days ago prior in a 128-123 defeat of the Boston Celtics, and it marked a league high dating back to Houston's 90 at Phoenix on Nov. 16, 2017.

PHILADELPHIA 76ERS 115 - GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS 104
Joel Embiid returned from a nine-game absence to score 24 points and grab 10 rebounds as host Philadelphia beat Golden State. Embiid had been out with a dislocated ring finger on his left hand. He came out wearing No. 24 in memory of Kobe Bryant, who died in a helicopter crash on Sunday. Embiid received permission from Bobby Jones, who previously wore No. 24 and had his jersey retired by the Sixers. Raul Neto scored 19 points, Ben Simmons added 17, Tobias Harris contributed 14 and Al Horford had 12 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists for the Sixers, who

improved to 22-2 at home. D'Angelo Russell had 28 points and seven assists for the Warriors.

TORONTO RAPTORS 130 - ATLANTA HAWKS 114

Serge Ibaka had 24 points and 10 rebounds, Pascal Siakam added 24 points and nine rebounds, and Toronto defeated visiting Atlanta for its season-best eighth consecutive win. Kyle Lowry had 12 points, eight rebounds and 11 assists to become Toronto's all-time leader in assists with 3,772, passing Jose Calderon (3,770). John Collins had 28 points and 12 rebounds and Trae Young added 18 points and 13 assists for Atlanta, which has lost 10 consecutive games against Toronto. Former Raptor Vince Carter, who received a video tribute and a standing ovation, scored 10.

MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 104 - DENVER NUGGETS 96

Jonas Valanciunas had 23 points and 12 rebounds, Dillon Brooks scored 24 points, and host Memphis beat Denver. Ja Morant scored 14 points, Brandon Clarke had 12 and Jaren Jackson Jr. finished with 10 points and a career-high-tying seven blocked shots for the Grizzlies, who never trailed. Memphis has won 10 of 13 in January. Nikola Jokic had 25 points and 13 rebounds, Jerami Grant scored 21 along with a career-best six 3-pointers, and Gary Harris added 10 points for Denver.

BOSTON CELTICS 109 - MIAMI HEAT 101

Gordon Hayward tallied a game-high 29 points to lead Boston to a win at Miami. Jaylen Brown notched 25 points, Kemba Walker had 16, Marcus Smart scored 11 and Daniel Theis recorded 10 points and 11 rebounds for the Celtics. Jayson Tatum (groin), averaging 21.5 points per game, missed his third consecutive contest, but Boston won for the fourth time in five games. Goran Dragic led Miami with 23 points. Jimmy Butler had 20 points, and Bam Adebayo contributed 16 points and 10 rebounds for the Heat, who

are 5-5 in their past 10 games and played their third game in five days. Miami fell to 21-3 at home.

NEW ORLEANS PELICANS 125 - CLEVELAND CAVALIERS 111

Jrue Holiday scored 28 points and Brandon Ingram added 24 as visiting New Orleans defeated Cleveland. The Pelicans won for the seventh time in their past nine road games. JJ Redick scored 15 while rookie Zion Williamson had 14 points and fell one rebound short of his second straight double-double while playing a season-high 30 minutes. Collin Sexton scored 24 points, Kevin Porter Jr. added 21, and Larry Nance Jr. had 17 points and 11 rebounds as the Cavaliers lost their eighth consecutive home game.

PHOENIX SUNS 133 - DALLAS MAVERICKS 104

Devin Booker scored 32 points and Deandre Ayton added 31 as Phoenix got off to a hot start and then used a big third quarter to jump ahead and grasp control of the game. Miles Bridges added 15 points, Malik Monk supplied 13 points, Willy Hernangomez had 12 points and 10 rebounds, and Cody Zeller provided 10 points and 10 rebounds for the Hornets. The Knicks got 24 points from Julius Randle and 23 from Marcus Morris Sr. — Reuters

CHARLOTTE HORNETS 97 - NEW YORK KNICKS 92

Terry Rozier scored 30 points, and host Charlotte broke an eight-game losing streak by defeating New York. The Hornets used a 10-0 run that concluded early in the fourth quarter to jump ahead and grasp control of the game. Miles Bridges added 15 points, Malik Monk supplied 13 points, Willy Hernangomez had 12 points and 10 rebounds, and Cody Zeller provided 10 points and 10 rebounds for the Hornets. The Knicks got 24 points from Julius Randle and 23 from Marcus Morris Sr. — Reuters



MILWAUKEE: Khris Middleton #22 of the Milwaukee Bucks goes up for a dunk during the game against the Washington Wizards at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP