

Friday Times

ISSUE NO: 18049

JUMADA ALTHANI 6, 1441 AH | FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2020

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Local

Lost dog



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

muna@kuwaittimes.net

A Kuwaiti family lost its favorite dog that has lived with them for 11 years, and they offered a reward of KD 500 for whoever finds it. After three days, an expatriate found it and took it back to the Kuwaiti family, who gave him the reward and were thrilled to have the dog back home. I know this amount may seem large to some and little to others, but during these three days, the family went through a difficult time and suffered a lot of pain, anxiety and fear.

I know the feeling because I have a little cat that has been living with me for three years now. I raised it since it was a newborn when I found it near garbage suffering from pain and illness. I took it to my house and took care of it - he is not just an animal but a family member.

I often see cats on the street during this cold weather and I think of my cat that is living in a safe place away from street torture, hunger and extreme cold. I completely understand the family's feelings and intense fear for its favorite dog, so congratulations to the dog owners!

But this issue witnessed two teams - those who do not know mercy and even used the dog's voice as a kind of



The adopter must be an adult with experience in caring for animals

mockery of the dog owner, because they don't understand that when an animal lives with a family for a long time, it becomes one of its children. Another team of animal rights defenders supported the right of this family to offer a financial reward to encourage everyone to help in the search for the animal like a missing child. The controversy did not end with the return of the dog to its owners, but turned into a "trend" of hashtags between supporters and opponents.

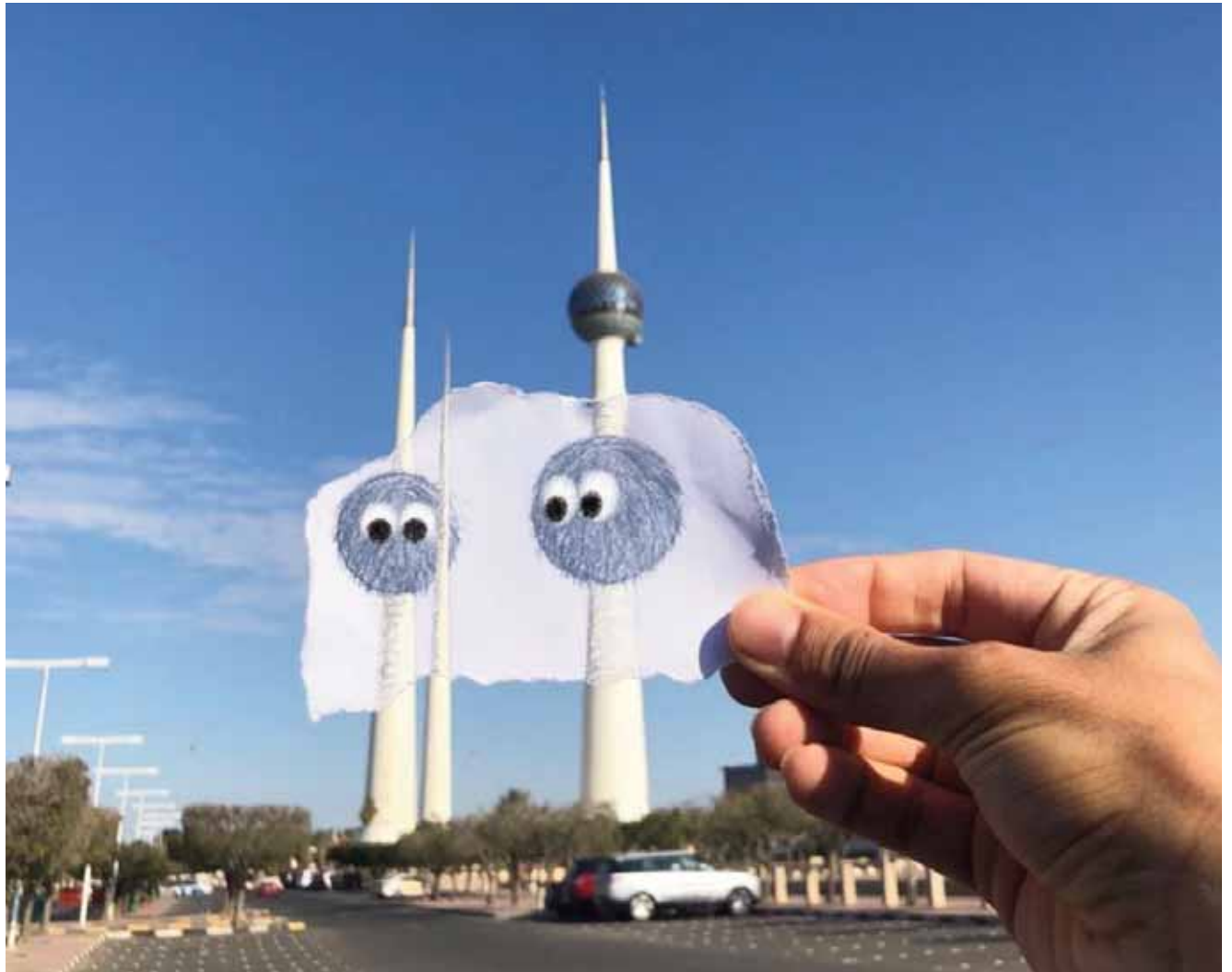
The conditions of animals, especially dogs and cats in Kuwait, are like others in many Arab countries. I do not know why when we talk about animal rights, some say, "what about the state of human rights?" Why do we see that a dog or cat is less deserving, and that some people have the right to torture or starve a helpless soul?

Whenever I visit a social media site, I see someone who has gone to the animal market or reviews the conditions of animals that suffer from hunger and cold. I feel sorry and fear that these poor animals are subject to this torment, hunger and deprivation.

I am surprised at the families that offer their children a dog or cat without realizing that it is not a puppet and needs medical care, vaccinations, good food and even doctor visits in the event of illness to be happy. It is a big responsibility and it is not right to leave its care entirely to children. So I encourage those who own dogs or cats not to give them to young children. The adopter must be an adult with experience in caring for animals, and they must be willing to take care of the animal in all circumstances.

I wish everyone respects the love and loyalty of this family for its dog. Glad he is back home and safe now. Thank you to those who helped in finding the little dog!

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Kuwait has experienced a few days of wonderfully cold weather and local artist Ahmed Alemairi captures the spirit of Kuwait's response in his humorous photo/sketch shown here. See more of his work on Instagram at @emairi. — Photo by Ahmed Alemair

Kuwait FM receives new US envoy's credentials



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with the newly appointed US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday credentials of newly appointed US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski. Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah wished the ambassador successes in new post, and more progress of both country's relations. Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry and US embassy officials also attended the meeting. — KUNA



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives credentials of newly appointed US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski.

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Local



Locals and visitors share their experience with

couchsurfing in Kuwait

By Faten Omar

Traveling on a budget or just want to explore a country for free? Couchsurfing (CS) is the best answer for budget travelers and backpackers. CS is a service that connects people around the world to find a place to stay or share one's home or culture by guiding travelers. Whether you're traveling the world, hosting travelers, or making friends locally, being a Couchsurfer will enrich connections with the people you meet. Kuwait Times spoke with some Couchsurfers to share their stories and experiences.

Anja Erhart, a 22-year-old student from Austria, told Kuwait Times that her first experience with CS was four years ago while traveling with her friends in France. "Since then, I had the chance to experience quite a lot through Couchsurfing. I was hosted by people, I hosted travelers in my house, and I also used 'hangouts' to mingle and meet with locals," she said.

"For my first trips when I had no hosting experience and no certified account, it was very hard to find a host. Most of them never replied and I had to write at least 15 requests to hopefully find a host. With a certified account, it's much easier. Most of the people who request to stay at your place never show up because their plans change, so out of 10 requests, only one will show up. I learned not to fuss about this and to let it flow. If they come, they do. And if they won't, they won't."



Anja Erhart

Local



Jens Poulsen



Jason Sant



Vyola Gomes

Cynthia



Anja has hosted 20 people at her house, stressing the difficulty of her parents' acceptance of the concept of CS. "For my parents and grandparents, it is hard to understand and they are afraid to open their house to strangers; they find even meeting up too dangerous. Sometimes I don't tell them, or sometimes I tell them that the Couchsurfers are colleagues from university."

Jens Poulsen, 40, a Swiss and Danish finance manager at the Institute for Electronics, ETH Zurich, who has hosted around 120 people at his home, started his journey in 2006. "My first hosts were from a site called Hospitality Club around 16 years ago. I created my Couchsurfing profile in 2006 and had my first guests then."

Poulsen told Kuwait Times that using CS is an adventure on its own, in the sense that until you meet the people, everything can still change. "When I attend CS meet-ups, I always feel full of international energy from all these people and their different backgrounds. It is very enriching. In Kuwait, I stayed at a Couchsurfer's home and met several people during my short time there. It gave me a very good impression of the society of Kuwait, with the strong difference in status between Kuwaiti nationals and foreigners living and working in the country," he said.

"I am fascinated by this platform and its capability to bring together people from all over the world. I have used it countless times and met so many amazing people through it - people that I would never have met just out in the street," Poulsen added.

For Jason Sant, an American traveler who also couchsurfing in Kuwait explains the value of the platform. He wanted to find how to travel the world for several years on a budget. "I started reading all sorts of books. One of the writers spoke about the Couchsurfing app and staying with people all over the world. I was blown away, and I knew immediately I had to be involved! I recognized that I could save money on travel, but even more than that, I saw this as an opportunity to make lifelong friends with people who are also passionate about travel," he said.

Sant's first experience as a Couchsurfer was in Tampa in Florida. His European host who had moved to Tampa gave him his first experience of Zumba, and explained how CS works and what makes a good host and surfer. "Once I started getting to know the members of this community, I realized I wanted to play a part in growing and helping this community. This is more than a group of people to me. This is my tribe, my family. I met a CS ambassador and was invited to participate in planning the 2019 Orlando Couch Crash. The event was an amazing success, and I realized I wanted to play a larger role in helping to shape and grow this community," he said.

"My goals as a CS Ambassador are to help grow the community through setting up events, recruit new members who would be a great fit for CS, help new members become involved with the community, and work on safety issues to ensure a positive CS experience for everyone involved," Sant added.

Cynthia was introduced to Couchsurfing in 2007, meeting over 1,000 people during her travels. "Couchsurfing has not only enhanced my travels, but it has enhanced my life too. I am an avid world traveler. I have been to all seven continents, 117 countries and all 50 US states! I recently completed a five-week journey through the Middle East, adding six new countries to my country count list. I travel for cultural immersion and meeting people," she told Kuwait Times.

"The CS app does not have all the features that a PC can access, such as Groups. That's a drawback, so I try to check the site on my computer weekly at least. I have organized more than 150 events on multiple continents around the globe. It is what I am most well-known for in Couchsurfing," she said.

Regarding her experience in Kuwait, Cynthia said: "I posted a dinner event on CS and a similar site for women only. The event was posted at a very short notice of a few days, so I was very pleased with the size of the group that attended. As often happens, I made new friends at the event and ended up spending the balance of the evening with them after the official Couchsurfing event ended. We went to a great souq, explored the city and shared tea with a view of the sea. The people I met that night, although they live 8,000 miles from me, are people I consider to be my friends!"

Sharing interesting stories of travelers was the main reason for Bijoi, 35, to become an active CS host in Kuwait. "I joined Couchsurfing in 2007 after my wife introduced me to it," he said. Bijoi has had the best and positive experiences through the platform, but hosting travelers is not that easy when you have a family. "Living with my family and two daughters makes it harder to host travelers. Hosting 20 people in the house is linked with a set of rules. The most important one is if the traveler is male, they have to be out of the house when I'm not around. I also check references for safety, and if they do not have references, I take a copy of their passport."

For him, Couchsurfing was a new world full of experiences, not only for him, but also his children. "My daughters have learned more about different cultures around the world and understand diversity. Once we had a guy from Argentina who cycled the world - that was so interesting to hear. I like to know about cultures and how people live," he added.

Vyola Gomes, a 29-year-old Indian business development manager who joined CS in 2013, said: "I had an extremely good experience and a bad one because of my negligence to research the person through reviews! Lesson learned!" She has hosted five people in Kuwait, explaining that the low number is the result of not living in a touristic destination.

Gomes said that her first surfer was a weird guy who kept asking her if she wanted a massage. "I didn't sleep all night, stayed alert and messaged friends to stay alert if I needed them. It was

creepy! But honestly, it was my fault for not going through his references. On the other hand, the best event was the one that I organized in Paris for seeing the Eiffel Tower - around 10 locals and tourists showed up and I was hosted by one of the locals. It was a night to remember," she recalled.

She notes that CS is a platform that will open minds and hearts against all prejudices. "Young travelers should especially experience staying in a local home with local food, and the experience is just something new every time. Host people at your place to show them your part of the world, educate them about your culture and food and erase stereotypes. Also, check the references and feel free to chat/video call before they arrive. There are good and bad people."



Local



Collecting Pre-oil Kuwait

'Inspired by classic items, local collector shares sneak peak of private collection'

By Ben Garcia

Ali Abdullatif Al-Kandari's house in Khaitan has become a virtual museum, with a huge assortment of antiques and artifacts which he has collected from various sources all over Kuwait. Some are from the pre-oil era, a reminder of the humble beginnings of the Kuwaiti people. Kandari told Kuwait Times he was inspired by his uncle, who had a large collection of old household items which he got from his friends and Souq Mubarakiya.

"At first, I was inspired by my uncle's collections. I remember helping him out in cleaning his objects. I told myself it probably would be satisfying if I could have my own collection too," Kandari recalled. "So little by little, I collected old things, many from the pre-oil era. I widened my search for old household items by contacting friends and relatives and visiting the Friday Market, from where I got a lot of antiques and artifacts. I then created my own little museum," he said.

Kandari hopes the next generation of Kuwaitis will see his collections, which should be preserved. "It's good to reminisce about the old days, especially our lives as Kuwaitis in the pre-oil era," he said. "For me, anything old has value; it is a symbol of resilience which reminds us to be humble at all time."

Visitors can see old paper bills, stamps, gaming instruments, water containers, old transistor radios, old black and white TVs, old telephones, old weighing scales, collection of miniature cars, stone rice mills, kettles, old soda bottles, old gas ranges, old car plate numbers, old letters, old VCRs, old books, marble toys, baskets made of bamboo and iron and much more.

His house in block 10 in Khaitan is known to many as Al-Kandari Antiques, and has been featured in several TV and radio shows. The house is open to visitors. Contact: 97922898.



— Photos by Ben Garcia

Kuwait Times

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Local

Abidance by int'l resolutions fair solution to Palestine case: Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry said that it highly appreciates US efforts to resolve the Palestinian issue and end the over-70-year Arab-Israeli conflict that has caused bitter sufferings to the Palestinian people and undermined regional security and stability. The ministry said in a statement on Wednesday that just out of its principled and unwavering position based on backing the options of the Palestinian people, Kuwait restates that a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue can be reached only through compliance with relevant international legitimacy resolutions and terms of reference laid down by the international community, chiefly an independent and sovereign Palestinian state on the June 4, 1967 border with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian embassy in Kuwait released a statement in which it rejected the peace plan proposed by US President Don-

ald Trump, and expressed gratitude to Kuwait for its supportive stance towards the Palestinian cause. "We in the occupied state of Palestine, rejected, reject and will reject any deal from anywhere in the world that does not return our right in our land and establish our fully independent and sovereign state on the June 4, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and we considered this deal since its start - which was the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital - is not worth the ink it was written with," the embassy wrote in a statement made available to the press Wednesday.

"This is a conspiracy to liquidate the Palestinian cause, which will not go through, as [Palestinian] President Mahmoud Abbas said our great people will send it to 'history's dustbin', as with many projects before. The reference for any political process in the Middle East is only the international resolu-

tions and the Arab Peace Initiative as far as we are concerned.

"We in the occupied state of Palestine affirm our commitment to peace as a strategic choice based on international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative to establish a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital on the June 4, 1967 borders. We confirm our commitment and respect of international law and our continued fight against violence, extremism and terrorism, and consider ourselves partners with the international community in bearing our responsibility towards that.

"We appreciate the stand of the state of Kuwait by standing with our people and cause, and supporting us with all means to achieve our legitimate rights and remove injustice against the Palestinian people. We are fully confident that Kuwait, headed by the 'conscience of the Arab nation' HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-

Jaber Al-Sabah, will remain in support of the Palestinian people until they achieve their right and establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital."

The Palestinian embassy also took the chance to congratulate His Highness the Amir on the 14th anniversary of his ascension to power. "On the occasion of the 14th anniversary of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's assumption of his constitutional duties, we are honored, on behalf of the entire community in Kuwait, to congratulate His Highness and pray to Almighty Allah to grant him good health," the statement reads. "On this occasion, we must pause at His Highness's basic stands towards the Palestinian cause which His Highness shoulders in Kuwait and on his travels, and his unlimited support for Palestine and its legitimate leadership headed by the President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas."

Kuwait security forces to join GCC drill

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

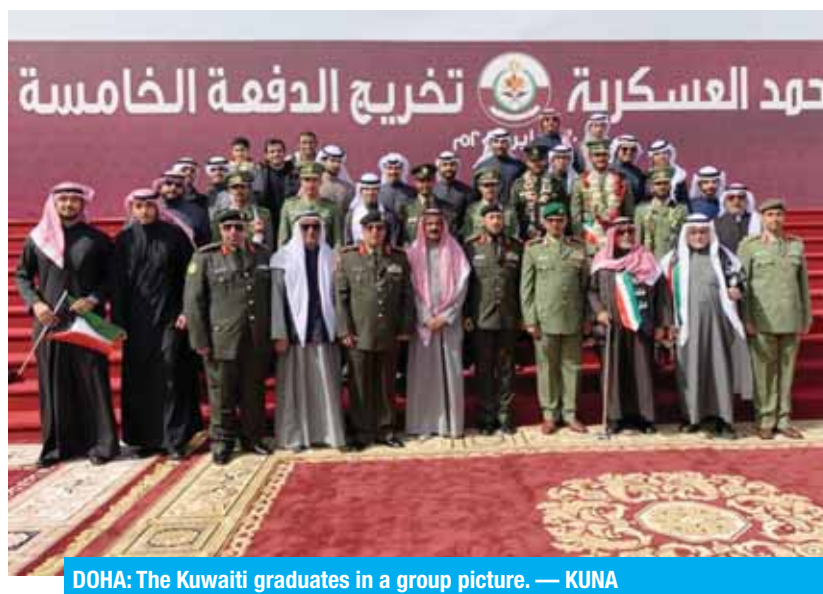
KUWAIT: A group of Kuwaiti security forces departed to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to participate in a joint exercise for security services in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday. The drill aims to raise the level of cooperation and coordination among teams and forces involved, the ministry explained in a statement, adding that the exercise also targets raising the participants' level of coordination and exchange of experiences in dealing with crises and emergencies. The participation's decision came in the end of GCC interior ministers' 36th meeting, it added. The first joint Gulf exercise for the GCC member states security personnel was held in Bahrain in October 2016.



KUWAIT: A group of Kuwaiti security forces pose for a group picture before departing to the UAE to participate in the GCC drill.

Kuwait cadets graduate from Qatari military academy

DOHA: Qatar's Ahmad bin Mohammad military school celebrated yesterday the graduation of 33 Kuwaiti cadets, among its 15th class of cadets which included 119 graduates. The Kuwaiti embassy's military attache Colonel Nasser Al-Hjaili said that there were 20 officers from the Kuwaiti Army and 13 officers from the National Guard. The graduates, who belong to a number of Arab countries, carried out during the graduation ceremony internal and external field exercises with determination and courage, he added. Hjaili praised the existing relations between Kuwait and Qatar in all fields, especially in the field of military training and development, noting that Lieutenant Mohammed Al-Khodhr of the Kuwaiti Army won first place in shooting in this session. The Mohammed Al-Attiyah Air College in Qatar had celebrated on Wednesday the graduation of nine Kuwaiti officers from the Kuwaiti Army and the National Guard within the seventh batch of students, aviation officers and support majors. — KUNA



DOHA: The Kuwaiti graduates in a group picture. — KUNA



Kuwaiti embassy's military attache Colonel Nasser Al-Hjaili (right) with Lieutenant Mohammed Al-Khodhr.

Minister Aseeri quits after more MPs vowed to vote against her

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: In the middle of a political controversy from day one of her inclusion in the cabinet, Minister of Social Affairs Ghadeer Aseeri resigned yesterday and her resignation was accepted by the government, ending perhaps the shortest ministerial career in Kuwait's history.

Aseeri was forced to step down after realizing that more than 25 MPs would vote against her in the no-confidence vote next week, the required number to unseat her as per Kuwaiti parliamentary rules. The former minister said that she opted to resign in order to help avoid an expected collision between the government and the National Assembly, adding that lawmakers gathered against her although she spent just a few days in her post.

Aseeri was grilled last week by Islamist opposition MP Adel Al-Damkhi on allegations that she violated the constitution and that she showed disrespect to lawmakers and their voter bases through issuing unwise statements. She denied the allegations during the grilling debate but 10 MPs filed a no-confidence motion against her and the voting was supposed to take place next Tuesday. By then, it was not clear if the minister

was going to lose the voting battle but her opponents claim that she later took a number of decisions in the ministry that angered many other MPs who publicly declared they would vote against her, thus making her case a hopeless one.

Earlier this month, several Islamist lawmakers strongly criticized the prime minister for including her in the cabinet because she had expressed sympathy publicly with the anti-government protests in Bahrain in 2011 and criticized Gulf states for sending troops to Bahrain to help the government against demonstrators.

MP Mohammad Al-Mutair had vowed to grill the prime minister if he went ahead to include Aseeri in the cabinet but he had to call his grilling off to allow the assembly to vote on a law granting amnesty to a number of jailed opposition activists and former MPs.

But controversial statements by the minister pushed MP Damkhi to file the grilling against the minister. The government accepted the resignation and appointed Municipality Minister Waleed Al-Jassem as acting minister of social affairs. Speaking after the resignation, MP Damkhi insisted that the row with the minister was not personal and called on the government to stick to clear standards in picking up ministers.



KUWAIT: In this January 22, 2019 file photo, Minister of Social Affairs Dr Ghadeer Aseeri walks behind His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah during a parliament session at the National Assembly. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Duterte satisfied with Kuwait's handling of maid killing case

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has spoken for the first time about sending workers to Kuwait. The official Philippines news agency said Duterte said during a speech on the 69th anniversary of the Social and Development Management Department (DSWD) that he is satisfied with the way the Kuwait's government dealt with the case of the Filipina maid who was killed in Kuwait recently. He said "there was an investigation, and there were arrests, and this is good for me."

Duterte also commented on the ban on sending workers to Kuwait, saying he will leave the matter to Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello to decide whether to remove the ban on sending workers to Kuwait or not. The minister said earlier that the ban will remain until the Kuwait government agrees with the agreement of protecting Filipino workers in Kuwait, which was signed by the two countries on May 11, 2018.

In other news, Minister of Public Works and Housing Rana Al-Fares discussed with business pioneers and young inventors means of supporting them and benefiting from their experience. "I met a group of business pioneers to discuss means of supporting them and enabling them to work in the project of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, Ministry of Public Works and Public Authority for Roads and Transport," she said.

No coronavirus cases in Kuwait so far: Ministry

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) affirmed yesterday that the country is clear of any coronavirus case "until this moment." MoH official spokesperson, Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, said in a statement to the press that the ministry had taken all precautionary measures to keep this disease at bay. Dr Sanad has also affirmed that the ministry's all sectors are in a state of alert round the clock, also in coordination with other official departments to ensure the epidemic would not spill over to the country. MoH is abiding by international laws to maintain the national health security — namely in accordance with recommendations by the World Health Organization (WHO). He urged concerned bodies or persons to contact "our official channels" to reply to any inquiry in this regard. The new strain of coronavirus has recently broken out in China taking scores of lives and prompting authorities to enforce lockdowns on a number of towns and cities.



KUWAIT: Temperature scanners are used to screen passengers for fever upon their arrival at Kuwait international airport on January 29, 2020. — AFP

Other nations have also reported cases — including the UAE that said four Chinese of a single family were diagnosed with the disease.— KUNA

41 residency violators arrested in Jleeb raid

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Acting Director of Farwaniya governorate Municipality branch Saad Al-Khrainej said the public cleanliness and road occupancy team led a campaign in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in which they stormed three street markets, during which four truckloads of used clothes were confiscated, in addition to five truckloads of fruits and vegetables, be-

sides removing 80 steel chain barriers and used tyres used to reserve parking spaces. A facility built on state property was also removed.

Khrainej added 20 abandoned cars were removed and sent to the impoundment site, 10 violating garages and 10 stores used to store foodstuff were fined. He said the inspection team at the engineering and inspection follow-up department cut power from 11 buildings in

violation of municipal standards in cooperation with the electricity and water department, closed 15 stores administratively and issued eight citations to violating stores. Khrainej said the judicially authorized team cut power from 83 violating buildings following all legal procedures. He said Jleeb command and immigration detectives arrested 41 residency violators and roaming vendors, who were sent to concerned authorities for further legal action.



Russia funds IVF
baby boom to battle
population slump

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Yemen's Houthis fire at Aramco, other Saudi targets

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CIVITAVECCHIA: The Costa Smeralda cruise ship is docked in the Civitavecchia port 70km north of Rome yesterday. More than 6,000 tourists were under lockdown aboard the cruise ship after two Chinese passengers were isolated over fears they could be carrying the coronavirus. — AFP

China virus deaths rise to 170

Hundreds of foreigners evacuated then quarantined

BEIJING: Hundreds of foreign evacuees from the Chinese city of Wuhan entered quarantine yesterday as deaths from a fast-spreading virus rose to 170 and markets shuddered at the impact of an inevitable big hit to the world's No 2 economy. All eyes were on the World Health Organization (WHO), which has held off declaring the flu-like coronavirus a global emergency but was to reconsider that later in the day.

Such a declaration would trigger tighter containment and information-sharing guidelines, but may disappoint Beijing, which had expressed confidence in defeating the "devil" virus. It could also potentially spook markets further. "The fear is that they (the WHO) might raise the alarm bells ... so people are taking money off the table," said Chris Weston, head of research at Melbourne brokerage Pepperstone.

The day after a state economist forecast the crisis would lop a percentage point off China's first quarter growth, global stocks tumbled, the yuan hit its lowest this year, oil prices slid again and safe haven assets like gold gained. The coronavirus, which originated in an illegal wildlife market in the central city of Wuhan, has now claimed 170 lives and infected 7,711 people in China, latest official data showed.

Almost all the deaths have been in Hubei province - of which Wuhan is the capital - where 60 million people are now living under

virtual lockdown, staying inside their homes and only venturing out with masks on. "Canteens are not open. Most of the shops are closed. We cannot go out and buy food," Si Thu Tun, one of 60 students from Myanmar trapped in Wuhan, told online news outlet the Democratic Voice of Burma. "Honestly, I have one big potato and three packs of instant noodles and some rice," he said. Myanmar plans a special flight to get the students out within three days.

Global spread

As other countries fly citizens out, cut flights and corporate travel, and heighten screening, another 105 cases have emerged in at least 16 places from Japan to the United States. An Italian cruise ship's 6,000 passengers were kept on board while tests were held on two Chinese travelers suspected of having the coronavirus. The crisis has stoked a wave of anti-China sentiment around the globe, from shops barring Chinese tourists to online mockery and surprise checks on foreign workers.

Australia, South Korea, Singapore, New Zealand and Indonesia were quarantining evacuees for at least two weeks, though the United States and Japan planned shorter, voluntary isolation. Three Japanese, from 206 evacuated on Wednesday, were infected, and worryingly two of them had not shown symptoms, Tokyo said.

A second Japanese flight included nine people showing fever or coughing symptoms, broadcaster NHK said.

India was the latest nation to report a case, a student of Wuhan University. And South Koreans protested at facilities earmarked as quarantine centers, throwing eggs at a minister. "The weapons that will protect us from the new coronavirus are not fear and aversion, but trust and cooperation," said South Korean President Moon Jae-in as Seoul prepared to evacuate the first of about 700 citizens from Wuhan.

In the corporate world, Alphabet Inc's Google and Sweden's IKEA were the latest big names to close China operations. Samsung Electronics said it had extended holiday closure for some Chinese production facilities. Airlines to suspend flights to China include British Airways, Lufthansa, Air Canada and American Airlines. Air France cabin crew unions were demanding the same, sources said, though the company has already allowed pilots and crew to opt out of China flights.

'When China slows, we feel it'

Fuelling concern over the damage to productivity, thousands of Chinese factory workers on Lunar New Year holidays may struggle to get back to work next week, due to extensive travel restrictions imposed to stop the spread of

the virus. Global policymakers are anxious, with China taking centre stage at US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's news conference on Wednesday. "China's economy is very important in the global economy now, and when China's economy slows down we do feel that - not as much though as countries that are near China, or that trade more actively with China, like some of the Western European countries," he said.

Streets in many Chinese cities were largely deserted and tourist attractions shut. Starbucks coffee shops were requiring temperature checks and masks. Cases of human-to-human transmission outside China are of particular concern to medics, but it is too early to determine how lethal the coronavirus is, as there are likely to be many cases of milder infections going undetected.

It has an incubation time of between one and 14 days. Chinese National Health Commission Minister Ma Xiaowei said this week the virus was infectious during incubation, unlike Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), another virus that emerged from China and killed about 800 people in 2002 and 2003. The global cost from SARS was estimated at \$33 billion, or 0.1% of world GDP in 2003. Many economists fear the impact on global growth could be bigger this time than from SARS as China now accounts for a larger share of the world economy. —Reuters

Abu Dis: 'Palestinian capital' that doesn't want the job

ABU DIS: Abu Dis, the capital of an independent Palestinian state? For Donald Trump maybe, but residents of the run-down neighborhood on the outskirts of Jerusalem are skeptical. On Tuesday the US President outlined his proposals for a Middle East peace deal, welcomed by rightwing Israelis and mockingly dubbed the "deal of the century" by Palestinians. The plan gives Israel full control of the disputed city of Jerusalem, including the predominantly Arab eastern part that Palestinians have long claimed as the capital of their future state.

Instead, it would allow them a capital on the outskirts of the city, beyond a looming concrete barrier erected by Israel during the bloody second Palestinian intifada in the early 2000s. Trump's plan proposes the cramped district of Abu Dis as a capital, which it suggests could be renamed "Al-Quds" (the holy) - the Arabic name for Jerusalem. But Jerusalem itself, with its iconic Muslim and Christian holy sites, is a powerful symbol of national and religious identity. For many Palestinians, giving it up is unthinkable. "Abu Dis can't be a capital," said Yara, a Jerusalem resident who crosses to Abu Dis several times a week to study at the local university. "Jerusalem should be a city that everyone can reach."

'I prefer Jerusalem'

The journey from the holy places of Jerusalem's Old City to Abu Dis should take only a few minutes by car, slaloming between busloads of tourists who visit the city. But at a roundabout, the GPS gives up and a metres-high

concrete wall blocks the way. Getting through involves zigzagging up and down hills, finding a highway, crossing a checkpoint and a village and passing a car cemetery - about a 30-minute drive. From their homes on the far side of the wall, the residents of Abu Dis can see the Dome of the Rock in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, the third holiest site in Islam. In the shade of the wall, covered in pro-Palestinian graffiti, 43-year-old street vendor Mohammed Hermas struggled to see how his neighborhood could become a capital. "I really don't see what I could get out of it, whether the capital is in Jerusalem or here," he said of the Trump plan, tending to falafel furiously bubbling in a vat of oil. "There's no vision for our future."

Sami, a young father with ripped jeans, was more open to compromise. "The state and religion must be separated. As long as we can pray in Al-Aqsa, the capital can be elsewhere. But yes, I prefer Jerusalem," he added. He added that he wants to be able to go and work inside Israel to be able to earn more for his family. "Here you work for 80 shekels a day (₪21), but in Israel you can make 400 (₪105) for the same work."

Parliament of Abu Dis

Palestinian leaders immediately rejected Trump's plan for multiple reasons, most prominently the recognition of all Jerusalem as Israel's "indivisible capital". But the notion of Abu Dis as the capital is not strictly new. The idea it could be a trade-off for losing east Jerusalem was floated in multiple negotiations



ABU DIS: A photograph shows the village of Abu Dis, which is the proposed Palestinian capital in US President Donald Trump's plan for the Middle East, with Israel's controversial wall separating it from Jerusalem. — AFP

in recent decades. The Palestinian Authority once even began building a possible parliament building in Abu Dis, but the Palestinian legislature was ultimately established in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Today, the unfinished sand-colored building sits a few metres from the concrete wall. Before the wall was built, the residents of Abu Dis often worked or studied in Jerusalem. From his office in the local library of Abu Dis, where he deals

with archives of the inheritances of Jerusalem families, Khaled Elyan can see both the unfinished parliament and, in the distance, the Dome of the Rock. "Abu Dis is part of Jerusalem, it's a district of the city - it's not an independent city. Abu Dis can't be the capital," he said. "The wall has isolated us. The goal was to separate us from Jerusalem," he said. "What Trump and (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu are selling is an illusion." — AFP

India reports its first case of coronavirus

BENGALURU: India reported its first case of the new coronavirus yesterday, saying a woman in the southern state of Kerala had tested positive in an outbreak that originated in China, killing 170 people, and spread abroad. The patient was an Indian student of Wuhan University in China, India's government said in a statement, adding the patient was stable and in isolation in hospital. The central Chinese city of Wuhan is the epicenter of the outbreak.

"We had sent blood samples of 20 people from Kerala, of which 10 returned as negative. Out of six that were pending, the sample of a female student from Wuhan has come back as positive," Kerala's health minister, KK Shylaja Teacher, told reporters. The patient was being treated in an isolation ward in the district of Thrissur, Teacher said. India is the world's second most heavily populated country after China. The government has taken measures to ensure that all people arriving from China report to the health authorities.

A total of 806 people recently returned from China were under observation in Kerala for any signs of the virus, the state government said on Wednesday. A senior Indian government official said bringing Indian nationals home from Wuhan was not the best option due to the risk of infection but that an aircraft was on standby and facilities to quarantine them have been identified. Infections have been reported in at least 16 countries, with 105 confirmed cases, but no deaths have occurred outside China. — Reuters

Stranded in Wuhan: Foreigners raise call for help in epicenter

WUHAN: Pregnant, newly wed and now trapped at the Chinese epicenter of a global health crisis, Thai national Aphinya is among thousands of foreigners desperate to escape - and watching helplessly as the US and Japan fly their citizens home. Hundreds were flown to safety this week to Tokyo, Singapore and California on government-chartered flights, but those from countries with less diplomatic clout fear they are being left behind. "I feel hurt that they don't care about us," Aphinya Thasripech, 32 said. "Either I could starve or I'll get infected and die," said the factory worker, who is two months pregnant.

So far 170 people have been killed by the virus since it emerged from a market in Wuhan, and more than 7,700 people have been sickened. The illness has also spread around the world, with cases being recorded as far away as the United Arab Emirates, Finland and the United States, but all of the deaths have been in China. China has imposed transport bans in and around Wuhan - effectively trapping tens of millions of people - including thousands of foreigners - in a bid to contain the virus.

Aphinya arrived in China on two weeks ago to marry her Chinese husband in Xiantao - about 200 kilometers from Wuhan. Now the city is a virtual ghost town, with restaurants and shops shuttered. Aphinya said she is worried for the health

of her unborn baby, and desperate for the Thai government to get her out. For days, the government in Bangkok has said they are awaiting "permission" from China to evacuate 65 citizens known to be at ground zero.

But the wait is taking its toll. "Sooner or later, it will get to us," said Aphinya, adding she had heard that a man had collapsed in a restaurant near her. Thai medical student Badeephak Kaosala has barricaded himself in his dorm room with a dwindling supply of food and water. He has watched with disbelief as wealthy nations have mounted mercy flights for their stricken citizens, with no word from home on when - or if - he might get out. "China has given permission to so many other countries... so we feel really down," 23, told AFP.

South Korea, France and Britain have all announced preparations to evacuate their citizens. Japan has already brought out two plane-loads. But "fear, frustration and panic" is mounting among those still trapped, said Pakistani Ruqia Shaikh, 33, who was visiting friends when the city was locked down.

There are around 500 Pakistani students in Wuhan. Currently four have been diagnosed with the coronavirus, an official in Islamabad has said. Those with families are eager to leave, said Ruqia, though some students prefer to remain where they are - happier to take their chances against the disease than run the gauntlet of Pakistan's poor health facilities. "Our country is not capable of treating the coronavirus," she told AFP. But Fadil, an Indonesian doctoral student in Wuhan who goes by one name, said he and his friends are desperate to leave - even if only to another Chinese city.

There are about 100 Indonesians in Wuhan, and another 143 elsewhere in Hubei province. "The key thing is that we want to get out of here," he said. "Only fools would want to stay in Wuhan." A few Myanmar nationals living in Wuhan have taken to Facebook, issuing public pleas to be brought home. — AFP

International

Yemen's Houthis say they fired at Aramco, other Saudi targets

Houthis say attacks are retaliation for air strikes

DUBAI: Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement said it had fired rocket and drone strikes at Saudi targets including Aramco oil facilities, the group's first claim of such attacks since it offered to halt them four months ago. Few details were given of the precise nature and timing of the attacks, and there was no immediate confirmation from the Saudi authorities of any strikes.

In comments reported by Houthi-run Al Masirah TV, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saria said more than 15 "operations" had been carried out in the past week inside Saudi Arabia in retaliation for an escalation in air strikes. Saudi Aramco facilities in Jizan on the Red Sea were targeted, along with other targets near the bor-

der with Yemen, including Abha and Jizan airports and Khamis Mushait military base, "with a large number of rockets and drones", he said in a separate statement.

State oil giant Aramco declined to comment on the report. The Houthis have been battling a Saudi-led military coalition for nearly five years. If confirmed, the attacks would be the first by the Houthis on Saudi Arabia since late September, when the group said it would halt missile and drone attacks if the coalition ended air strikes on Yemen. Oil prices were higher after the reports.

The Houthis had made their offer to halt strikes on Saudi targets last year after claiming

responsibility for a Sept. 14 attack on Saudi oil facilities that initially halved the kingdom's output. Riyadh rejected the Houthi claim of responsibility for that attack and blamed Iran, which denied it. After a lull in hostilities in recent months on many fronts, violence has escalated at a frontline east of Yemen's Houthi-held capital Sanaa, since a Jan. 19 missile attack on a government military camp which killed more than 100 people.

United Nations Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths in the past week condemned the uptick in troop movements, air strikes, and missile and drone attacks, saying they jeopardize progress being made on de-escalation and confidence building.

Moammar Al-Eryani, the information minister for the Saudi-backed internationally recognized Yemeni government, said the Houthi attack claims were a "declaration of the death of the political process in Yemen".

Yemen has been mired in almost five years of conflict since the Houthi movement ousted the government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi from the capital in late 2014. The Saudi-led military coalition intervened in 2015 to try to restore him. The United Nations has been trying to re-launch political negotiations to end the war and, separately, Riyadh has been holding informal talks with the Houthis since late September about de-escalation. — Reuters

US-Israeli woman freed after Putin's pardon

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday freed a US-Israeli woman jailed for drug trafficking after she was pardoned by President Vladimir Putin. Russia released 26-year-old Naama Issachar as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met Putin at the Kremlin to discuss US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan. Issachar's case caused an outcry in Israel and she was set to fly back with Netanyahu after his meeting with Putin, an Israeli government official confirmed to AFP.

Issachar was arrested at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport in April 2019 while she was in the transit zone en route from India to Israel. Russian authorities said they found nine grammes (three ounces) of cannabis in her checked luggage and she was sentenced in October to seven and a half years in prison. Her case was controversial because she was sentenced for drug trafficking while she was in transit and the drugs were in hold luggage. Putin pardoned Issachar on Wednesday after she submitted a request at the weekend.

'Didn't cross border'

"Guided by the principles of humanity, I pardon Naama Issachar," Putin said in a decree cited by the Kremlin. He told Netanyahu that it was lucky for Issachar that she did not cross the border, suggesting this would have complicated the pardon procedure. "She - thank God, it's very good for her - didn't even cross the Russian border," Putin said, adding that the drugs were found in her luggage while the baggage was being moved from one plane to another.

He told Netanyahu: "Give my very best regards to her, her family and her mum." Issachar's fate had sparked a wave of sympathy in Israel where Netanyahu had pledged to do everything for her release. Her mother Yaffa Issachar told Israeli media in Russia that her



MOSCOW: Israeli-US Naama Issachar, jailed for drug smuggling, attends her appeal hearing at the Moscow Regional Court. — AFP

daughter was "out, in a car". "Finally, thank God, thanks to everyone," she was quoted as saying. In December, Issachar lost an appeal against her sentence, which Netanyahu had described as disproportionate.

'Mercy and compassion'

During the appeal hearing, Issachar had proclaimed her innocence, denouncing the charges against her as absurd. After initially refusing to appeal to Putin, on Sunday she signed a request for a pardon. Putin appeared with Issachar's mother and Netanyahu while visiting Israel last week for commemorations of the liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz 75 years ago.

The Israeli foreign ministry had called the verdict "harsh and disproportionate" and President Reuven Rivlin had appealed to Putin's "mercy and compassion" when asking him to intervene in the case. Flying back to Israel with Issachar was likely to be a publicity coup for Netanyahu ahead of March 2 elections. But the official purpose of his visit to Moscow was to discuss Trump's Middle East peace plan with Putin.

"I think there's a new and perhaps unique opportunity here," the Israeli premier told Putin at the Kremlin. Netanyahu stood alongside Trump at the White House when the peace plan was announced Tuesday and called it a victory for Israel. He told Putin "you're actually the first leader I'm speaking with after my visit to Washington about President Trump's Deal of the Century." — AFP



BAGHDAD: A flaming tuk tuk car lies in the street as Iraqi protesters clash with riot police following a demonstration in Al-Khilani Square in the capital Baghdad. — AFP

Iraq weighs larger NATO role to replace US-led coalition

BAGHDAD: Iraq is considering a larger role for NATO at the expense of the US-led coalition, Iraqi and Western officials told AFP, after an American drone strike on Baghdad that sparked outrage. The January 3 strike which killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani and a top Iraqi commander was condemned by Baghdad as a breach of its sovereignty and of the coalition's mandate, which focuses on fighting the Islamic State (IS) group.

Iraq's parliament swiftly voted in favor of ousting all foreign troops - including the 5,200 US soldiers - and the coalition's anti-IS operations were indefinitely suspended. Fearing a swift withdrawal could be destabilizing, Iraqi and Western officials have begun discussing changes to the coalition's role, according to local officials and diplomats. "We are talking to the coalition countries - France, the UK, Canada - about a range of scenarios," said Abdelkarim Khalaf, spokesman for Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi. "The essential thing is that

no combat troops are present and our airspace is no longer used," Khalaf told AFP.

Two Western officials said the premier had asked them to "draft some options" on a path forward for the coalition. These options had been submitted directly to the premier. They included a coalition not led by the US, an amended mandate with limits to coalition activities or an expanded role for NATO's separate mission in Iraq. The Canadian-led NATO mission was set up in 2018 and has around 500 forces training Iraqi troops, although its operations have also been on hold since the US strike. By comparison, the US-led coalition established in 2014 has up to 8,000 troops in Iraq, the bulk of them American forces. Khalaf told AFP that a larger role for NATO was one of several options being discussed.

One of the Western officials said "the NATO option" has won initial nods of approval from the prime minister, the military and even anti-US elements of the powerful Hashed al-Shaabi military network. "I expect it will end with some sort of compromise - a smaller presence under a different title," he said. "The Americans will still be able to fight IS and the Iraqis can claim they kicked (the US) out." The various options were expected to be laid out at a meeting Wednesday between Iraq and NATO in Amman and again next month by NATO's defense ministers. "But there is recognition among the Europeans that there needs to be US buy-in to whatever happens next," the Western official said. — AFP

Arabs prioritizing ties with US against Iran over Mideast plan

Arab leaders tread fine line on Trump's initiative

RIYADH: Arab powers appear to be prioritizing close ties with the United States that are vital to countering Iran over traditional unswerving support for the Palestinians in their reaction to President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan. At a White House event on Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump proposed creating a Palestinian state but demilitarized and with borders drawn to meet Israeli security needs, while granting US recognition of Israeli settlements on occupied West Bank land and of Jerusalem as Israel's indivisible capital.

The plan diverges from previous US policy and a 2002 Arab League-endorsed initiative that offered Israel normal relations in return for an independent Palestinian state and full Israeli withdrawal from territory captured in the 1967 Middle East war. Saudi Arabia's response exemplified the careful balance now required from Gulf Arab monarchies, Egypt and Jordan which rely on US military or financial backing and find themselves aligned with the United States and Israel in confronting Iran.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry expressed appreciation for Trump's efforts and support for direct peace negotiations under US auspices. At the same time, state media reported that King Salman had called the Palestinian president to reassure him of Riyadh's unwavering commitment to the Palestinian cause. Egypt and Jordan, which already have peace deals with Israel, as well as Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) used similar language that swung between hope for re-starting talks and caution against abandon-

ing long-held stances. Despite Palestinians' rejection of the plan and boycott of Trump over perceived pro-Israel bias, three Gulf Arab states - Oman, Bahrain and the UAE - attended the White House gathering in a sign of changing times.

In a bitterly divided Arab world, backing for Palestinians has long been seen as a unifying position but also often a source of internal recriminations over the extent of that support, especially as some states have made independent, pragmatic overtures to historical adversary Israel. Trump and Netanyahu praised the UAE, Bahraini and Omani ambassadors for attending the White House announcement: "What a sign it portends - I was going to say 'of the future' - what a sign it portends of the present," Netanyahu said to applause. Critics were less kind, condemning the envoys' presence as a "shameful" abandonment of the Palestinian cause. "No government or ruler wants to be seen to sell Palestine so cheaply and hand Netanyahu such a victory and, in fact, end up footing the bill," said Neil Quilliam, senior research fellow at Britain's Chatham House think-tank. "At the same time, all states except perhaps Egypt are dependent upon the US and will not risk angering Trump, given his propensity to act like a petulant child."

'A thousand no's'

Saudi King Salman has previously reassured Arab allies he would not endorse any plan that fails to address Jerusalem's disputed status or Palestinian refugees' right of return, amid perceptions Riyadh's stance was changing under



RAMALLAH: Palestinians wave the national flag as they protest a US peace plan proposal, at the northern entrance of the West Bank city of Ramallah near the Jewish settlement of Beit El yesterday. — AFP

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is close to Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner, the plan's main architect. Palestinian officials say Prince Mohammed, the de facto Saudi ruler, has pressed Abbas in the past to support the Trump plan despite serious concerns. Saudi officials have denied any differences between the king and crown prince.

Naif Madkhali, a prominent Saudi who tweets often in support of the government, blasted Trump's

plan: "No and a thousand no's," he wrote under the hashtag #Down_with_the_deal_of_the_century. In Bahrain, which hosted a US-led conference last June on the Palestinian economy as part of Trump's broader peace plan, opposition groups came out strongly against the proposal. "Whoever today gives up the Holy Land of Palestine will tomorrow give up his land in order to preserve his seat," tweeted Waad party leader Ibrahim Sharif. — Reuters

Turning back the time: How quitting smoking reverses lung damage

TOKYO: Smokers can effectively turn back time in their lungs by kicking the habit, with healthy cells emerging to replace some of their tobacco-damaged and cancer-prone ones, a new study shows. Smokers have long been told their risk of developing diseases like lung cancer will fall if they can quit, and stopping smoking prevents new damage to the body. But a study published yesterday in the journal *Nature* found that the benefits may go further, with the body appearing to draw on a reservoir of healthy cells to replace smoke-damaged ones in the lungs of smokers when they quit.

The study's joint senior author, Peter Campbell of the Wellcome Sanger Institute, said the results should give new hope to smokers who want to quit. "People who have smoked heavily for 30, 40 or more years often say to me that it's too late to stop smoking - the damage is already done," he said in a statement issued by the institute. "What is so exciting about our study is that it shows that it's never too late to quit." Some of the people in the study had smoked more than 15,000 packs of cigarettes in their life, he said. "But

within a few years of quitting, many of the cells lining their airways showed no evidence of damage from tobacco."

Healthy cells emerge

The study analyzed lung biopsies from 16 people, including current smokers, ex-smokers, adults who had never smoked and children, looking for the mutations that can lead to cancer. Genetic changes that appear in the body's cells are a normal part of ageing, and many of these mutations are harmless so-called "passenger mutations". But a mutation in the wrong gene in the wrong cell can "dramatically change the behavior of the cells and instruct them to behave more like a cancer", Campbell told AFP. "If enough of these 'driver mutations' accumulate, then the cell will become a full-blown cancer."

The study found nine out of every 10 lung cells in current smokers had mutations, including those that can cause cancer. But in ex-smokers, many of those damaged cells had been replaced by healthy ones akin to those seen in people who had never smoked. — AFP

Syrian army retakes key northwest town

BEIRUT: Syrian government forces recaptured a strategic northwestern highway town from jihadist and allied rebels Wednesday, in the latest blow to the country's last major opposition bastion. Once a hotspot for anti-government protests, Maaret al-Numan has been turned into a ghost town by deadly regime and Russian air strikes that killed another 11 civilians in the embattled province of Idlib on Wednesday, according to a war monitor. The town lies on the key M5 highway connecting the capital Damascus to second city Aleppo, long in the sights of the government as it seeks to revive a moribund economy ravaged by almost nine years of war.

"Our forces managed in the past few days to stamp out terrorism in many villages and towns," including Maaret al-Numan, an army spokesman said. Russian and regime air strikes on Wednesday killed 10 civilians further north in the village of Kafr Lata and another near the town of Saraqeb, also on the M5, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. It added that regime forces advancing on Saraqeb, 27 kilometers

north of Maaret al-Numan, had seized an additional five villages.

In 2011, Maaret al-Numan was one of the first towns in the northwestern province of Idlib to rise up against the Damascus government. The following year, it was captured by rebels fighting against President Bashar Al-Assad's rule. It is the latest town to fall in a Russian-backed offensive on the Idlib region this year. The region, which hosts some three million people, is dominated by jihadists from Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, but allied rebels are also present.

The government has slowly chipped away at the south of the bastion, despite several deals between government ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey intended to avert a broad military offensive. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Moscow on Wednesday of "not honoring these agreements". It was a rare critical remark from Erdogan, who has largely sought to keep good relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin since a 2016 rapprochement.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled the government's advance on the south of the province in recent weeks, seeking safety closer to the Turkish border further north. The violence in the northwest has displaced more than 388,000 civilians since December, the United Nations says. At least 20,000 of them have moved in the last two days, said UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs Mark Lowcock on Wednesday. — AFP

International

Russia funds IVF baby boom to battle population slump

Boosting national birth rate top priority for Putin

BALASHIKHA, Russia: For three years, Valeriya Pashko has been trying to get pregnant. Now her last hope is IVF, provided free by Russia's health service as authorities try to avert a new drop in the birthrate. "My husband and I are really relieved to be getting reimbursed. This costs a lot of money," said the 23-year-old social worker. Pashko is having fertility treatment at a perinatal center in the town of Balashikha just outside Moscow that the authorities describe as a model for the rest of the country.

Boosting the national birth rate is a top priority for President Vladimir Putin, who made this one of the key topics in his state of the nation address this month. "Russia's fate and its historic prospects depend on how many of us there are," he said, announcing enhanced child benefits and payouts to families for every new baby to help the country "escape from the demographic trap".

Russia saw its population fall to 142.9 million in 2010 after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, when it was 148.3 million. It is now back up to 146 million, but projected to fall again. In a private clinic, the price of a cycle of in-vitro fertilization starts at around 100,000 rubles (\$1,600), not including the costs of donor sperm and eggs. This is more than three times the median monthly wage.

'Reassuring'

But since 2013, the IVF procedure, which is the most effective fertility treatment with a success rate of around 30 percent, has largely been state-funded under a compulsory health insurance scheme. Pashko is set to have her second round of IVF after the first failed. Both will be reimbursed by the state. "It's so reassuring to have this last chance because I know a lot of couples in their 50s who don't have children because they weren't able to," she said.

At the Balashikha clinic "the number (of IVF procedures) has almost tripled" thanks to state funding, said the head doctor Olga Serova. Her office is decorated with Orthodox icons and a portrait of Putin, who has made the battle against falling population a national priority. "This policy of supporting IVF boosts the birthrate and comes as part of the government's project on demographics," Serova said. The center's fertility clinic is gleaming and has modern equipment, in contrast to many crumbling provincial hospitals. As one of the best in the country, it welcomes journalists' visits.

New population drop

Russia's current population of 146 million is predicted to fall by 4 to 12 million by 2035. Those in their 20s now were born during a massive



BALASHIKHA: Pregnant women sit in a hallway at a peri-natal centre in the town of Balashikha. For three years, Valeriya Pashko has been trying to get pregnant. Now her last hope is IVF, provided free by Russia's health service as authorities try to avert a new drop in the birthrate. — AFP

slump in the birthrate amid economic uncertainties, so there are fewer people to become new parents. In the first 10 months of last year, the population fell by almost 260,000 people, the

steepest drop over the past 11 years. Putin has rolled out a number of policies aimed at encouraging people to have babies since coming to power in 2000. — AFP

Italy's 5-Star braces for splits as identity crisis deepens

ROME: Italy's ruling 5-Star Movement faces the prospect of desertions and ruinous splits which may be impossible to stem at a spring congress, party officials are warning. The anti-establishment movement, which won twice as many votes as its nearest rival at the last national election in 2018, has been beset with problems ever since. It shed votes when in government with the hard-right League until August last year, and has done so since forming a new administration with the centre-left Democratic Party (PD). Now 5-Star's parliamentarians and supporters are divided between those who want a return to its origins as a go-it-alone protest party, those who favour cementing the alliance with the PD, and those wanting to hook up again with the League.

5-Star's candidate won just 3.5% of the vote in a regional election in northern Italy on Sunday after former leader Luigi Di Maio resigned, complaining of backstabbing from colleagues. "The Movement used to be poetry and hope, now it's guerrilla warfare and suspicion," said Max Bugani, a veteran 5-Star politician who now works with its mayor of Rome, Virginia Raggi. Bugani, an influential 5-Star figure since its foundation in 2009, said the party could soon split up, and that this would be better than "pushing on together but arguing every day."

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, an independent close to 5-Star, wants it to commit to a long-term alliance with the PD in a "progressive front" against the popular rightist bloc spearheaded by League leader Matteo Salvini. This strategy is backed by 5-Star's founder, comedian Beppe Grillo, but is resisted by Di Maio and other senior figures who want to remain equidistant from left and right, free to join forces with one or the other as circumstances dictate. Opinion polls put 5-Star on about 16% support, half its 2018 level and lagging the PD on 19% and the League on 30%.

Anarchic

The party's tensions are likely to come to a head at a congress intended to pick a new leader, reorganise, and set policy priorities. Originally set for March, 5-Star said on Thursday it had been pushed back by "a few weeks". But some of its lawmakers see defections even before then. They fear that caretaker leader Vito Crimi, a low profile senator, may struggle to impose discipline on an increasingly anarchic parliamentary group.

"We are going to lose some people," said a senior source, suggesting some deserters were financially motivated to avoid an internal 5-Star rule obliging its lawmakers to give up part of their salaries to fund causes decided by party members. Last month, three 5-Star senators defected to the League, depleting the government's already slim majority, and a League official said contacts were under way to lure another five or six.

Asked to comment on this, a 5-Star member of the government told Reuters "it's possible." The difficulties of 5-Star, which defines itself as post-ideological, may have been inevitable once it transformed itself from an angry protest movement to a party of government, effectively joining the "system" it was born to fight. Dismissing left and right as outdated concepts helped it Hoover up votes across the political divide when in opposition.

But to govern it had to join forces first with the hard right, alienating many of its left-leaning followers, and then with the left, alienating more conservative supporters. It has had policy successes, pushing through many of its flagship measures such as the "citizens' income" poverty relief scheme, tougher sanctions for corruption, curbs on temporary job contracts and a cut in the number of parliamentarians. It has also avoided the corruption scandals it decried in Italy's traditional parties, propelling its rise to government.

However, critics blamed Di Maio for hoarding power within his inner circle of advisers, and he failed to give the movement an effective structure or organization, fuelling simmering dissent which had no official outlet within the party. "5-Star's internal organizational failings are a key part of its decline because political parties are first of all organizations," said Mattia Zulianello, a political scientist at Birmingham University who specializes in populist parties. — Reuters

Nurse accused of poisoning babies with morphine

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: A nurse in Germany has been arrested on suspicion of poisoning five premature babies with morphine, police said yesterday, adding that the infants had survived. The woman was taken into custody on Wednesday after investigators found a syringe containing breast milk and traces of morphine in her locker at Ulm university hospital in southern Germany.

The babies, who were between one day and one month old and staying in the same hospital room, all suddenly developed breathing problems "at almost the same time" in the early hours of December 20, Ulm police chief Bernhard Weber said. "Only because of the immediate action taken by the staff could the five lives be saved," he told a press conference. Doctors do not expect the infants to suffer any lasting harm.

The young nurse taken into custody has yet to be formally charged but faces five counts of attempted manslaughter, Ulm prosecutor Christof Lehr said at the same press conference. She denies poisoning the babies, he added. Hospital staff initially suspected the infants had caught an infection, "but this could be ruled out after urine tests", police chief Weber said. The tests did however show traces of morphine—although two of the babies had not been prescribed the heavy painkiller as part of their care.

The hospital then notified the police. A search of the lockers of employees on duty around the time of the incident turned up the syringe "filled with breast milk", said Lehr. Testing then "confirmed the terrible suspicion that the syringe contained morphine", he said. — AFP

International

Armenia probes babies lost to Europe: Stolen and sold

The biggest illegal adoption scandal

YEREVAN: A probe into the suspected sale of dozens of Armenian babies to foreign families has left hundreds of women wondering what became of their own lost children in the biggest illegal adoption scandal to hit the former Soviet republic. Police say a criminal ring tricked mothers out of their newborns in what is the latest smear on a lucrative international adoption market, with growing calls for a total shutdown to end similar abuses.

While the scale of the problem is hard to estimate, child protection experts say high adoption fees of up to \$100,000 fan a black market that affects children from India to Uganda. Anti-slavery groups consider illegal adoptions, when a child is brought to another country in breach of regulations or as a result of wrongdoing, a form of child trafficking.

The scandal in the Caucasus surfaced in November, when authorities revealed that more than 30 children had been sent to Italy for adoption between 2016 and 2018 after their mothers were pressured into giving them up. Some women were coerced into giving birth despite wanting abortions, while others were wrongly told their newborns were ill, Armenia's security services said in a statement.

Those charged deny any part in the scandal. The probe, described by a United Nations expert as "very disturbing", has pushed hundreds of Armenian mothers into a quest to find out what became of their own lost children. "I am sure my baby is still alive," said Haykuhi Khacha-

tryan, who was told by the Yerevan clinic at the centre of the scandal that her third child was born dead in September.

"It's not just my maternal instinct. There is nothing to prove otherwise," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a phone interview. Investigating authorities said that more than three dozen mothers worried their children might have been adopted without their approval have made contact since the illicit trade came to light. Detectives are now checking all adoptions by foreigners since 1991, said Naira Harutyunyan, a spokeswoman for Armenia's Investigative Committee, a law enforcement agency.

Wake-up call

The UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, who raised concerns about Armenian adoptions in 2015, said the scam should act as an urgent "wake-up call". "This looks like ...there is a mafia treating children as commodities and making financial gain out of trading children. This is absolutely scandalous," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a phone interview.

"There is a real need for clarification and mothers are entitled to know what has happened to their children," she said. Inter-country adoption should be a measure of last resort for children who cannot be placed in foster care or adopted in their country of origin, according to the UN. But five-figure fees paid by adoptive parents in the West often prove too

alluring, leading to unethical practice in poor countries, said Iara de Witte, a child trafficking expert at the Dutch child rights organization Defense for Children.

"It is said that one of the reasons for inter-country adoption is poverty," she said by phone. "But with the thousands of euros that adoptive parents have to pay for a child...the original family could have been supported to raise their own child." In her 2015 visit to Armenia, De Boer-Buquicchio said she had witnessed children housed in orphanages because their parents lacked the money to raise them.

Some had their disabilities overstated to deter adoption locally, she said, but with no international agency in Armenia, foreign adoptive parents relied on unsupervised middlemen. Mushegh Hovsepyan, assistant to the minister of social affairs, said the government was mulling reforms, emptying orphanages and strengthening the foster care system. "We hope that in the near future we will be able to assert that the sale of children in Armenia is not possible or that the risks are reduced," Hovsepyan said in a statement.

Last hug

Armenia's Investigative Committee said five people - including the heads of a private maternity clinic and a public orphanage - had been arrested as part of the probe. The suspects face charges, including illegally separating a child from his or her parents, said Harutyunyan. In at least two cases, adoptions followed payments of

up to \$20,000, she said. Lawyers for the head of Yerevan's Republican Maternity Hospital, Razmik Abrahamyan, and the director of Yerevan's Children's Home, Liana Karapetyan, said their clients denied the "unreasonable" and "groundless" accusations. The Thomson Reuters Foundation was unable to contact representatives for the other three suspects, two of whom have not been named. The health ministry said it could not comment on a probe involving a private hospital.

The Italian ambassador to Yerevan, Vincenzo Del Monaco, said Italy was ready to cooperate with investigating authorities. Meanwhile a growing group of women wants answers. A Facebook group 'Armenian Mothers' set up by Khachatryan has organized protests demanding a thorough investigation. The 33-year-old said she grew suspicious about the death of her child after medics repeatedly refused to show her a body and later requests to get a DNA sample were turned down.

"I asked to give my baby a hug but I was told it was not allowed," she said. "I'll fight as much as I can (to have him back)". Khachatryan's lawyer, Susanna Sargsyan, said she had been contacted by the relatives of more than 600 children whose parents had been told were born dead or with serious illnesses. Manya Hovhanisyan, 36, wants to find out whether one of her children had been sold off - and voiced hope that a new era of openness in the ex-Soviet republic might even elicit answers. — Reuters

Tech heaven: Drone academy students help map out Africa future

LILONGWE: For Ethiopian aeronautical engineer Lydia Elias, building and piloting a drone to support humanitarian and development projects on the continent of her birth has been a lifelong dream. Now, as a student at Africa's first drone academy, she is about to make it come true. The institute is in Malawi, and builds on the work of a pilot scheme launched in 2017 with support from UN children's fund UNICEF, in which drones have been used to deliver medical supplies, monitor crops and map cholera outbreaks.

As drones become smaller, more reliable and more affordable, their role in such projects - on a continent prone to natural disasters and dotted with isolated communities - seems certain to increase. "Aeronautical engineers are very few in my country," said Elias, 23, as she set off to practice piloting a drone. "After learning I will try to teach my people. I have an aerospace club, so I will try to transfer this knowledge to (colleagues) in my country." She and 25 others from across Africa are the first batch of students at the academy, which opened outside the capital Lilongwe this month. They are learning how to make and fly drones, collect and analyse data over a 12-week course. Other students share Elias's excitement. "I have been able to create this drone...which I made with my own hands," said Tanzanian Emmanuel Nasolwa, 26, beaming with joy as he showed off his work. — Reuters

Bulgarians' patience runs dry as water crisis lingers

PERNIK: Forced to "live without water, in the 21st century, in a European Union country": Bulgarian Yana Stoyanova is not bemoaning climate change, but the incompetence of the authorities which has left some 100,000 people with an acute water shortage. Accountant Stoyanova does not live in an isolated backwater, but around 30 kilometers from the capital Sofia. She is at the sharp end of a crisis which has led to the environment minister being charged with mismanagement and forced to resign. It also prompted a parliamentary vote of no confidence on Wednesday in the government-which it survived. But the scandal has fed public anger at the failures of those running the EU's poorest country.

The western Bulgarian city of Pernik should have a plentiful supply of water from the nearby Studena dam. However, the reservoir there is practically empty, with most of the bed now lying exposed. Pernik residents meanwhile are receiving murky, undrinkable water-and even that only between 4pm and 10pm (1400-2000 GMT). For three months now, the daily routine for 36-year-old Stoyanova and her electrical engineer husband has revolved around the shortage.

"When we get back from work at 7pm, we run to take a shower and try to wash everything before 10pm," she explains, with buckets and containers being filled before the taps run dry. "I try to cook with mineral water, I wash dishes with it and of course I only drink mineral water," says 56-year-old Adelina Ivanova, who has to haul the bottles up seven flights of stairs. "The meaning of your life in a given day is: 'Will I manage to take a shower?', and being so happy when you do," Ivanova says. "It's absurd for a civilized person to be reduced to that."



PERNIK: A man looks at a river in the bottom of the Studena Dam, near the city of Pernik, about 30 kilometers from the capital Sofia. Located at the foot of Vitosha Mountain, the massif overlooking Sofia, the Studena Dam is practically empty. — AFP

Bulgaria has had a drier winter than normal and during 2019 received 25 percent less rainfall than average, in what was the second-hottest year on record. But residents are clear on where they place the blame for the crisis. "We are victims of negligence and corruption, not the climate," sighs 67-year-old Ivan Dragov, who used to work in the area's water distribution network. Prosecutors accuse the former Environment and Water Minister Neno Dimov of ignoring warnings about the falling water levels at the reservoir, as well as continuing to allow a local steelworks to draw water from it.

"Thirty years ago, around a dozen businesses were operating in the area and the water level was monitored daily," says Dragov, adding that there were no shortages for residents back then. Pernik's former mayor has also been charged with abuse of power over her refusal to enforce rationing during her campaign for re-election last autumn-which she went on to lose anyway. — AFP

International

White House seeking to quash Bolton testimony at Trump trial

Democratic prosecutor says testimony essential to 'fair trial'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's defense team, seeking a speedy acquittal at his Senate impeachment trial, resisted Democratic efforts on Wednesday to have former national security advisor John Bolton testify, arguing that it could prolong the divisive proceedings for months. Trump lashed out at Bolton on Twitter, saying his former aide was coming out with potentially damaging allegations in an upcoming "nasty & untrue book" because he was fired from his White House position.

Bolton reportedly claims in the book that Trump told him military aid to Ukraine was tied to Kiev investigating his political rival Joe Biden - the charge at the heart of the two articles of impeachment approved on December 18 by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. The fight over Bolton's testimony intensified as the senators who will decide Trump's fate began directly questioning Democratic prosecutors and White House lawyers.

Taking turns by party, senators spent 10 hours submitting written questions, which were then read aloud to the chamber by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, who is presiding over just the third impeachment trial of a president in US history. The 100 members of the Senate were to return yesterday to pose further questions to the White House defense lawyers and the seven House prosecutors seeking Trump's removal from office for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

Senate Democratic Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said it may be an "uphill fight" to garner

enough Republican support to issue a subpoena to Bolton, who has said he is ready to testify. Republicans hold a 53 to 47 seat edge in the Senate and four Republicans would need to side with the Democrats to compel Bolton to appear.

Trump called on Republicans to reject a push for witnesses when the issue comes up for a vote on Friday and blasted Bolton, whom he fired in September. "Frankly, if I listened to him, we would be in World War Six by now," Trump said. "(He) goes out and IMMEDIATELY writes a nasty & untrue book. All Classified National Security. Who would do this?"

'Don't wait for the book'

Echoing the views of many of his Republican colleagues, Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming came out against further witnesses and urged an early end to the trial. "America has heard enough," Barrasso said. "A majority of Americans are saying this is a waste of time because they know the president is not going to be removed." Opinion polls on whether Trump should be removed are actually evenly divided but a two-thirds majority - 67 senators - is needed to convict the president and Trump is virtually assured of being acquitted.

Chief Democratic prosecutor Adam Schiff said Bolton's testimony was essential to a "fair trial". "Don't wait for the book," the California lawmaker told the senators sitting as trial jurors. "This case is overwhelmingly clear without John Bolton but if you have any question about it you



WASHINGTON: US Senator and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York, speaks to the press at the US Capitol. The White House told former national security advisor John Bolton that a book reportedly containing damaging evidence for President Donald Trump cannot be published because it breaks secrecy laws. — AFP

can erase all doubt." White House deputy counsel Patrick Philbin countered that the House had not subpoenaed Bolton and his appearance would present "grave security issues". "He has all of the nation's secrets," Philbin said.

The White House, he added, would seek to prevent Bolton's testimony and the matter would end up in a lengthy legal battle in the courts. "This institution will be effectively paralyzed for months on end," he said. One of Trump's lawyers,

Harvard professor emeritus Alan Dershowitz, advanced an argument that Trump's actions were not impeachable because the president believed his re-election was in the public interest. "Every public official I know believes that his election is in the public interest," Dershowitz said. "If a president does something which he believes will help him get elected in the public interest, that cannot be the kind of quid pro quo that results in impeachment." — AFP

36 killed in militia massacre in DRC

OICHA, DR Congo: Thirty-six people have been killed in a suspected militia attack in the eastern DR Congo region of Beni, where hundreds have died in violence since November, a local official said Wednesday. Congolese troops have been carrying out a military operation on an armed group in the east of the country - long plagued by various militias - and militiamen have responded with a series of massacres against civilians.

"They were all hacked to death. This brings (the toll) to 36 bodies," local Beni governor Donat Kibwana told AFP, updating casualties from Tuesday's attack. Officials had earlier reported 15 fatalities. Two people with skull fractures caused by machetes have been admitted to the hospital in Oicha for surgery, an AFP reporter there said. The main attack took place late Tuesday in Manzingi, a village 20 kilometres (12 miles) northwest from Oicha, while a pastor was also killed in nearby Eringeti.

According to a toll compiled by a civil society organisation, the Kivu Security Tracker (KST), 265 people have now been killed in the Beni region since the army began its crackdown on the armed group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), on Oct 30. The massacres seem to be a tactic by the ADF to frighten the population into silence, local commentators say.

The group has also disrupted operations to curb an outbreak of Ebola in North Kivu province. Tuesday's massacre occurred to the west of the ADF's usual area of operations, which is closer to the Ugandan border. The army offensive, unfolding in thick forest and jungle, has led to what the military says is the capture of the group's headquarters and the killing of five of its six leaders. — AFP

On the defensive, Pompeo wades into feud with media

WASHINGTON: Accused of failing to defend his own diplomats in the Ukraine scandal that led to the impeachment of his boss, Mike Pompeo - who as secretary of state is meant to defend press freedoms around the world - has now waded into a bitter feud with the media. A key ally of Donald Trump, Pompeo has often echoed the president's disdain for the media. But on Friday he reportedly lost his temper with a National Public Radio (NPR) journalist who asked him about standing up for the former US ambassador to Kiev, Marie Yovanovitch, whose removal was a focus of the impeachment investigation.

Mary Louise Kelly, a distinguished former national security correspondent, said that once her microphone was off Pompeo launched into an expletive-laden tirade, yelling insults and telling her Americans don't care about Ukraine. "He shouted at me for about the same amount of time as the interview itself had lasted," said Kelly, who hosts an NPR daily news show. "He was not happy to have been questioned about Ukraine. He asked, 'Do you think Americans care about Ukraine?' He used the F-word in that sentence and many others."

He then had a member of his staff bring in a map of the world with none of the countries named and demanded she point to Ukraine, which Kelly said she did. Without denying that he had cursed at Kelly, Pompeo later issued a statement accusing her of lying twice, in saying she had agreed only to ask about Iran, and in agreeing that their post-interview con-

versation would be off the record. Kelly denied she had agreed to the talk being confidential, and produced an email exchange from before the interview showing that she would not take any subject off the table. On Tuesday, Trump publicly praised Pompeo's attack on Kelly, saying he "did a good job on her".

'Don't be such a baby'

The State Department then banned an NPR journalist who wasn't involved in the spat - veteran diplomatic correspondent, Michele Kelemen - from the secretary's plane for his latest overseas trip, which includes a meeting in Kiev with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky. The State Department Correspondents' Association (SDCA) slammed Kelemen's removal from the flight, saying it was "unacceptable to punish an individual member of our association," and noting that the State Department was meant to defend press freedoms around the world.

Perhaps more worryingly for Pompeo, Steve Hilton, a star host on the president's favorite television channel Fox News, blasted Pompeo for "putting out a ridiculous statement, whining about what questions he'd agreed to answer". "For goodness sake, Mr Secretary, don't be such a baby. You should be able to handle tough questions by now and don't be such a bully," he said, calling the secretary's outburst "an embarrassment to you and the administration" and calling on him to apologize.

Pompeo, speaking to reporters as he left on the trip, recalled that he had a feud with NPR dating from his time as a conservative congressman criticizing Iran policy - but indicated he was not planning a permanent boycott. The top diplomat has often made his displeasure known at journalists' questions in the past: When asked by an AFP correspondent for details on the first meeting between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Pompeo fired back: "Don't say silly things." — AFP

‘Finally free!’: Asia’s Bibi on Pakistan prison, life in exile

‘I became a prisoner of fanaticism’

PARIS: Recounting the hellish conditions of eight years spent on death row on blasphemy charges but also the pain of exile, Pakistani Christian Asia Bibi has broken her silence to give her first personal insight into an ordeal that caused international outrage. Bibi was sentenced to death on blasphemy charges by a Pakistani court in 2010 but then dramatically acquitted in 2018. She now lives in Canada at an undisclosed location.

French journalist Anne-Isabelle Tollet, who has co-written a book about her, was once based in the country where she led a support campaign for her. She is the only reporter to have met Bibi during her stay in Canada. In the book “Enfin libre!” (“Finally Free”) - published in French on Wednesday with an English version due out in September - Bibi recounts her

arrest, the conditions of prison, the relief of her release but also the difficulty of adjusting to a new life. “You already know my story through the media,” she said in the book. “But you are far from understanding my daily life in prison or my new life,” she said.

‘Depths of darkness’

“I became a prisoner of fanaticism,” she said. In prison, “tears were the only companions in the cell”. She described the horrendous conditions in squalid jails in Pakistan where she was kept chained and jeered at by other detainees. “My wrists are burning me, it is hard to breathe. My neck... is encased in an iron collar that the guard can tighten with a huge nut,” she wrote. “A long chain drags along on the filthy ground. This connects my neck to the handcuffed hand

who pulls me like a dog on a lead. Deep within me, a dull fear takes me towards the depths of darkness. A lacerating fear that will never leave me.” Many other prisoners showed her no pity. “I am startled by the cry of a woman. ‘To death!’ The other women join in. ‘Hanged! Hanged!’”

‘At what price?’

Blasphemy is an incendiary charge in Muslim-majority Pakistan, where even the whiff of an unsubstantiated allegation of insulting Islam can spark death at the hands of mobs. Her acquittal on the charges, which stemmed from an incident in 2009 when she argued with a Muslim co-laborer, resulted in violent protests that paralyzed the country led by firebrand cleric, Khadim Hussain Rizvi.

Bibi, who vehemently denied the charges against her, argued in the book that the Christian minority in overwhelmingly Muslim Pakistan still faces persecution. “Even with my freedom, the climate (for Christians) does not seem to have changed and Christians can expect all kinds of reprisals,” she said. “They live with this sword of Damocles over their head.”

And while Canada gives her a safer and more certain future, Bibi also has to come to terms with likely never setting foot in her homeland again. “In this unknown country, I am ready for a new departure, perhaps for a new life. But at what price? My heart broke when I had to leave without saying goodbye to my father or other members of the family. Pakistan is my country. I love my country but I am in exile forever,” she said. —AFP

Start me up: Young Pakistanis face uphill climb in innovation

LAHORE: For many of Pakistan’s farmers, long at the mercy of ruthless middlemen, an app enabling them to sell direct to clients could mean more money in their pockets. Omar Majid Warraich knew his idea could help thousands earn more from their crops, but the problem was he did not know how to execute it. “As a start-up, you tend to need advice about the do’s and don’ts, when to pitch an idea, what to pitch to investors, apply for grants, get the loans,” he said.

Today the co-founder of Agrim@art is one of Pakistan’s start-up success stories—his platform has more than 700 registered and verified farmers and a \$100,000 grant from Karandaaz, an investment platform sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Officially launched in August last year, Agrim@art reported sales worth 5.5 million rupees (\$36,000) in its first three months, and predict they will have 2,000 farmers working with them by March 2020.

Like tech entrepreneurs around the world, Warraich turned to a start-up incubator for help getting his idea off the ground—the National Incubation Center (NIC), a public-private partnership based in Lahore. The challenges he faced are not uncommon in Pakistan, where the education system is weak, and the economy is faltering. Some 64 percent of Pakistanis are under the age of 30, and youth unemployment stood at six percent in 2019, according to a report commissioned by the UN.

No money, more problems

Incubation centers fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in the tech sector are “the solution”, believes Faisal Sherjan, program director at NIC. Its hub, with its colorful walls, state of the art labs and quirky furniture, is far removed from the daily grind of the heaving, traffic-choked, polluted city of 11 million. Teams there have six months to set up their businesses while utilizing its facilities, which include Facebook’s newly installed VR lab to a host of business workshops.

There are supervisors and mentors to help entrepreneurs navigate Pakistan’s daunting business environment. There have been some homegrown tech hits: Bykea, a motorbike-hailing app, raised more than \$7 million in 2019 and is expected to raise another \$15 million in the first quarter of



LAHORE: People work at their stations at the National Incubation Centre (NIC), a start-up incubator in Lahore. — AFP

2020. The country has both a huge talent pool and a huge market, offering the “right mix” for investors, says Khurram Zafar, director of Karandaaz and 47 ventures, a fund that only invests in Pakistan.

But there are concerns about how tech start-ups can successfully navigate a messy business environment. Pakistan was still ranked a dismal 122 out of 137 on the Global Entrepreneurship Index in 2018, and 108th on the World Bank’s ease-of-doing-business list. Kalsoom Lakhani, founder and CEO of the fund Invest2Innovate (i2i), cited the “bureaucratic headaches”, “the difficulty of bringing money into the country and the impossibility of getting it out”, and the “very debilitating” taxation, as key issues.

‘Game-changing start-ups’

Bribery and corruption are widespread, while government efforts to tackle graft have resulted in an unfriendly regulatory environment “towards investors and entrepreneurs alike”, i2i said in a 2019 report on Pakistan’s start-up ecosystem.

The government is enthusiastic about start-ups and has launched incubators in dozens of universities and tech schools, which it hopes will help develop the sector. Global tech giants are also taking interest. Ride-hailing app Uber has partnered with a government fund to bring its #Uber-Pitch to Pakistan, where budding businesses are given a chance to present their ideas, while Google and Facebook have awarded grants to start-ups featured on Pakistani reality show Idea Cronon Ka (Million Dollar Idea). — AFP

Fugitive giraffe found dead in Thailand canal

BANGKOK: A giraffe whose daring escape from convoy en route to a Thai breeding station won hearts online was found dead in a lotus-clogged canal yesterday after a two-day search using drones and hang gliders. Two giraffes made a bid for freedom from the back of a poorly secured truck as it slowed in highway traffic after leaving Bangkok’s main airport on Tuesday. The animals had been imported from an unnamed African country and destined for Safari World, a popular attraction outside Bangkok which describes itself as “an open zoo”.

Rescuers caught one of the creatures after stunning it with a tranquiliser gun, but the other escaped into scrubland — cheered on by hundreds of thousands of people on social media. The story took a tragic turn, however, after it was found dead in a lotus swamp near a main road, according to Safari World. Vets will determine the cause of death. Hundreds of thousands of Thais followed Facebook live videos of journalists trailing the hunt for the runaway ungulate.

Comments lamenting its fate poured onto social media. “Hope you reincarnate in a better world lil giraffe,” said one. Safari World is Thailand’s biggest animal park, but the multi-million dollar company has in the past been criticized for training its creatures to perform for entertainment — including staging boxing matches with orangutans. Zoos and animal shows are common in Thailand, where tourists pay to have their pictures taken with tigers or watch elephants play football and perform tricks. — AFP



CHACHOENSAO, Thailand: Photo shows a runaway giraffe seen crossing a road in Bang Khla, Chachoengsao province. — AFP

International

Bangladesh allows Rohingya refugees' children to study

'Now they can chase their dreams'

DHAKA: Rohingya refugees reacted with surprise and joy on Wednesday to the news that Bangladesh would provide formal education to their children, two and a half years after they were forced to flee Myanmar. Human rights groups have long campaigned for the nearly half a million effectively stateless Rohingya children in Bangladesh's refugee camps to be allowed access to quality education, warning of the costs of a 'lost generation'. "Oh my god! Bangladesh is letting us be educated!" Mohammed Zobayer, 19, said by phone when Reuters told him about the decision, taken this week but not formally announced.

Officials say the move will provide schooling

to the age of 14 and training thereafter in place of informal learning for only younger children. "I'm so excited. This is so good. I can't express my happiness," Zobayer said. More than 730,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar after a military-led crackdown in 2017, and were forced into squalid camps across the border in Bangladesh. UN investigators concluded that the military campaign had been executed with "genocidal intent".

Bangladesh has not recognized the vast majority of the refugees and does not issue birth certificates for those born in the camps, making their legal status unclear. Last year it expelled scores of them from local schools, saying they

were using fake Bangladeshi identity cards. Mahbub Alam Talukder, Bangladesh's refugee relief and repatriation commissioner, told Reuters Rohingya children would be taught in existing learning centers and some more schools would be built, with teachers recruited through NGOs. "They will follow the Myanmar national curriculum," he said.

Learning centres are operated in the camps by international NGOs and the U.N., but children and their parents say they offer mostly unstructured learning and playtime for those who attend. "Many have already lost two academic years," Zobayer, who works as a teacher in one of the learning centers, said. "Now they can

chase their dreams. It is like having a new life." Dil Mohammed, a senior Rohingya leader, said the community was grateful to Bangladesh.

"The country saved our lives by opening its doors for us. Now, by providing education, they have saved our children from becoming a lost generation," he said, adding that Myanmar had barred Rohingya children from mainstream schools in 2012. The Hague-based International Court of Justice ordered Myanmar yesterday to protect the Rohingya against further atrocities and preserve evidence of alleged crimes, after west African nation the Gambia launched a lawsuit in November accusing the country of genocide. — Reuters

Australia heatwave renews fire worries

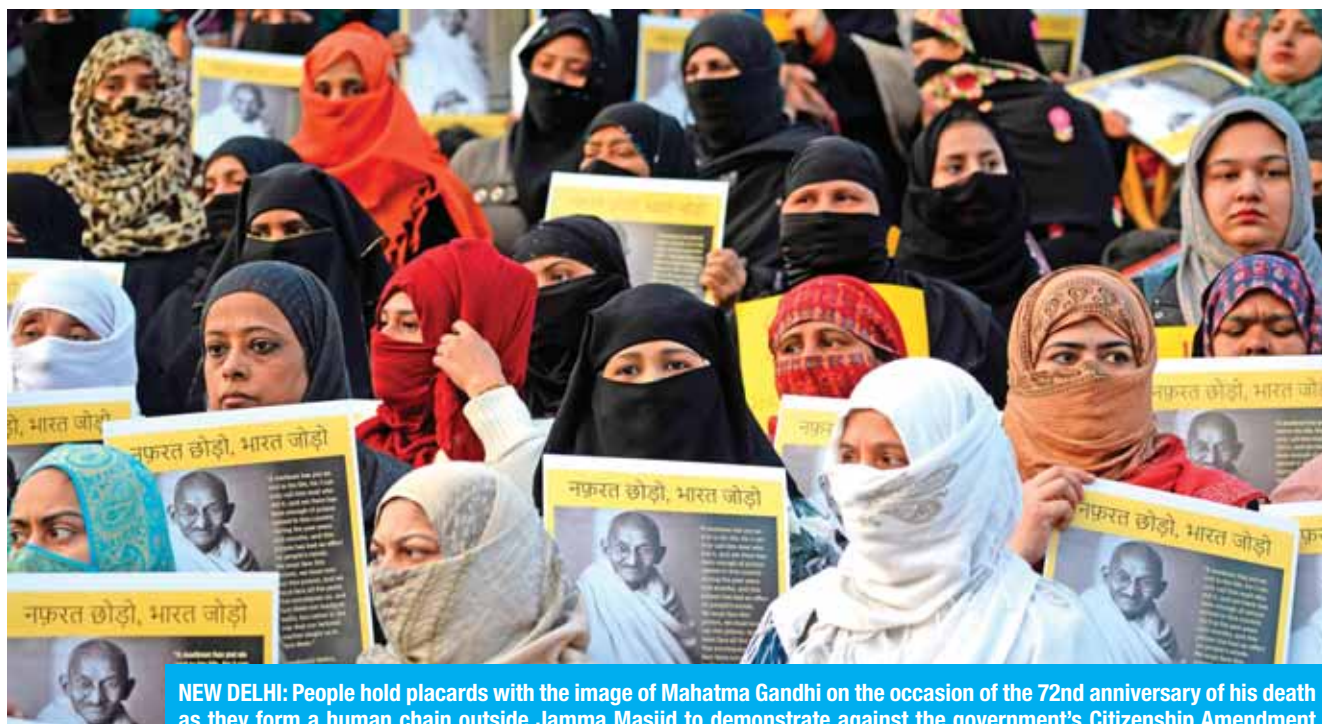
SYDNEY: Australia was bracing for a heatwave to sweep across the country's fire-ravaged southeast in the coming days, with the forecast stoking fears the soaring temperatures could inflame bushfires. Temperatures reached above 40 degrees Celsius yesterday in South Australia state, where dangerous fire weather warnings were issued in several bushfire-prone areas. The heatwave is then expected to hit Melbourne and Canberra on Friday before parts of Sydney reach 45 degrees Celsius on the weekend.

Authorities say the searing heat, accompanied by dry winds, would bring severe bushfire conditions to parts of New South Wales and Victoria - where more than 80 fires are still burning across the two states. "We've had the benefit of some suppressed, benign conditions over the last few days. However, as we've heard, it's going to be hot and dry," Victoria Emergency Services Commissioner Andrew Crisp said, urging residents to be prepared for bushfires to flare. "If you're gonna wait until you see the smoke or the fire at your doorstep, it's far too late. You've gotta get out early," he said.

Storms are forecast to follow the heatwave, bringing rain that could help dampen fires but also the potential for wild weather, including flash flooding. Extreme weather has battered parts of Australia in recent weeks, bringing giant hail, floods and landslides. The renewed fire threat came as worst-hit New South Wales announced an inquiry into the catastrophic bushfire season, which has left at least 32 people dead and devastated vast swathes of the country since September.

"The scale of these fires has been unprecedented and we must leave no stone unturned," Premier Gladys Berejiklian said. "This inquiry will allow NSW to learn from this season and the catastrophic conditions we've faced, and apply these learnings for the future." That comes on top of a Royal Commission inquiry announced by Prime Minister Scott Morrison earlier in January. The months-long crisis has sparked renewed calls for Australia's conservative government to take immediate action on climate change, with street protests urging Morrison to reduce the country's reliance on coal.

Scientists say the bushfire disaster was exacerbated by climate change, coming on the back of a crippling drought that turned forests into a tinderbox and allowed blazes to spread out of control quickly. While the prime minister belatedly acknowledged the link between the bushfire disaster and a warming planet, he has said his government would focus on climate adaptation and building resilience instead of measures to cut emissions. — AFP



NEW DELHI: People hold placards with the image of Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of the 72nd anniversary of his death as they form a human chain outside Jamma Masjid to demonstrate against the government's Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) yesterday.— AFP

Shot fired at protest against Indian new citizenship law

NEW DELHI: An unidentified man fired at a protest against India's new citizenship law near a university in Delhi yesterday, wounding a student, witnesses said, the first such incident in the capital during more than a month of demonstrations. Witnesses said the man holding a gun shouted slogans against the protesters near Jamia Millia Islamia University, before firing at them.

"The police stood nearby," Ahmed Zahir, a witness said. A Reuters photograph showed the man, dressed in a black jacket and brandishing a single-barrel weapon, standing meters away from dozens of policemen outside the university, where more than 1,000 protesters had gathered for a march.

Police later said they had detained the suspected gunman but gave no details. Protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act,

which fast-tracks Indian citizenship for non-Muslim minorities from three neighboring countries, have flared since last December. Some of the biggest protests have taken place near the university, which police stormed in December. Yesterday, police barricaded the road outside the university.

A group of students, most of them women, were holding a sit-in near the barricade after they were stopped from marching to a memorial for independence leader Mahatma Gandhi on the anniversary of his assassination in 1948. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government insists the citizenship law is needed to help members of persecuted religious minorities who fled to India before 2015 from Muslim-majority Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

But protesters say the law, and a proposed national register for citizens, discriminates against Muslims and violates India's secular constitution. In recent days, leaders from Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have called for action against the protesters, who they term unpatriotic. This week, India's junior finance minister Anurag Thakur encouraged supporters at a state election rally in New Delhi to chant slogans calling for traitors to be shot, drawing a reprimand from the election commission. — Reuters

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A model presents a creation from Spanish designer Agatha Ruiz De La Prada's Autumn - Winter 2020 / 2021 collection during the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week in Madrid. — AFP

**WHY FASHION'S FAIRY GRANDMOTHER
AGNES B. IS A TRUE BELIEVER**

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Robbie wants men to see *Birds of Prey*

Margot Robbie hopes men will watch *Birds of Prey* (And The Fantabulous Emancipation Of One Harley Quinn). The 29-year-old actress reprises her *Suicide Squad* role of Harley Quinn in the film alongside Ella Jay Basco, Jurnee Smollett-Bell, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, and Rosie Perez, and she doesn't want the female-heavy cast and director, Cathy Yan, to put guys off seeing the film because she believes they will still find something to "relate" to. Speaking at the world premiere of the movie in London on Wednesday (29.01.20), she said: "I hope that guys watch films with female leads as much as they watch ones with male leads."

"Cause I watch films despite the gender of the protagonist and find a way to relate just on y'know human behavior. "I feel if more men watch female-driven content they'd find a way to relate as well." Margot produced the movie and though it was a "priority" for her to employ more women, she insisted Cathy didn't get the director job because of her gender, but because she was simply the right person. She told Sky News: "It was a big priority for me to always seek opportunities for women because they categorically and historically get fewer opportunities."

"However, at the end of the day, the best person for the job should get the job and if the best person that came in was a guy we would have had a guy directing this film, but Cathy [Yan - director] was the best person for this job." The *Bombshell* actress hopes there will be more female nominees in the directing categories during awards season next year, following a series of all-male shortlists this time round. She said: "I hope that's not the case next year. "I loved a lot of movies this year, I loved movies that were directed by phenomenal female directors as well, but yeah, what can you do?" — BangShowbiz

Hamilton doesn't want Terminator return

Linda Hamilton is not interested in returning to the 'Terminator' franchise. The 63-year-old actress reprised her role as Sarah Connor for the first time in 28 years in *Terminator: Dark Fate*, which disappointed at the box office. Although Linda enjoyed reuniting with her co-star Arnold Schwarzenegger and producer James Cameron - who created the sci-fi franchise in 1984 - she admits that she isn't comfortable with the pressure of producing movie that needs to make money.

When asked by The Hollywood Reporter if she was optimistic about playing Sarah again, Linda said: "No. Something says to me ... I don't know. I would really appreciate maybe a smaller version where so many millions are not at stake. "I can't tell you how many laymen just go, 'Well, people don't go to the movies anymore.' That's not Hollywood analysis; that just comes out of almost everybody's mouth. "It should definitely not be such a high-risk financial venture, but I would be quite happy to never return. So, no, I am not hopeful because I would really love to be done."

Despite her reluctance to battle Skynet's killer cyborgs again Linda did not completely close the door on the prospect of a 'Terminator' return. She added: "If there was something new that really spoke to me, I am a logical person, and I will always consider viable changes." *Terminator: Dark Fate* was directed by Tom Miller and saw Schwarzenegger return to his iconic role as the T-



800. It was hoped that the film would be the beginning of a new trilogy, but Miller conceded that it was unlikely following the film's underwhelming box office performance.

He said: "We had originally talked about three movies in total. Over time it naturally fell into chunks, but it was all about what is the big, fat story - the arc of these characters - and then it comes down to how do you divide up that pie into three movies. "The opening weekend certainly makes the chances of it less bright. But we did structure it so I don't feel like this film feels incomplete, in the same way that *Terminator 2* didn't." — BangShowbiz

Ronan named as ambassador for Irish Film Institute

Saoirse Ronan has been named as inaugural ambassador for the Irish Film Institute. The 'Little Women' star has been honored with the title and will help the Institute by acting as an advocate for its work in exhibition, preservation and education for the next three years at least. She said: "I am delighted to have been asked to be the inaugural IFI Ambassador. Film in Ireland is always something I will support. Our industry is going from strength to strength through the incredible projects being produced at home and abroad by Irish filmmakers, and by producers from across the pond also. IFI has always cared about great cinema, and I am honored to play a small part in their effort to share the brilliant work that is out there with as many people as possible."

And the Irish Film Institute are "deeply" grateful to have Saoirse onboard. IFI Director Ross Keane added: "Saoirse is a hugely gifted actress, and we are delighted to have a respected artist of her standing as our inaugural IFI Ambassador. Saoirse has achieved excellence in her craft, which is a value we strive for across our remit of film exhibition, preservation and education. Having previously collaborated with Saoirse on our fundraising campaign in 2011, we are thrilled to be working with her once again as she supports the Irish Film Institute into a new decade. This is a huge endorsement of the IFI, and I would like to express my deep gratitude to Saoirse for her unwavering support of our vision and mission to promote film culture." Saoirse has been nominated for the upcoming Academy Awards and the British Academy Film Award (BAFTA) Awards, and also received a nod at the Golden Globe Awards earlier this year. — BangShowbiz



Trainor's 'knees go weak' when she hears her own songs

Meghan Trainor's "knees go weak" when she hears her own songs. The 'All About That Bass' hitmaker is still thrilled that her tracks are played all over the world and admits it "still makes her scream". She said: "It still makes me scream and my knees go weak when I hear myself in the mall. CVS always plays 'Like I'm Gonna Lose You'. Like, all the time. I swear I'm on their playlist. And it rattles me, 'cause I love CVS!" And the 26-year-old singer decided to call her new LP 'Treat Myself' after going through a very "dark phase" of life, battling panic attacks. Speaking to the New York Post, she added: "I went through a dark phase of panic attacks and when I crawled out of it, my therapist said, 'You should treat yourself, because what you accomplished and went through was hard - and you should remind yourself how badass you are.' ... I went out and bought myself a car, and then I started taking more time for myself."

I started working out more and eating better. It was a very important lesson I had to learn - to speak up for myself and be like, 'I need a break!' My mental health is No. 1." Meghan - who is married to *Spy Kids* actor Daryl Sabara - previously detailed her battle with anxiety and depression in 2018, when she said she was left feeling "alone" and "terrified" as a result of her vocal cord surgery. She explained: "When I had an episode it would last for three days. I was crippled and had this pain. Eventually I was going to doctors, psychologists and therapists and I was like, 'My back feels like someone has a flame to it, I'm not sure if I'm going crazy.' — BangShowbiz



Priyanka Chopra set to join the cast of The Matrix reboot

Priyanka Chopra is in advanced talks to join the cast of 'The Matrix' reboot. According to Variety, the 37-year-old actress is set to play a role in the fourth installment of the sci-fi franchise but details about her prospective character have been kept under wraps. 'The Matrix 4' marks a revival for the popular sci-fi series and is set to be released in 2021. The original movie was released in 1999 with two sequels, 'The Matrix Reloaded' and 'The Matrix Revolutions' both being released in 2003.

Priyanka will join franchise newcomers Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Jessica Henwick and Jonathan Groff in the project, with production set to begin imminently in California. Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss are set to reprise their roles as Neo and Trinity respectively whilst Lana Wachowski is returning to direct the film. However, Hugo Weaving, who played the role of Agent Smith in the first three films, recently confirmed that he will not be fea-

turing as filming clashed with his starring role in the theatre production of 'The Visit'.

He said: "It's unfortunate but actually I had this offer (for 'The Visit') and then the offer came from The Matrix, so I knew it was happening but I didn't have dates. I thought I could do both and it took eight weeks to work out that the dates would work - I held off on accepting a role in 'The Visit' during that time. I was in touch with Lana Wachowski, but in the end she decided that the dates weren't going to work. So we'd sorted the dates and then she sort of changed her mind. They're pushing on ahead without me." Meanwhile, Keanu, 55, has previously teased the reboot is "very ambitious" and said that he is "absolutely" excited for Neo's storyline. The 'John Wick' star said: "It's very ambitious. As it should be!" — Bang Showbiz



Regina Duarte

Actress says she will be Brazil's culture chief

An actress known for decades of work in soap operas said Wednesday she has agreed to become Brazil's secretary for culture. Regina Duarte, 72, made the announcement to reporters as she left the presidential palace. In taking the job offer from President Jair Bolsonaro, Duarte will replace a man fired over a speech that included lines seeming to quote Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. "Yes, I accepted," Duarte said of the new position. Duarte's name has been circulating for some time, but she kept mum after visiting the culture secretariat headquarters last week in Brasilia.

Culture used to have its own full-fledged ministry but Bolsonaro—who has been called the "Trump of the tropics" for his brash style and derogatory comments about women and minorities—downgraded it to a secretariat at the same level as sports after coming to power a year ago. Duarte has starred in many Brazilian soap operas over the course of a TV career spanning five decades. She will be the fourth person to hold the job since Bolsonaro took office.

She is an unabashed conservative in a country where most artists are leftist. Duarte took part in Bolsonaro rallies during the 2018 presidential campaign and once said in a speech she was with him "body and soul." But many in the arts world expect that given her 50 year career as a performer she will be more conciliatory on culture than her predecessor, Roberto Alvim. Alvim was fired this month over a speech in which he appeared to quote Goebbels, saying art in Brazil over the next decade would be "heroic and national."

"In the current situation of dismantling of our culture, I think Regina Duarte can help. She is rightwing but not Nazi," film producer Paula Lavigne said over the weekend.—AFP

Ex-cocktail waitress tells trial Weinstein raped her

A former cocktail waitress told Harvey Weinstein's sex assault trial Wednesday that the ex-Hollywood mega-producer pinned her down and raped her in his New York apartment in 2005. Tarale Wulff, 43, said she was driven to Weinstein's home after turning up at his office for what she believed would be a meeting about a possible film role. "He grabbed my arms, put me onto the bed and leaned over me," Wulff told the Manhattan court. "I told him, 'I can't.' He told me, 'Don't worry, I can't have kids,'" added Wulff, now a model. Weinstein, 67, faces life imprisonment if convicted of predatory assault charges related to actress Jessica Mann and former production assistant Mimi Haley.

Wulff is the second supporting witness to testify that Weinstein raped her after "The Sopranos" actress Annabella Sciorra told the jury yesterday that he forced himself on her in the early 90s. Wulff was one of two women to take the stand on the sixth day of testimony in the high-profile proceedings symbolic to the #MeToo movement. She said Weinstein had earlier mxxxxxxxxxx in front of her after grabbing her arm and taken her to a secluded part of a plush Manhattan restaurant where she worked. Defense attorney Donna Rotunno accused Wulff of changing the year of the alleged assault from 2004 to 2005 just a few months before the trial. She also pointed out that Wulff had accepted the meeting with Weinstein despite the initial alleged sexual assault in the restaurant.

'Prior bad acts'

Earlier, Dawn Dunning testified that Weinstein stuck his hand up her skirt during a hotel meeting to discuss possible film projects in 2005. "I just kind of froze and stood up. He apologized and said it wouldn't happen again," she said. Dunning, now 40, added that two weeks later Weinstein demanded a threesome with her in return for movie roles after she agreed to meet him in a hotel lobby. A female assistant took her to a suite upstairs. There, wearing just a bathrobe, Weinstein said she could have the part if she had sex with him and his assistant.

"When I started laughing he started being really angry he said, 'You're never going to make it,'" said Dunning, adding that she stopped acting soon after. The ex-Miramax boss said he had asked the same of Charlize Theron, Salma Hayek and Uma Thurman, accuser Dawn Dunning told the New York state court. There is no suggestion that any of the three actresses ever acquiesced to the alleged request. Dunning and Wulff testified as "prior bad acts" witnesses to bolster the prosecution's case that Weinstein engaged in a pattern of predatory sexual behavior. Arthur Aidala, for the defense, pointed out that—like Wulff—Dunning had agreed to meet Weinstein a second time despite the alleged assault at their previous meeting. The trial continues. — AFP



Harvey Weinstein departs Manhattan Criminal Court after days proceedings in his sexual assault trial in New York City. — AFP

Nicaraguan cigar factories

keep it in the family

Part of the success of Nicaragua's thriving cigar industry is a carefully honed mystique of family: how the clannish industry was forged and maintained by a handful of fathers, sons, cousins, brothers-and sisters and mothers, too. With more than 50 factories, large and small, the industry is centered around the northwestern city of Esteli. Production by mostly family-run businesses here made Nicaragua the biggest exporter of cigars in 2018, its exports of more than \$255 million surpassing those of the Dominican Republic and Honduras.

That success is largely due to the stubbornness and work ethic of a few founding fathers whose sons and daughters are now in charge. "It's a family business," said Jorge Padron during the recent Nicaraguan cigar festival, when Esteli shows off its highly prized aromatic cigars to aficionados from around the globe. "I have the title of manager, but many of us, including brothers and cousins, take responsibility for it at various levels." Jorge took over from his father Orlando, founder of the "Padron" brand.

"We have been working in this business since we were children," he said. "It made things much easier to ensure continuity after the death of my father in December 2017." At the My Father's Cigars factory, the refrain is the same: "We have no grand titles in the company, we are a family," said Janny Garcia, one of a growing number of women making their voices heard in the industry.

As she speaks, her father Jose—or "Don Pepin," as he likes to be called—leads a tour of his huge flag-stoned factory, situated on the edge of the Pan-American Highway that passes through Esteli. Like many of the founding fathers of Nicaragua's cigar dynasties, Don Pepin and Orlando Padron came over from Cuba, whose Havana-puffing revolutionary leader Fidel Castro saw cigars as a key source of foreign currency. The pioneers



Nicaraguan Jorge Padron (right), President of Padron Cigars, Orlando Padron (center) and Rodolfo Padron (left), pose for a picture with a portrait of their father, Orlando Padron, during an interview with AFP at Padron Cigar Factory, in Esteli, Nicaragua. —AFP photos

brought their cigar-rolling know-how—and sometimes some tobacco seeds from the motherland—to the receptive soil of the Nicaraguan highlands. Don Pepin left the communist-run island in 2001 to found his own empire in Miami and Esteli. Now 70, the patriarch has brought in his son Jaime, daughter Janny and son-in-law Pete Johnson to run the business as together a united clan—one that cultivates a culture of secrecy alongside their products.

Cuban exiles

Two other Cuban exiles, Simon Camacho and Juan Francisco Bermejo, set up the oldest of the Esteli factories, Joya de Nicaragua, in

1968. Fleeing from communism, they came to the attention of Nicaragua's right-wing dictator Anastasio Somoza a decade later. The story goes that Somoza was offered one of their cigars—by none other than United States President Richard Nixon during a 1971 visit to the White House. Nixon, like the rest of America's cigar smokers, was deprived of Cuba's high-quality Havanas because of the US embargo.

Cuban cigars may easily outsell the lesser-known Nicaraguan product in Europe, but Nicaraguan brands have taken advantage of the crippling US embargo on Cuban products to sell to a market which accounts for half of world consumption—a circumstance from

which Esteli and its families have benefited greatly, increasing exports to the US by 40 percent in a little over a decade. Nationalized by leftist Sandinista revolutionaries between 1979-1990, the historic factory of Joya de Nicaragua is today run by Juan Martinez, after his father Orlando restored the company to family ownership. In Esteli, these family sagas are carefully staged and part of the marketing arsenal. Rare indeed are the factories that do not showcase a founding father or grandfather—though sometimes the real stories about these forebears are as ephemeral as a spiraling swirl of cigar smoke.

These values of family solidarity are extended to the workforce, who are mostly specialized employees whose loyalty must be ensured. Paid up to \$350 a month—well above average for the troubled Central American country—thousands of employees benefit from free transport, daycare and schools for their children, workers' canteens and even clinics. "We take care of our people," the bosses say. —AFP



A woman prepares cigar boxes for export at "My Father Cigars" Factory.



A worker of Nicaragua American Cigars Tobacco Factory checks the cigar's quality.



A tourist smokes a cigar during a tobacco festival called "Puro Sabor" (Pure taste).



A tourist smokes a cigar and poses for a picture during a tobacco festival called "Puro Sabor" (Pure Taste).

Copenhagen Fashion Week Autumn Wear



Models display creations by Frederik Moller at the Copenhagen Fashion Week Autumn Wear show in Copenhagen. —AFP photos

Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in Madrid



Models present creations from Spanish designer Agatha Ruiz De La Prada's Autumn — Winter 2020 / 2021 collection.

Swan song: N Ireland looks to post-Brexit future



Violin-maker Martin McLean works in his workshop near Cookstown, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland. —AFP photos



Violin-maker Martin McLean works in his workshop.

Violin-maker Martin McLean carves amber wood and plucks at delicate strings in his studio in Northern Ireland, surrounded by stacks of slender glinting tools and precious timber. The European Union paid for half of his £50,000 (\$65,000, 60,000-euro) garden workshop outside Cookstown, County Tyrone, through a rural diversification fund. Britain leaves the EU today and for McLean, Brexit represents the loss of a patron. “I’m sad because I’d see myself as European-and violin-making is very much part of a European tradition,” the 48-year-old told AFP.

McClean, seated in his workshop in a worn blue apron, waxes lyrical about legendary luthiers who created bespoke violins, violas and cellos with “sound that can fill a concert hall, and wow and audience, and excite a musician”. He makes about 10 instruments a year, each one costing as much as £10,000. His clients are mostly professional classical performers from around the world.

Recently, he has shipped pieces to Canada, the United States and Australia. One of his instruments will soon go to Malaysia. But like many firms in British-run Northern Ireland, he is confused-and concerned-about what will happen after Brexit. “When you’re a one-man business... every purchase, every customer is quite important,” he said.

Dual system

Britain’s departure from the European Union after nearly 50 years of membership is set for 2300 GMT today. Existing arrangements will remain unchanged until the end of this year, as London and Brussels enter talks to agree a comprehensive trade deal. But a dual system enters into force from 2021, to avoid a hard border with Ireland—a requirement of a 1998 peace deal that largely ended 30 years of violence over British rule in the north.

Goods arriving and staying in Northern Ireland from non-EU countries will come under British rules. Those going on to the EU via member state the Republic of Ireland will be subject to the EU system. How the system will work in practice, what its impact on business will be, is unclear. On Monday, the EU’s chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said on a visit to Belfast and Dublin that frictionless trade was “impossible” and border checks “indispensable”. “Business is really still pretty concerned that it’s going

to be a heavy touch, a burdensome and slow process of complying with whatever the regulations are—but we just don’t know yet,” said Roger Pollen, of the Northern Ireland Federation of Small Businesses. “Because nothing is going to change immediately after Friday, people are hoping that they’ll get some sort of clarity of what the change will be at the end of the year.”

Supply chains

McClean imports timber from central Europe—spruce from the Swiss Alps and maple from Croatia and Romania—fittings from India and Italy, and varnish from the United States. Although his supply chains are modest, he is already seeing the effects of Brexit uncertainty. “I have a couple of wood dealers that will come and visit me three times a year and I can sort through their stock and I can pick out the wood that I like the most,” he said. “They’re certainly of the view that that’s not going to happen anymore. That’s going to make it more expensive,” he said, adding that he will now have to travel personally to view stock.

Northern Ireland is already the poorest region of Britain, as well as the most exposed to Brexit. Northern Ireland has 28,500 “micro-businesses” like McClean’s—firms employing between one and nine people—according to a 2018 report from the Enterprise Research Centre. They account for 111,000 people — 20 per cent of the workforce in the region and operate on smaller margins, making them vulnerable to trading turbulence.

A new cliff-edge?

The EU has also warned there may be a fresh prospect of a “hard Brexit” if trade talks do not come to fruition by the end of 2020, as Britain has ruled out extending the transition period. “If we have no agreement it will not be business as usual and the status quo,” Barnier warned. “We have to face the risk of a cliff-edge in particular for trade.”

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said he has fulfilled his promise to “get Brexit done”. But in Northern Ireland, McLean said it was “very much a step into the unknown”. “We don’t quite understand it yet,” he said. “No one seems to have much of an idea at this stage.” —AFP



Violin-maker Martin McLean works in his workshop.



Violin-maker Martin McLean works in his workshop.



Violins are seen in the workshop of Martin McLean.



Some of the “ape art” created by the orangutans and chimpanzees that live in the Center For Great Apes (CGA) sold in a gift shop and at a silent auction in a fundraising event.



This image courtesy of the Center for Great Apes (CGA) in Wauchula, Florida, shows 37-year-old Bubbles, who once was the favorite pet chimpanzee for the world-famous pop singer Michael Jackson, in his habitat at CGA.



This handout photo courtesy of the Center for Great Apes/Keith Von Stein, shows Sandra the Orangutan at her new zoo home in Wauchula, Florida.

Showbiz apes find peace through painting in Florida retirement

One of them worked alongside Clint Eastwood, others acted in the remake of sci-fi classic “Planet of the Apes”, while yet another was the darling favorite of Michael Jackson. They are the 53 chimpanzees and orangutans who live in a unique sanctuary in central Florida. All of these great apes were raised by humans and lack the basic survival skills to ever live in the wild. They do not know how to gather food, and the mothers would be incapable of caring for their offspring.

For that reason, they had no other place to go when Hollywood or scientific research labs had no more use for them, or when they grew too big and powerful for their celebrity owners to continue caring for them. The lucky ones make the final journey to this oasis, officially known as the Center for Great Apes (CGA) in Florida, in the southeastern US. It is the only accredited orangutan sanctuary in the western hemisphere and one of only nine chimp sanctuaries in North America.

One of the more recent arrivals is 33-year-old orangutan Sandra, who joined the CGA community last November, after a court in Argentina declared her a “non-human person” with the right to liberty from a Buenos Aires zoo where she had been kept. After that historic legal finding, she was sent here to get over her depression. Now she is the spoiled girl of Florida’s most exclusive retirement community. “She plays a lot. She’s doing really well,” said Patti Ragan, who founded the center.

“She is meeting several orangutans right now. The one that I think she’s most interested in is a male named Jethro,” she said. “Pretty soon we’re going to open the door so they can be in the same space. So we hope that goes well.” Another resident is Popi, a 48-year-old orangutan who was eight when she played the girlfriend of Clint Eastwood’s simian sidekick in the movie “Every Which Way but Loose” and then again in the sequel “Any Which Way You Can”. She wound up acting in Las Vegas



Some of the “ape art” created by the orangutans and chimpanzees that live in the Center For Great Apes (CGA), a non-profit sanctuary in Wauchula, Florida, sold in a gift shop and at a silent auction in a fundraising event. —AFP photos

until hidden camera footage showed she was being mistreated by her trainer.

Then there are the 23-year-old twin chimpanzees Jacob and Jonah, who appeared in the 2001 Tim Burton movie “Planet of the Apes”, as well as Bubbles, once the adored baby chimp of Michael Jackson and now a hulking 37-year-old, the alpha male in his group. Furthermore, there is Tango, an orangutan who for years served as the face of the orange beverage Tang.

“We have a lot of former entertainment great apes here,” Ragan told AFP. Not all of them are former Hollywood stars. Others were in circuses, research laboratories or were sold as exotic pets when they were still babies. Some wound up living in cramped cages or garages because they became more difficult to

control when they grew up.

Ape art

The CGA is located on 40 hectares (98 acres) of wooded land near Wauchula, surrounded by central Florida’s orange groves. The entrance to the sanctuary does not call attention to itself, with well-trodden dirt tracks snaking between the trees and connected by raised corridors along which the apes can move about. In the clearings are the enclosures, like giant bird cages, full of plants, toys and things for the apes to climb on.

It is one of the few places in Florida to have been opened in secrecy, rather than with the usual fanfare of theme parks and tourist attractions. It is neither a zoo nor a park, does not

accept visitors and does not promote itself. Only donors can visit, and then only by invitation, and just a couple of times each year to get to know the apes. Even then, they are banned from posting pictures on social media. “Their (the apes’) well-being is priority,” said Ragan.

As a result, very few people even know the place exists, said Jeff Thomas, 76, who together with his wife Terrie were among a group of donors visiting the center during a recent auction of “ape art”. On tables arranged among the trees, the organizers had displayed paintings created by the chimps and orangutans, abstract and vibrant with color. On a paper to one side, the visitors write down their bids for the artwork. “I’m very proud to know that this is a wonderful place for them,” said Terrie Thomas, 60, her voice trembling slightly. “It makes me really emotional to talk about it because I really, truly love these animals. I think they’re amazing.”

The description of one painting by Jacob explains that the chimp “especially enjoys painting, and he usually likes to taste each bright color before he puts it on his canvas.” Supporting each animal costs around \$23,000 per year, and together with other running costs, the sanctuary needs \$1.8 million every year. It is financed solely by voluntary donations.

The foundation sprang up almost by chance. Patti Ragan was living in Miami and doing volunteer work at the city zoo when she was asked to look after a baby orangutan, due to experience she had gained in Borneo. A year later, a baby chimp was added to her care, and in 1993, Ragan registered her sanctuary as a not-for-profit organization. And the baby orangutan she was originally asked to look after is still with her, named Pongo, and now 29 years old. —AFP

Yemeni artist who balances almost everything on his face



Yemeni street artist Salim el-Maghrabi balances a bicycle on his chin while performing in public in the capital Sanaa. —AFP photos



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a cane on the tip of his hat.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a cleaver on his face.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a ladder on his chin.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a sword on his face



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a wheelbarrow on his chin.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a table on his chin.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a stack of soda cans on his chin.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances an apple atop two stacked empty soda bottles on his chin.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a cooking gas cylinder on his chin.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances large caliber ammunition rounds on his nose.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances cups on a tray placed atop a pole on his chin.



Salim el-Maghrabi balances a child sitting in a chair with a Yemeni national flag on his chin.

WHY FASHION'S FAIRY GRANDMOTHER AGNES B. IS A TRUE BELIEVER

French designer Agnes b. really doesn't like the fashion world of which she is one of the great survivors. "I don't like fashion. I have nothing to do with that world where everyone is in a bubble," said the veteran creator, a lifelong activist for progressive causes. "Some people like to go out and be seen," said the 78-year-old who dressed her friend David Bowie for decades and who made the famous black jacket with the leather collar that John Travolta wore in the movie "Pulp Fiction". Like her, Bowie would run a mile from the "celebrity scene", she told AFP.

Both, however, shared a passion for all kinds of modern art. And now Agnes b.-whose real name is Agnes Trouble-is opening her own gallery in an up-and-coming corner of the French capital. Fab will not only house her eclectic private collection of more than 5,000 works-half of them photographs-but will also, she promised, be a "factory of culture and social solidarity". Next to Station F, the world's biggest startup incubator in the shadow of France's national library, the designer wants to put some fizz into what was a soulless corner of French capital. Her idea is to bring the art, music, fashion and publishing worlds together with the neighborhood's young tech crowd and its multi-ethnic working-class residents. Even as she approaches her eighth decade, the grandmother of 16 and great-grandmother to 19, has lost none of the daring, drive and curiosity that helped her build a fashion empire of 300 boutiques, largely in Asia.

Art and activism

Indeed, Fab's first show is called "La hardiesse", or "The Audacious One", a nod to the self-taught designer who started out in fashion as a penniless young single mother with twin boys to look after. Back then, after marrying a much older man straight from school, the young Agnes Bourgois (hence Agnes b.) dreamed of being a museum curator. Now, she has a collection of Basquiats, Warhols, Nan Goldins, Martin Parrs and paintings by Gilbert and George all of her own that many institutions would mortgage themselves for.



French fashion designer Agnes Trouble known for her fashion brand "Agnes B." poses during a photo session at the Fab in Paris. —AFP photos



But Agnes b. sees herself more as a motherly custodian than a collector of artists who can fall rapidly out of favor. The art world can be just as ruthless and as capricious as fashion. "Suddenly, no one cares about what these artists have done, and they drop them. I don't like that," she told AFP. For her, an artwork becomes "an orphan when it leaves an artist's studio. It needs to be adopted, loved, seen and understood," the designer insisted.

Born in Versailles, near Paris, into a genteel, but impoverished Catholic family, Agnes b.'s adolescence was marked by abuse by her uncle. It took her more than 60 years to tackle the subject with the film "Je m'appelle hmmm" ("I'm called hmmm"), which she wrote and directed, although she insisted it wasn't actually her own story. Agnes b. married the future publisher Christian Bourgois-who was 12 years her senior-when she was 17.

'78-year-old Greta Thunberg'

"After I had my twins at 19, I left Christian at 21 without a penny. I

was lucky to be very poor without being very unhappy. I would buy ham from the shop with the money they gave me for bring them empty bottles. "One day, one of the twins said to me: 'Aren't you lucky Mummy to to have us!'" The experience helped forge her social conscience that has seen her support innumerable liberal causes in France and beyond. "I really feel for the Rohingyas, the Uyghurs and the climate," the designer declared, adding that she is "very afraid of Trump". With France hit by strikes sparked by government pension reforms, she worried for those who have been "forgotten".

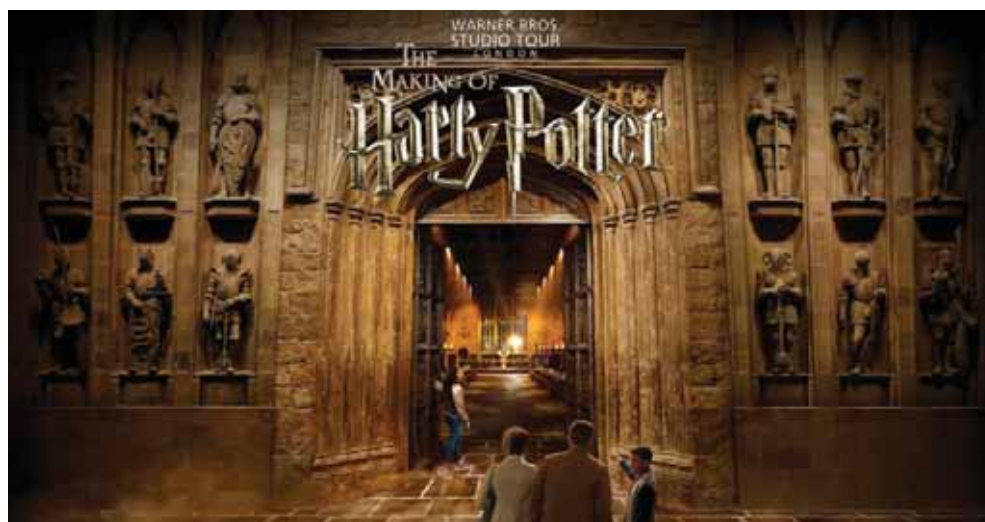
"Nobody talks about the cleaners or the artists who have nothing. Who is defending them? "I am a bit of a 78-year-old Greta Thunberg," she joked, referring to the teenage Swedish climate activist. Her liberal Catholic faith, however, is a comfort. "It's pegged into me," she said. "I don't have that doubt even though I really like people who doubt. I need to talk to my friends in heaven." "We are not machines or animals, even if animals have a kind of soul themselves too." —AFP



Ride the Hogwarts Express to feel like your Hogwarts letter has finally come.
— Evenfh / Getty Images

Top 10 HARRY POTTER experiences in the world

Deep in the Scottish Highlands it is rumored there exists a mysterious school for young witches and wizards. But you needn't go traipsing into the Scottish wilds to experience a bit of the magic for yourself. Across the world there are a plethora of spell-binding attractions and experiences aimed at bringing the wonderful world of Harry Potter to life. So have your broomstick at the ready, prime your Floo powder or practice your Apparition skills to check out these top 10 Harry Potter experiences around the world.



See all the details from your favorite Harry Potter movie scenes at the Warner Brothers Studio Tour in London. — www.getyourguide.com



For a glimpse of J.K. Rowling's inspiration and a Diagon Alley experience, head to the Livraria Lello in Porto, Portugal. — Kike Calvo / Getty Images



Used as a backdrop for many key scenes in Harry Potter movies, travelers can take flying lessons at Alnwick Castle.

— Gannet77 / Getty Images

Jump aboard the Hogwarts Express

Few motifs get Harry Potter fans' hearts afluttering like the crimson-red Hogwarts Express steaming across the Glenfinnan Viaduct. If you're yet to receive your Hogwarts letter, don't worry, you can still make this iconic journey with a return trip on Scotland's Jacobite Steam Train - the same company that provided the actual steam engine and carriages used in the films.

Setting off from Fort William, this 84-mile round trip will whisk you through familiar filmic landscapes from the viaduct itself to Loch Shiel which featured as Hogwarts' eery Blake Lake.

Go behind the scenes of the movies

The Warner Brothers Studio Tour, located 20-miles outside London, is the ultimate experience for any Harry Potter fan. Incredible special effects, surprise reveals, huge chunks of set and thousands of props and costumes tell the story of how a visionary team brought the movies to life. Poke your nose into the Gryffindor common room, wander the foggy Forbidden Forest or marvel at the splendor of Gringotts Bank, before grabbing yourself a bubbling butterbeer and hitting the gift shops for an astounding array of Harry Potter merch. Visit during the holidays for themed events and to see "Hogwarts in the Snow." Tickets must be booked in advance.

Browse a Diagon Alley boutique

Step foot inside Porto's Livraria Lello bookshop and you'll feel as though you've been transported straight into a Diagon Alley boutique. The neo-Gothic interior (stacked floor-to-ceiling with glossily-bound books) is an impressive illusion: what appears as intricately-carved wood is actually painted plaster, dappled by a magical light from the magnificent stained-glass ceiling. The piece de resistance has to be the scarlet staircase that winds like a two-headed snake to the store's mezzanine level. As you browse the bookshelves - avoiding the restricted section, of course - it's easy to see how J.K. Rowling was inspired by this interior when she worked in Porto as an English teacher between 1991 and 1993. There is a \$5 entry fee which can be redeemed when you buy a book.

Witness the magic live on stage

The magic of the eighth Harry Potter story comes to life in the world-renowned stage production of Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, playing in theaters in London, Hamburg, Melbourne, New York, San Francisco and Toronto. Jumping between past and present, the story follows Harry's youngest son Albus as he wrestles with the burden of his family's legacy. Per-

passageway, you'll find the spell-binding Wizard Chambers. Faux-Medieval tapestries and stained-glass windows create a gothic-castle feel, while trunks, cauldrons and curious artifacts - as well as a Gryffindor-esque four poster bed - bring the magic to life.

While in London, stop by Platform 93/4 at King's Cross Station or book onto a walking tour to visit the city sights that starred in the films. If you've yet to perfect your Apparition skills, Harry Potter-themed accommodations are popping up all over the world. Airbnb is a great place to start with some stunning options like the spectacularly-designed Wizarding Room in Melbourne, Australia.

Adventure through the wizarding world

With four locations in Los Angeles, Orlando and Osaka, Japan, you'll need a Time-Turner to fit in everything at Universal Studios' Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Explore your favorite facets of Hogwarts and beyond on rides like Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey and Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure before wand shopping at Ollivanders and dinner at the Leaky Cauldron.

There's an extra touch of magic at Orlando where the two parks - which separate Diagon Alley (Universal Studios Florida) from Hogsmeade (Universal's Islands of Adventure) - are connected by a working replica of the Hogwarts Express. To access both parks and the Hogwarts Express, you'll need a Park-to-Park admission ticket or Annual Pass.

Sign up for flying lessons

The battlements and archways of the 14th-century Alnwick Castle are an impressive sight to behold; not least because the castle is Hollywood royalty. For fifty years, Alnwick has been



After spending a night in a wizard room, take a Harry Potter walking tour of London. — Ministry of Joy / Getty Images



At Herring Green Farm Falconry Centre, people can interact with snowy owls just like Hedwig. — Tstajduhar / Getty Images

formed in two parts, the play enchants with special effects and a cast of familiar characters. Tickets sell out fast, sometimes nearly a year in advance, but subscribe to the mailing list for release dates and returns or apply for the Friday Forty, a weekly scheme which releases 40 top-billed tickets at £40/\$40 every Friday.

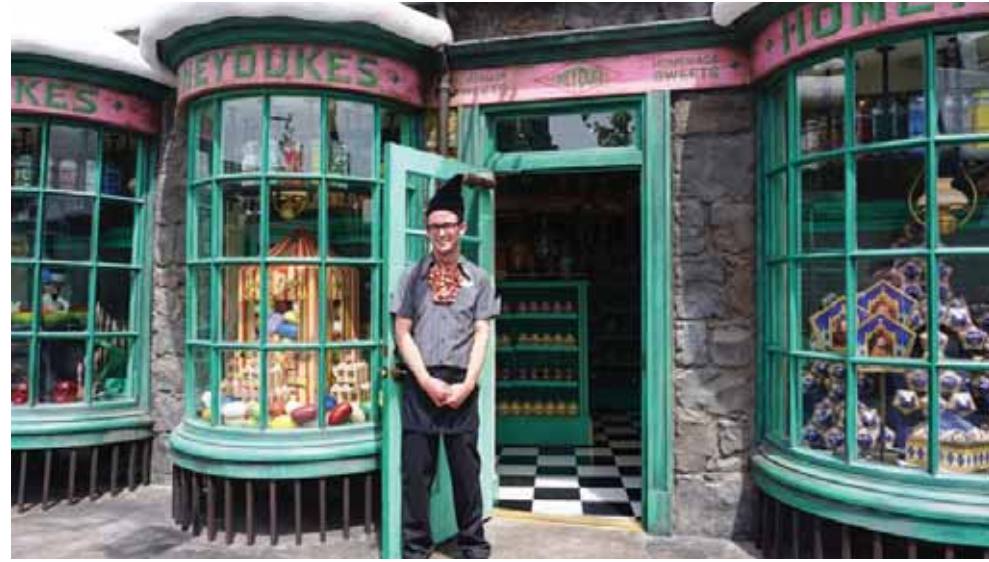
Spend a night in magical surrounds

Ever dreamt of spending a night in a Hogwarts dorm room? Now you can, with a stay at London's Georgian House Hotel. The outside may look unassumingly muggle, but inside, concealed behind a bookcase down a portrait-lined

Lifestyle | Travel



Now showing in multiple cities worldwide, *Harry Potter and Cursed Child* is a chance to dive deeper into the Potter Family saga. — Steven Ferdman / Getty Images



Live and breathe everything Harry Potter at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. — Anadolu Agency / Getty Images

used in blockbuster hits like *Star Trek*, *Transformers* and *Downton Abbey* as well as several of the *Harry Potter* films.

You'll recognize the Inner Bailey from when Ron and Harry crash-landed the flying Ford Anglia, the Lion Arch from jaunts to Hagrid's cabin and, most iconic of all, the Outer Bailey as the location of Harry's first flying lesson with Madam Mooch. Today, visitors can enjoy daily broomstick training sessions in the very same spot as well as a plethora of Potter-inspired events.

Enroll in wizarding school

Though not technically *Harry Potter*-themed, the College of Wizardry at Czocha Castle in Poland is about as close as you can get to roaming the halls of Hogwarts. This epic live action role play has you spend three nights at the 14th-century castle under the guise of your pre-assigned wizarding character.

After being sorted into one of five houses - Faust, Molin, Sendivogius, Durentius and Libussa (die-hard Gryffindor's will have to concede on this one) - spend your days attending



Learn to cook all the most amazing dishes served at Hogwarts. — Belfast Cookery School

alchemy lessons, meeting magical creatures, exploring the castle's hidden passageways or dancing the night away at the Witchard's Ball. Tickets are steep, but include all meals, robes and a school handbook. Attendees must be 18 or over.

Learn to make spell-binding sweet treats

If you've ever found yourself salivating at the mere thought of those Hogwarts house tables groaning under the weight of evermore enticing dishes, then you'll love this *Harry Potter*-inspired cookery class. Under the tutelage of the Belfast Cookery School, who've kitted out their kitchen to resemble the Great Hall, you'll master the magical skills needed to perfect treats like Pumpkin Pasties and Harry's favorite dessert of treacle tart with vanilla ice cream. Ideal for *Harry Potter* fans of all ages, book onto the next class or plan your own private event with the school.

Hang out with Hedwig and friends

From Buckbeak to Aragog and Norbert the baby dragon, J.K. Rowling's magical creatures often stole the show; none more so than Harry's beloved owl, Hedwig. Get an up-close encounter with these captivating winged creatures at the Herring Green Farm Falconry Centre in Bedford, England. Their annual "Harry Potter tea with owls" events give visitors the chance to fly, handle and interact with the birds - including the spectacular snowy owl - before enjoying a scrumptious Potter-themed spread of tea and cake. Tickets grant you access to explore the rest of the center as well as the other "Harry Potter weekend" events. — www.lonelyplanet.com

At the Czocha Castle in Poland, travelers can take all wizarding classes they want. — Gosiek - B / Getty Images



Comic

Word Search

World Currencies

Find and circle all of the world currencies that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - a John Paul Getty quotation.

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

AFGHANI	EURO	KWANZA	NEW SHEKEL	RUPEE
ARIARY	FORINT	KYAT	NGULTRUM	RUPIAH
BAHT	FRANC	LEMPIRA	OUGUIYA	SHILLING
BALBOA	GOLD CORDOBA	LEONE	PATACA	SOM
BIRR	GOURDE	LILANGENI	PESO	SUCRE
BOLIVAR	GUARANI	LIRA	POUND	SYLI
BOLIVIANO	GUILDER	LITAS	PULA	TAKA
COLON	HRVYNIA	LOTTI	QUETZAL	TALA
DALASI	KINA	MANAT	RAND	TENGE
DENAR	KORUNA	METICAL	REAL	TOLAR
DINAR	KRONA	NAIRA	RIAL	VATU
DIRHAM	KROON	NAKFA	RINGGIT	WON
DOLLAR	KROON	NEW CEDI	RYAL	YEN
DRAM	KUNA	NEW DONG	RUBLE	YUAN RENMINBI
ESCUDO	KWACHA	NEW KIP	RUFUYAA	ZLOTY

Yesterday's Solution

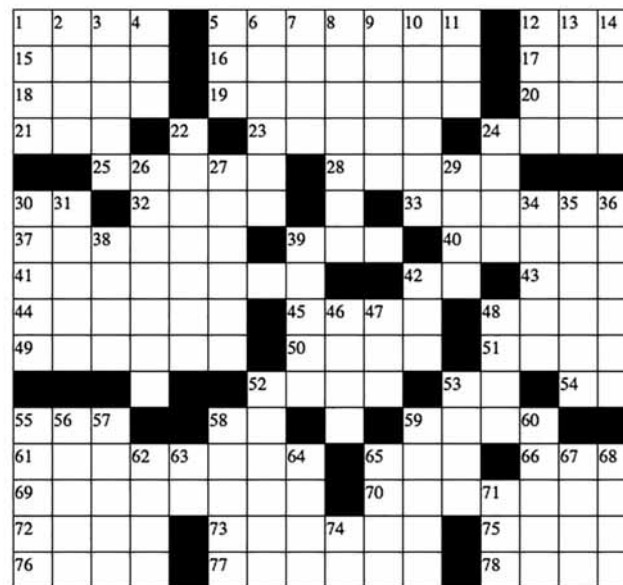
Winter

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

BLACK ICE	HAIL	SEASON	SNOWBOARD
BLIZZARD	HEADBAND	SKATES	SNOWFLAKE
BOOTS	HIBERNATION	SKI DOO	SNOWMAN
CARNIVAL	HOCKEY	SKI PANTS	SNOWSHOES
CHRISTMAS	HOLIDAYS	SKIING	SOLSTICE
COLD	ICE FISHING	SLED	SOUP
EGG NOG	ICICLES	SLEET	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

The hidden sentence is: ONE KIND WORD CAN WARM THREE WINTER MONTHS

Crossword 2424



ACROSS

- French cabaret singer (1915-1963).
- French nuclear physicist who generalized the wave-particle duality by proposing that particles of matter exhibit wavelike properties (1892-1987).
- Type genus of the family Myciadidae.
- The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
- Substitute a person or thing for (another that is broken or inefficient or lost or no longer working or yielding what is expected).
- An unabridged dictionary constructed on historical principles.
- (used especially of vegetation) Having lost all moisture.
- (zoology) Lacking a tail or taillike appendage.
- The syllable naming the sixth (subdiat) note of a major or minor scale in solmization.
- A light touch or stroke.
- Cause to change.
- Strike with disgust or revulsion.
- (Babylonian) Any of a group of powerful earth spirits or genii.
- A white trivalent metallic element.
- The twelfth month of the civil year.
- Of or relating to or near the sacrum.
- Worn away as by water or ice or wind.
- Shrubby tree widely distributed along tropical shores.
- A country on the island of Dominica.
- An egg unit of work or energy.
- A nitrogen-containing base found in

- RNA (but not in DNA) and derived from pyrimidine.
- Avatar of Vishnu.
 - Something that is a source of danger.
 - (Norse mythology) Ruler of the Aesir.
 - A fabric made by knitting.
 - A ductile gray metallic element of the lanthanide series.
 - A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
 - A leukocyte with basophilic granules easily stained by basic stains.
 - A period of time spent sleeping.
 - City in central Iran.
 - Reprehensible acquisitiveness.
 - A sudden quick movement.
 - German mathematician (1804-1851).
 - An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
 - A school teaching mechanical and industrial arts and the applied sciences.
 - A genus of tropical Asian and Malaysian palm trees.
 - Gully or streambed in North Africa and the Middle East that remains dry except during rainy season.

DOWN

- An anxiety disorder associated with serious traumatic events and characterized by such symptoms as guilt about surviving or reliving the trauma in dreams or numbness and lack of involvement with reality or recurrent thoughts and images.

- The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
- Jordan's port.
- At a great distance in time or space or degree.
- An undergarment worn by women to support their breasts.
- The process of remembering (especially the process of recovering information by mental effort).
- A translucent mineral consisting of hydrated silica of variable color.
- Any one of three large skeletal muscles that form the buttock and move the thigh.
- Filled with a great quantity.
- (Greek mythology) Son of Daedalus.
- The fatty flesh of eel.
- Among the largest bony fish.
- Not only so, but.
- A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.
- Of or relating to the spleen.
- A tax on employees and employers that is used to fund the Social Security system.
- A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- Of or relating to the process of hearing.
- God of love and erotic desire.
- (in Indian English) The number that is represented as a one followed by 7 zeros.
- A major European river carrying more traffic than any other river in the world.
- Of or relating to the aorta.
- A member of a legation.
- A strategically located monarchy on the southern and eastern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula.
- American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
- A decree that prohibits something.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- (prefix) Bad or erroneous or lack of.
- A brace that extends from the rear of the keel to support the rudderpost.
- Pertaining to one of the small sacs (as in a compound gland).
- A small cake leavened with yeast.
- A city in northwestern Switzerland.
- Savory jelly based on fish or meat stock used as a mold for meats or vegetables.
- Largest crested screamer.
- Type genus of the Gavidae.
- (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
- Profane or obscene expression usually of surprise or anger.
- A silver-white metallic element of the platinum group that resembles platinum.
- A cord that is drawn through eyelets or around hooks in order to draw together two edges (as of a shoe or garment).
- Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
- Harsh or corrosive in tone.
- A beautiful and graceful girl.
- (used especially of commodities) In the natural unprocessed condition.
- In operation or operational.

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

TV Listings



01:50 Security
03:25 Crimson Tide
05:20 Men In Black
07:00 WarGames
08:55 Fahrenheit 451
10:35 Crimson Tide
12:40 Detective Dee Mystery Of The Phantom
14:55 Independence Day
17:30 47 Ronin
19:40 Black Panther
22:00 Platoon

17:35 Friends
18:00 Friends
18:30 Friends
19:00 Friends
19:30 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
20:00 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
20:30 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
21:00 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
21:30 Comedy Central Presents: Menna W FINA
22:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
22:30 Demetri Martin: Person
23:30 Alternatino



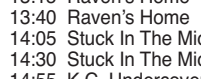
00:10 Evermoor Chronicles
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Alex & Co.
01:25 Alex & Co.
01:50 Evermoor Chronicles
02:15 Evermoor Chronicles
02:40 Alex & Co.
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:30 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Evermoor Chronicles
04:20 Evermoor Chronicles
04:45 Alex & Co.
05:10 Alex & Co.
05:35 Violetta
06:25 Binny And The Ghost
06:45 Rolling With The Ronks
06:50 Rolling With The Ronks
07:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
07:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
07:50 Jessie
08:15 Jessie
08:40 Freaky Friday
10:10 101 Dalmatian Street
10:20 Bunk'd
10:45 Bunk'd
11:10 Bunk'd
11:35 A.N.T. Farm
12:00 A.N.T. Farm
12:25 That's So Raven
12:50 That's So Raven
13:15 Raven's Home
13:40 Raven's Home
14:05 Stuck In The Middle
14:30 Stuck In The Middle
14:55 K.C. Undercover
15:20 K.C. Undercover
15:45 Bizaardvark
16:10 Bizaardvark
16:35 Sydney To The Max
17:00 Sydney To The Max
17:25 Coop And Cami Ask The World
17:50 Coop And Cami Ask The World



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



00:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
00:30 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
00:55 Impractical Jokers
01:20 Ridiculousness Arabia
01:45 Inside Amy Schumer
02:05 Friends
02:30 Friends
02:55 Lip Sync Battle
03:20 Ridiculousness Arabia
03:45 Inside Amy Schumer
04:05 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
04:35 Lip Sync Battle
05:00 Friends
05:25 Friends
05:50 Friends
06:20 Friends
06:45 Friends
07:10 Impractical Jokers
07:35 Impractical Jokers
08:00 Impractical Jokers
08:30 Impractical Jokers
08:55 Takeshis Castle Indonesia
09:20 Takeshis Castle Indonesia
09:50 Takeshis Castle Indonesia
10:15 Takeshis Castle Indonesia
10:40 Takeshis Castle Indonesia
11:05 Friends
11:30 Friends
11:55 Friends
12:20 Friends
12:45 Friends
13:10 Workaholics
13:35 Workaholics
14:00 Workaholics
14:30 Workaholics
14:55 Workaholics
15:20 Ridiculousness Arabia
15:45 Ridiculousness Arabia
16:15 Ridiculousness Arabia
16:45 Ridiculousness Arabia
17:10 Friends



00:10 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
00:35 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
01:00 Boyster
01:20 Boyster
01:45 Counterfeit Cat
02:10 Counterfeit Cat
02:30 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
02:55 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
03:20 Boyster
03:40 Boyster
04:05 Counterfeit Cat
04:30 Counterfeit Cat
04:50 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
05:15 Furiki Wheels
05:35 Furiki Wheels
06:00 Lab Rats
06:25 Lab Rats
06:50 Phineas And Ferb
07:15 Phineas And Ferb
07:40 Gravity Falls
08:05 Gravity Falls
08:30 Phineas And Ferb
08:55 Phineas And Ferb
09:20 Lab Rats: You Posted What?
10:10 Big City Greens
10:35 Big City Greens
10:55 Big City Greens
11:20 Big City Greens
11:40 Big City Greens
12:05 Big City Greens
12:25 Gravity Falls
12:50 Gravity Falls
13:10 DuckTales Shorts
13:15 Phineas And Ferb
13:40 Phineas And Ferb
14:05 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
14:30 Phineas And Ferb
14:55 Phineas And Ferb
15:20 Big City Greens
15:45 Big City Greens
16:10 Supa Strikas
16:35 Supa Strikas
17:00 Lab Rats
17:25 DuckTales



00:00 PJ Masks
00:30 The Lion Guard
01:00 Sofia The First
01:30 Gigantosaurus
02:00 PJ Masks
02:25 PJ Masks
02:50 Paprika
03:00 Zou
03:15 Zou
03:30 Henry Hugglemonster
03:55 Henry Hugglemonster
04:20 Paprika
04:30 Paprika
04:40 Zou
04:55 Zou
05:10 Zou
05:25 Paprika
05:35 Paprika

05:45 Henry Hugglemonster
06:00 Henry Hugglemonster
06:15 Henry Hugglemonster
06:30 Henry Hugglemonster
06:45 PJ Masks
07:00 PJ Masks
07:15 PJ Masks
07:30 Gigantosaurus
07:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
08:00 The Lion Guard
08:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
09:00 PJ Masks
09:30 Bluey
09:40 Bluey
09:50 Bluey
10:00 Bluey
10:10 Bluey
10:20 Bluey
10:30 Elena Of Avalor
11:00 Elena Of Avalor
11:30 Elena Of Avalor
12:00 Sofia The First
12:30 Sofia The First
13:00 PJ Masks
13:30 PJ Masks
14:00 The Floating Palace
15:00 Vampirina
15:30 Vampirina
16:00 Bluey
16:10 Bluey
16:20 Bluey
16:30 T.O.T.S.
17:00 Elena Of Avalor
17:30 The Lion Guard
18:00 T.O.T.S.
18:30 Bluey
18:40 Bluey
18:50 Bluey
19:00 Puppy Dog Pals
19:30 Vampirina
20:00 PJ Masks
20:30 The Lion Guard
21:00 Sofia The First
21:30 Elena Of Avalor
22:00 Fancy Nancy Clancy
22:30 Bluey
22:40 Bluey
22:50 Bluey
23:00 Puppy Dog Pals
23:30 Vampirina



00:10 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
00:35 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
01:00 Boyster
01:20 Boyster
01:45 Counterfeit Cat
02:10 Counterfeit Cat
02:30 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
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03:20 Boyster
03:40 Boyster
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16:35 Supa Strikas
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17:25 DuckTales

17:50 Phineas And Ferb
18:15 Phineas And Ferb
18:40 Supa Strikas
19:05 Milo Murphy's Law: The Phineas & Ferb Effect
19:55 DuckTales Shorts
20:00 Lab Rats
20:25 Furiki Wheels
20:50 Phineas And Ferb
21:15 Phineas And Ferb
21:40 DuckTales
22:05 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
22:30 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
22:55 DuckTales Shorts
23:00 Furiki Wheels
23:25 Dude That's My Ghost
23:50 Dude That's My Ghost



00:00 2019: What E! Year
01:00 Flip It Like Disick
02:00 Nightly Pop
02:30 Nightly Pop
03:00 WAGs Miami
04:00 Botched
05:00 Botched
06:00 Botched
07:00 Botched
08:00 E! News: Daily Pop
08:55 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
09:50 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
10:45 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
11:40 E! News: Daily Pop
12:35 Flip It Like Disick
13:30 Flip It Like Disick
14:25 Flip It Like Disick
15:20 E! News: Daily Pop
16:15 2019: What E! Year
17:10 Botched
18:05 Botched
19:00 E! News: Daily Pop
20:00 Flip It Like Disick
21:00 Flip It Like Disick
22:00 Flip It Like Disick
23:00 2019: What E! Year



00:30 The Colour Of War
01:15 Patton 360
02:00 UFO Hunters
02:45 America's Book Of Secrets
03:30 Serial Killer Earth
04:15 Ancient Impossible
05:00 Ancient Aliens
05:45 Deep Sea Salvage
06:30 MysteryQuest
07:15 The Colour Of War
08:00 America's Book Of Secrets
08:45 Serial Killer Earth
09:30 Ancient Impossible
10:15 Ancient Aliens
11:00 Deep Sea Salvage
11:45 MysteryQuest
12:30 The Colour Of War
13:15 UFO Hunters
14:00 America's Book Of Secrets
14:45 Serial Killer Earth
15:30 Ancient Impossible
16:15 Ancient Aliens
17:00 Deep Sea Salvage
17:45 MysteryQuest
18:30 The Colour Of War
19:15 UFO Hunters
20:00 America's Book Of Secrets
20:45 Serial Killer Earth
21:30 Clash Of The Gods
22:15 Ancient Aliens
23:00 Hangar 1: The UFO Files
23:45 MysteryQuest



00:20 The Curse Of Civil War Gold
01:05 Storage Wars
01:25 Storage Wars
01:50 American Pickers
02:35 Pawn Stars
02:55 Pawn Stars
03:20 Why Does Everyone Hate The English? With Al Murray
04:10 Project Impossible
05:05 Forged In Fire
06:00 Counting Cars
06:20 Counting Cars

06:45 The Curse Of Civil War Gold
07:30 Storage Wars
07:50 Storage Wars
08:15 American Pickers
09:00 Pawn Stars
09:20 Pawn Stars
09:45 Why Does Everyone Hate The English? With Al Murray
10:30 Project Impossible
11:15 Forged In Fire
12:00 American Pickers
12:45 American Pickers
13:30 American Pickers
14:15 Football: A Brief History By Alfie Allen
15:00 Presidents At War
16:30 Presidents At War
18:00 WW2 Treasure Hunters
18:45 WW2 Treasure Hunters
19:30 WW2 Treasure Hunters
20:15 Custer: The Final Mystery
21:00 Navy Seals: America's Secret Warriors
22:40 Ancient Aliens
23:30 American Pickers



00:10 Fish Of The Day
00:35 Fish Of The Day
01:00 48 Hrs Destination
01:25 48 Hrs Destination
01:50 Late Nite Eats
02:15 Late Nite Eats
02:40 What's For Sale With A View
03:05 What's For Sale With A View
03:30 Climbing The Property Ladder
04:20 Get Lost In Korea
05:10 Ultimate Airport Dubai
06:00 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
06:25 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
06:50 Miguel's Feasts
07:15 Miguel's Feasts
07:40 Gok's Chinese Takeaway
08:30 Late Nite Eats
08:55 United Plates Of America
09:20 Log Cabin Fever
10:10 Pizza In Parma
10:35 Delicacy Hunter: On The Silk Road
11:00 Ultimate Airport Dubai
11:50 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
12:15 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
12:40 Miguel's Feasts
13:05 Miguel's Feasts
13:30 Gok's Chinese Takeaway
14:20 Late Nite Eats
14:45 United Plates Of America
15:10 Log Cabin Fever
16:00 Pizza In Parma
16:25 Delicacy Hunter: On The Silk Road
16:50 Ultimate Airport Dubai
17:45 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
18:10 Miguel's Feasts
18:40 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
19:35 Gok's Chinese Takeaway
20:30 Late Nite Eats
20:55 United Plates Of America
21:25 Log Cabin Fever
22:20 Pizza In Parma
22:45 Cruise Ship Diaries
23:15 Ultimate Airport Dubai



00:00 Nazi Megastructures
00:55 Ultimate Survival WWII
01:45 Locked Up Abroad
02:35 Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey
03:25 Somewhere In China
04:15 Nazi Megastructures
05:05 Ultimate Survival WWII
06:00 Locked Up Abroad
06:55 Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey
07:50 Nazi Megastructures
08:45 Ultimate Survival WWII
09:40 My Fighting Season
10:35 Car SOS
11:30 Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey
12:25 Access 360 World Heritage
13:20 My Fighting Season
14:15 Airport Security: First Class
15:10 America Inside Out With Katie Couric
16:05 Egypt From Above

17:00 Car SOS
18:00 Access 360 World Heritage
19:00 Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey
20:00 Explorer XL
21:00 Live Free Or Die
22:00 Airport Security: First Class
23:00 Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey



00:30 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
01:30 Unlikely Animal Friends
02:30 Wild Alaska: Arctic Summer
03:30 The Hidden Kingdoms Of China
04:30 Pond Stars
05:30 World's Deadliest Killer
06:30 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
07:30 Shocking Sharks
08:30 Africa's Deadliest: Botswana Compilations
09:30 World's Deadliest Animals
10:30 Snakes In The City
11:30 Shocking Sharks
12:30 Africa's Deadliest: Botswana Compilations
13:30 World's Deadliest Animals
14:30 Snakes In The City
15:30 Monster Snakes
16:30 World's Deadliest
17:30 Pond Stars
18:30 Lion Kingdom
19:30 Europe's Wild West
20:30 Snakes In The City
21:30 Madagascar's Fantastic Creatures
22:30 World's Deadliest
23:30 Lion Kingdom



00:12 Breadwinners
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Rabbids Invasion
01:24 Sanjay And Craig
01:48 Sanjay And Craig
02:12 Winx Club
02:36 Winx Club
03:00 Regal Academy
03:24 Regal Academy
03:48 Rabbids Invasion
04:12 Rabbids Invasion
04:36 Breadwinners
05:00 Welcome To The Wayne
05:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
05:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
06:12 The Loud House
06:36 Motu Patlu
07:00 Rise Of The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
07:24 Chop Chop Ninja
07:36 Chop Chop Ninja
07:48 Winx Club
08:12 Regal Academy
08:36 I Am Frankie
09:00 Henry Danger
09:24 The Bureau Of Magical Things
09:48 Game Shakers
10:12 School Of Rock
10:36 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky And Dawn
11:00 Henry Danger
11:24 The Loud House
11:36 The Loud House
11:48 Hunter Street
12:12 Lego City Adventures
12:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
13:00 Motu Patlu
13:24 The Bureau Of Magical Things
13:48 Noobees
14:36 Knight Squad
15:00 Tiny Christmas
16:12 Albert: The Little Tree With Big Dreams
17:00 Motu Patlu
17:24 Knight Squad
17:48 Hunter Street
18:12 Hunter Street
18:36 Hunter Street
19:00 Hunter Street
19:24 Hunter Street
19:48 Henry Danger
20:12 Noobees
21:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
21:24 Chop Chop Ninja
21:36 Chop Chop Ninja
21:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
22:12 Welcome To The Wayne
22:36 Sanjay And Craig
23:00 Regal Academy
23:24 Winx Club

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Wisdom rather than knowledge is what counts most in your life to you now. You have been down troubled roads and turned each stumbling block into a stepping stone. You have lived and learned and may have an opportunity to share this wisdom with a troubled friend. Don't get discouraged if your advice is overlooked. Remember, no one could have changed your mind about some of the mistakes you made. Realize others too, may have to experience trouble to learn the lessons that are to be learned in their lives. You are a good friend and a good person. You may find today you are shown appreciation and gratitude for who you are to others.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may encounter an unusual amount of stress today. Counter it by taking time for yourself to do what you enjoy most. Paint, write, or escape with a good book. Yoga or meditation may even be something you should consider making a part of your daily routine. Be careful not to shut yourself off from those who care about you. Their support is important. Do not try to conquer every problem on your own.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Teamwork is strongly indicated, but those you work with aren't fond of your day dreamy mood today. Your required tasks pull you into a most productive cycle and you overcome any obstacles you may encounter. You could have a secret you're having trouble keeping; consider the consequences of sharing this. Someone - a younger person - could demand that you decide today when you're just not ready; this could lead to some difficulties. You have an understanding heart when it comes to a friend in need. Sticking to your guns in a sticky situation could prove to be your best bet.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Are you getting mixed signals? That's not unusual. Feelings are complicated, and what one wants from you may change daily, or even hourly. Don't hesitate to ask for clarification. Feelings are abstract. Actions are concrete. Find out what you need to do. Take action and do not look back. Keep your eyes on the prize.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Today is a day you have been longing for. You need an escape. Let your hair down and head for wide open spaces. Take a ride in a convertible. Just get outside and breathe in the fresh air. You crave a sense of freedom. Decide exactly what you want out of life and make it happen. This is a great time to make clear decisions about your future.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You will make a new acquaintance today. Don't assume the person is insignificant. There may be connections or influence here that will lead to opportunities for you. Or, it may be that this is the very person you need in your life right now. Be accessible. Make it clear that you are open to what the person has to offer. You may find sharing your feelings openly with others, helps them open up to you.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You have a great desire for change. Your career or something concerning your profession seem to be preventing it. You have a deep desire for self-growth and change now. It seems if you continue on the same career path this will be a huge interference for you. You may find that your sensitivity is stifled by your job requirements. Too much work and no play is never a good thing. Find your balance.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Wisdom rather than knowledge is what counts most in your life to you now. You have been down troubled roads and turned each stumbling block into a stepping stone. You have lived and learned and may have an opportunity to share this wisdom with a troubled friend. Don't get discouraged if your advice is overlooked. Remember, no one could have changed your mind about some of the mistakes you made. Realize others too, may have to experience trouble to learn the lessons that are to be learned in their lives. You are a good friend and a good person. You may find today you are shown appreciation and gratitude for who you are to others.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Today is a great day to just go with the flow. Go ahead and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you. Don't be surprised if taking a chance brings great reward. You may feel extra close to a loved one today. Aris, this may be the day you learn to truly learn to love and an appreciate yourself for who you have become and where you are in life. You have been feeling a that need to be needed and appreciated and today may just the day you receive that reward you have been longing for.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Let your hair down and take a drive. A horseback ride would be even better. Turn the music up loud and throw your cares out of the window. Find an escape and route to peace. Enjoy this day and all it brings. Spoil yourself. You may find you are more materialistic than usual. A shopping trip is in order to satisfy this need. Head to the mall and go for it! You work hard and deserve to be free from want.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Close relationships take on more emotional depth, power and importance in your world now. You feel as if you are needed and cared for. When these two feelings are missing you automatically have a feeling of uneasiness come over you. You were not made to be alone. Expressing your desires and vulnerability, helps draw your special someone closer to you. You may find the more you allow yourself to open up the closer you two become.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You are being noticed in the workplace. It may become very obvious to your superiors at work that you are talented beyond the title you hold. You may find that you are in line for a promotion or you will be assigned a special project due to your leadership abilities. Everyone has their eye on you. From your personal life to your career, you are beginning to outshine those around you. You may find your analytical skills are in top shape and you are not only able to solve every problem you come across but may be finding satisfaction in spending your spare time solving puzzles or playing word games. You are in the mood to exercise your mind.

Country Codes

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

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times

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Friday, January 31, 2020

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

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

Salmiya, Belajat Street, Tel: 1881122

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

ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

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

SPECIALIZED IN:

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

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 Tel.: (+965) 22060777.
 @DrFahadS, @RenovaBB, @DardonaBB
 Email: drfahad@beautybeyond.com.kw
 www.beautybeyond.com.kw

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

Specialized in:

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

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

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

Specialized in:

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

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

Scope of Clinical Practice:

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

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

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

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

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

IC INTERNATIONAL CLINIC

American Board Certified in General Surgery
 Member of the Society of American Gastrointestinal & Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)
 Higher specialization in Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgery & Organ Transplantation
 Member of many prestigious surgical societies.

- ◆ Day case surgeries
- ◆ Diagnosis, treatment and follow up of all surgical emergencies
- ◆ Surgery for morbid obesity (sleeve, gastric bypass)
- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- ◆ Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- ◆ Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries


Dr. Hani Haider
 General Surgery Consultant
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- Eyelid fat removal
- Eyelid fat transfer
- Blepharoplasty
- Eyebrow lift
- Botox injections
- Lens transplant




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OPHTHALMOLOGY



Dr. Hatem Al-Kandari
Consultant Ophthalmologist


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Dr. Rany Essam Mitwally
Senior Registrar



Dr. Ahmed Hosni Abd Elhamid
Consultant



Dr. Abeer Khattab
Specialist







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Dr. Kiran Turaka
Ophthalmologist



Dr. Zareena Zahir
Ophthalmologist



Dr. Hasan Khan
Senior Cardiologist



Dr. P. Seshendra Nath
Orthopedic Consultant (AUSTRIA)
Specialized in Neck, Shoulder, Hip and Knee

EXIR MEDICAL SUBSPECIALITIES CENTER
Block No.4 Jahra - Kuwait

Tel: 24568857 / 24568859 Info@exircenterkw.com www.exircenterkw.com

WELCOME

Dr. Tammam Abu Ali
Consultant ENT, Head Neck, Facial Plastic Surgeon.

Membership of the royal college of surgeons in UK and Ireland.
10 years work experience in King Hospital KUW Kuwait.
By Head of ENT department in Farouq Hospital KUW Kuwait
10 years work experience in UK and Ireland.

- Endoscopic Sinus Surgery
- Septoplasty and turbinate reduction surgery by laser or RF
- Snoring and OSAP Surgery
- Rhinoplasty with open and closed techniques
- Microscopic Middle Ear Surgery and Tympanoplasty
- Salivary gland and parotid surgery
- Thyroid and parathyroid surgery
- Micro laryngeal surgery




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DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

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



Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368

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

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laposcopic and Bariatric Surgery



email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com

Academic Certificates – Training

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

Scope of clinical Practice.

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

Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228

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

Classifieds

Friday, January 31, 2020

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: Shaik Muhammad Yousuf here and after in all documents I will be known as Shaik Muhammad 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, Dungarpur, Rajasthan have changed my given name to Mufaddal Shabbir Husain and surname to Kakumama.

I, Naeema D/O Habib Husain Kabir

R/O Najampura, Sagwara Dist, Dungarpur, Rajasthan have 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, Dungarpur, 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

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is

1889988

STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind to north easterly wind, with speed of 10 - 35 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08 - 28 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	11 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	07 °C
ABDALY	21 °C	07 °C
BUBYAN	17 °C	14 °C
JAHRA	22 °C	09 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	17 °C	12 °C
AHMADI	17 °C	11 °C
NUWASIB	23 °C	09 °C
WAFRA	23 °C	09 °C
SALMY	22 °C	07 °C

SFC. CHART	30/01/2020 0000 UTC
MSL Analysis (hPa) Valid 0000 UTC 30 JAN 2020	

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	01/31	Fair and some high clouds will appear	21 °C	07 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 28 km/h
Saturday	02/01	Fair and Clouds will decrease gradually with a chance for scattered rain	22 °C	08 °C	NW	12 - 42 km/h
Sunday	02/02	Rather cool	20 °C	06 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 32 km/h
Monday	02/03	Rather cold	19 °C	06 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:39
Zuhr	12:01
Asr	15:03
Sunset	17:24
Isha	18:44

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	22 °C
MIN. Temp.	07 °C
MAX. RH	85 %
MIN. RH	20 %
MAX. Wind	SE 46 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Airlines

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

Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2020

38 US economy growing moderately; missed Trump's 3% goal in 2019



40 Apple, Broadcom ordered to pay \$1.1bn for patent infringement



41 BoE slashes Britain's growth forecast on eve of Brexit



MACAU: A general view of Macau city is seen from the observation deck of Macau Town yesterday. —AFP

Virus outbreak casts shadow on global economy

Policymakers fret over widening fallout on growth outlook

WASHINGTON/TOKYO: A rapidly spreading virus outbreak in China is emerging as a potentially major new risk to the global economy and leaving policymakers, still grappling with the impact of the Sino-US trade war, fretting over the widening fallout. In a sign of alarm over the possible damage, Bank of Japan Deputy Governor Masayoshi Amamiya said yesterday China's huge presence in the world economy must be taken into account in gauging the impact the outbreak could have on global growth.

Stocks around the world tumbled yesterday as the death toll from the spread of the coronavirus reached 170, forcing airlines to cut flights and some stores to close. The potential impact on the world economy from the outbreak took center stage in US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's news conference on Wednesday.

"China's economy is very important in the global economy now, and when China's economy slows down we do feel that - not as much though as countries that are near China, or that trade more actively with China, like some of the Western European countries," Powell said.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also voiced concern yesterday, saying he was closely watching the impact on Japan's economy including declining inbound tourism. Zhang Ming, an economist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a top government think tank, projected the outbreak would cut China's first-quarter growth by one percentage point to 5% or lower.

China has imposed travel restrictions and shut businesses to contain the outbreak, but has not quelled rising concern among companies and governments across the world.

Asian stocks sank yesterday as the death toll from the virus rose and more cases were reported around the world. "Apart from the risk to human lives, it is likely to hit travel and consumption activities. In a scenario of widespread infection, it could materially weaken economic growth and fiscal positions of governments in Asia," S&P said yesterday.

Bigger damage than SARS

Analysts are comparing the current coronavirus outbreak to the 2002-2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

epidemic, which led to about 800 deaths and slowed Asia's economic growth.

Many say the impact on global growth could be bigger this time as China now accounts for a larger share of the world economy, a view echoed by BOJ's Amamiya. The number of Chinese tourists visiting Japan has increased by more than 20 times since then, Amamiya said. "The outbreak also spread during China's Lunar (New Year) holiday, when consumption tends to peak," he added.

"We're looking very carefully at developments, including how much the impact could spread," Amamiya said in a seminar in Tokyo hosted by Jiji news agency. The fallout from the epidemic casts a shadow over the Bank of Japan's projection that global growth will pick up around mid-year and help Japan's economy sustain a moderate recovery.

China is Japan's second-largest export destination. The Chinese make up 30 percent of all tourists visiting Japan and nearly 40 percent of the total sum foreign tourists spent last year, an industry survey showed. —Reuters

Business

US economy growing moderately in Q4; missed Trump's 3% goal in 2019

Trade seen lifting growth; inventories subtracting

WASHINGTON: The US economy likely maintained a moderate pace of growth in the fourth quarter, and probably again fell short of attaining the Trump administration's coveted but elusive 3 percent annual growth target because of slumping business investment amid damaging trade tensions.

The Commerce Department's snapshot of gross domestic product yesterday could show the Federal Reserve's three interest rate cuts in 2019 helped to keep the longest expansion in history, now in its 11th year, on track and avert a downturn. Growth is, however, slowing as the stimulus fades from the White House and Republicans' huge tax reductions in 2018, a package President Donald Trump had predicted would lift growth persistently above 3 percent. So far it has fallen short of that goal.

The report comes on the heels of the US Federal Reserve deciding to keep rates unchanged. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell told reporters on Wednesday the US central bank expected "moderate economic growth to continue" but also nodded to some risks, including the recent coronavirus outbreak in China. The Trump administration's 18-month-long trade war with China last year fueled fears of a recession. Though the economic outlook has improved with this month's signing of a Phase 1 deal with Beijing, economists do not see a boost to the economy as US tariffs remained in effect on \$360 billion of Chinese imports, about two-thirds of the total.

"The economy has clearly slowed, but we are not barreling towards a recession," said Ryan Sweet, senior economist at Moody's Analytics in West Chester, Pennsylvania. "The economy is coming off its sugar high in 2019 so is not sur-

prising that we are settling back into the growth rates that we saw prior to the fiscal stimulus." Gross domestic product probably increased at a 2.1 percent annualized rate in the fourth quarter as lower borrowing costs encouraged purchases of motor vehicles, houses and other big ticket items, according to a Reuters survey of economists. A smaller import bill and more government spending are also seen keeping GDP growth at the same pace logged in the third quarter.

The forecast was, however, made before Wednesday's advance reports showing a sharp widening in the goods trade deficit in December as well as a drop in wholesale inventories. Retail inventories were unchanged last month. The data prompted some economists to cut their fourth-quarter GDP growth estimates by as much as five-tenths of a percentage point to as low as a 1.4 percent rate.

Growth estimates for 2019 are converging around 2.5 percent, which would be slower than the 2.9 percent notched in 2018. Economists estimate the speed at which the economy can grow over a long period without igniting inflation at around 1.8 percent. The White House claimed that slashing the corporate tax rate to 21 percent from 35 percent, as well as shrinking the trade deficit would boost annual GDP growth to 3.0 percent on a sustainable basis. Economists have long disagreed, pointing to structural issues like low productivity and population growth. Some also argued that there was historically not a very strong relationship between corporate tax rates and business investment.

Tough task

"If you are trying to get to 3 percent in an



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump prepares to sign the United States-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement (USMCA) during a ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House on Wednesday in Washington, DC. — AFP

economy in its 11th year of recovery that's a tough task," said Sung Won Sohn, business economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "There is a lot of uncertainty. Even though we have this initial trade agreement, I think there will be more trade wars after the (US presidential) election."

Fed Chair Powell also said the risks from trade tensions remained and businesses were adopting a "wait and see attitude." Business investment likely contracted further in the fourth quarter after declining by the most in nearly four

years in the July-September period. Trade tensions have eroded business confidence and weighed on capital expenditure. With confidence among chief executive officers remaining low in the fourth quarter after dropping to a 10-year low in the prior quarter, a rebound is unlikely soon. Business investment is also seen pressured by Boeing's suspension this month of the production of its troubled 737 MAX jetliner, which was grounded last March following two fatal crashes. Boeing on Wednesday reported its first annual loss since 1997. — Reuters

Struggling state firms hold back Balkan economies

MOSTAR, Bosnia: The aluminum smelter in the Bosnian town of Mostar has fallen eerily silent since its electricity was cut in July. The only visitors to what was once a model factory in former Yugoslavia are staff filling in redundancy papers.

The closure of debt-laden Aluminij Mostar is symptomatic of the challenges facing countries across the Balkans as they try to keep loss-making state-owned businesses inherited from the communist era afloat in market economies. The demise of the aluminum exporter also shows how 25 years after the end of the Bosnian war, everything from ethnic rifts to weak corporate governance to corruption are hindering growth, just as the world economy is slowing and European Union membership looks ever more remote.

While closure may be the only option for many Balkan firms propped up by state subsidies, local leaders are keen to salvage something from businesses that are big employers in a region where just 44 percent of the working-age population have jobs. Besides its 900 staff, Aluminij provided work for some 10,000 people in its supply chain and was a mainstay for the local railway, power company and even the Croatian port of Ploce 60 km (40 miles) to the south.

"You can't just shut down the largest plant in the country," said Emil Coric, 34, a chief engineer at Aluminij, which also employed his father before he retired seven years ago. "Somebody must take responsibility."

Aluminij's management declined to comment for this story. In Bosnia, the value of assets held by state-backed firms is worth a year's gross domestic product (GDP). In Croatia and Serbia, it's 90 percent and 70 percent respectively, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

That's in stark contrast to the EU where the value of big state-owned firms accounts for less than 30 percent of GDP in most states and is under 10 percent in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, according to a 2016 EU study.

'Not sustainable'

The World Bank, IMF and potential investors see many of the state-owned firms in the Balkans as economic burdens, sucking up taxpayers' money, putting start-ups at a competitive disadvantage and often acting as hotbeds of political cronyism.

"This situation is not sustainable and seriously impedes private sector and general economic development," said Zsuzsanna Hargitai, Western Balkans director at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. She estimated that propping up inefficient state companies costs Serbia, the biggest economy in the region, two percentage points of national output a year.

While Belgrade has sold a steel plant and a copper mine to Chinese companies, it is still subsidizing nine businesses which together employ 15,000 people. The Resavica coalmine group alone gets about \$42 million a year. In Croatia, loss-making metals producer Djuro Djakovic, in which the state holds a 38 percent stake, is seeking help with wage arrears. The government finally stumped up a guarantee of 300 million kuna (\$44 million) to help the company and avoid protests in its impoverished eastern Slavonia region.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, which split after the war into a mainly Serb region and a federation of Bosniaks and Croats - itself largely divided geographically between the two groups - there are a host of struggling state-owned firms. The IMF said last year that most were in poor financial shape and a fundamental reform of them could boost Bosnia's GDP by three percentage points a year.

Yet the story of Aluminij shows how difficult the process of making such companies viable can be. Founded next to a bauxite mine in 1981 under Yugoslavia's planned economy, Aluminij's alumina plant and smelter established itself supplying the local auto and airline sector. It was destroyed during the 1992-95 war as Mostar was on the frontline, first as Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats defeated the Bosnian Serbs, and again when the victors turned on each other in struggle that left the city divided upon ethnic lines.

Like virtually all Bosnian entities, it was rebuilt after the war along ethnic lines. It was located in territory held by the Croats, so when it reopened in 1997 only Croat workers were allowed to return to their jobs, according to organizations deployed to Bosnia after the war, such as Amnesty International. — Reuters

Shell slows pace of its share buybacks as profit halves

Plan to complete \$25bn buyback unchanged: CEO

LONDON: Royal Dutch Shell is cutting the pace of its vast \$25 billion share buyback program after lower oil and natural gas prices halved its profit in the last three months of 2019, sending its shares to their lowest since July 2017.

While the Anglo-Dutch energy company warned again that a slowing global economy could affect its buyback program, which is the world's largest, Chief Executive Ben van Beurden said Shell still intended to complete it. Shell is set to buy about \$1 billion of shares in the first quarter of 2020, which is down from \$2.75 billion per quarter since July 2018 and means it will probably miss its target of completing the program by the end of 2020, analysts said.

Shell had already warned in October that the buyback program could be delayed beyond the target because slowing global growth due to the Sino-US trade war had hit demand for oil, natural gas and chemicals.

"With \$15 billion done to date it now looks extremely challenging to complete the program by year end," Redburn analysts said. A rise in Shell's debt ratio, or gearing, to 29.3 percent in its fourth quarter from 27.9 percent in the previous quarter, and well above its 25 percent target, added to the pressure on the oil company.

Shell, which pays about \$15 billion in divi-

dends every year, plans to boost payouts to investors through dividends and share buybacks to \$125 billion between 2021 and 2025.

Although rising tensions in the Middle East and a Phase 1 trade deal between the world's top two economies boosted oil prices to above \$70 a barrel in early January, prices dropped to below \$60 this week as the outbreak of the coronavirus in China exacerbated fears global economic growth could slow.

Slowdown

Shell's fourth-quarter headline profit halved to \$2.9 billion from \$5.7 billion in the same period of 2018, its lowest in more than three years, as weaker oil and gas prices pushed the company to take a \$1.65 billion charge on its US gas fields.

Shell's cash generation, a key metric for its operations that underwent deep cost cuts in recent years, also fell sharply to \$10.3 billion from \$22 billion a year earlier. "Our intention to complete the \$25 billion share buyback program is unchanged, but the pace remains subject to macro conditions and further debt reduction," Ben van Beurden said. Shell's fourth-quarter charge was mainly related to its onshore natural gas fields in North America. Rivals including Chevron and BP have also booked a number of significant provi-



Royal Dutch Shell yesterday said its net profit slid by almost one third last year, hit by lower oil prices.

sions in recent months.

The 48 percent drop in net income attributable to shareholders, based on a current cost of supplies (CCS) and excluding identified items to \$2.9 billion was below a forecast of \$3.2 billion in a survey of analysts provided by

the company. For 2019, Shell's profit was \$16.5 billion, down 23 percent from the previous year. Free cash flow, or money available to pay for dividends and share buybacks, plummeted to \$5.4 billion in the quarter from \$16.7 billion a year earlier. —Reuters

Facebook results beat forecasts but shares take a hit

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook agreed to pay \$550 million over a privacy lawsuit as shares dropped even with the social media giant reporting stronger than forecast earnings. The leading online social network said net income rose seven percent from a year ago to \$7.3 billion, while revenue increased 25 percent to \$21 billion in the final three months of last year. But in an earnings call Wednesday, Facebook's chief financial officer David Wehner confirmed a \$550 million settlement "in connection with the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act litigation".

The Illinois settlement—which still requires a judge's approval—was based on allegations that users' biometric data was illegally gathered using photo-scanning technology and then stored. "We decided to pursue a settlement as it was in the best interest of our community and our shareholders to move past this matter," Wehner said during the call.

The number of people using Facebook monthly climbed eight percent to 2.5 billion. For all its apps including Instagram, Messenger and WhatsApp, the figure was 2.89 billion.



In this file photo, a giant digital sign is seen at Facebook's corporate headquarters campus in Menlo Park, California. —AFP

Despite CEO Mark Zuckerberg reporting stronger than forecast quarterly earnings and user growth during the earnings call, shares dropped more than seven percent.

"We had a good quarter and a strong end to the year as our community and business continue to grow," said Zuckerberg. Investors may be concerned about the continuing increases in the amount of money Facebook spends as it pours resources into protecting privacy and preventing the network from being used as a platform for hate speech, abuse, and disinformation.

Costs in the recently ended fourth quarter rose 34 percent to \$12.2 billion. Facebook ended the year with its employee ranks up 26 percent to nearly 45,000.

Shares may have also been weighed down by worries about privacy regulations hobbling the company's ability to effectively target its money-making ads. —AFP

Turnaround costs push Deutsche Bank to bigger than expected loss

FRANKFURT: Deutsche Bank plunged to a bigger than expected loss of 5.7 billion euros (\$6.3 billion) last year, its fifth in a row, as the cost of its latest turnaround attempt hit earnings.

Misconduct scandals, a failed attempt to take on Wall Street heavyweights and, more recently, an aborted merger with Commerzbank mean Germany's biggest bank is still in recovery mode more than a decade on from the global financial crisis. The latest attempt, under CEO Christian Sewing, is a 7.4-billion euro drive to cut 18,000 jobs, shrink its investment bank and focus on corporate as well as private banking.

But its efforts are being hindered by a faltering global economy and ultra-low euro zone interest rates. "Our new strategy is gaining traction," Sewing said yesterday, noting revenues had stabilized in the second half of 2019, cost cutting was on track, the bank's capital position had improved and the net loss was entirely down to revamp costs. But the 1.6 billion euros loss in the fourth quarter was larger than analysts' mean forecast of 1 billion, leading the full-year result to miss expectations of a 5 billion

euros loss. "While capital was a positive surprise, weak core operating trends could lead to further Core Bank downgrades, leaving Deutsche Bank's share price vulnerable after a good start to the year," Credit Suisse analysts wrote in a note, referring to the businesses seen as central to Deutsche's future.

The bank's shares fell almost 3 percent in early trade, but had recovered to trade a fraction higher at 0920 GMT. The results conclude a turbulent decade for Deutsche, including a cumulative loss of 15 billion euros over the last five years and an 82 percent plunge in the shares over the decade. In contrast, US rival JPMorgan Chase & Co. posted its biggest-ever profit last year as its bond trading business bounced back in the last quarter of the year.

For analysts and investors, Deutsche's ability to generate revenue has been a major concern. The bank has repeatedly trimmed its forecasts. Revenue fell 4 percent in the fourth quarter to 5.3 billion euros and was down 8 percent for the year to 23.2 billion euros.

The quarterly figure included a 5 percent drop in corporate banking and a 4 percent decline at the private bank. The investment bank's cash-cow bond trading arm saw a 31 percent jump, a big improvement on recent quarterly falls, but less than gains at some US banks. "For us Deutsche Bank remains a 'show me' stock on revenues and we need evidence in future quarters to give credit on revenue turnaround," JP Morgan Cazenove analysts said in a note. —AFP

Business

Apple, Broadcom ordered to pay \$1.1bn for patent infringement

Apple to pay \$837m and Broadcom \$270m to California Institute of Technology

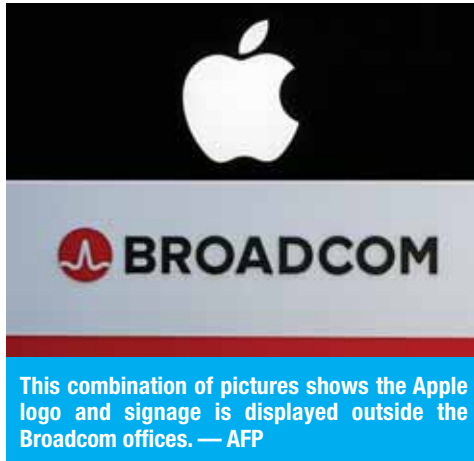
LOS ANGELES: A Los Angeles jury on Wednesday ordered Apple and Broadcom to pay \$1.1 billion to a California university for infringing wifi technology patents in what is thought to be one of the largest patent verdicts ever. Apple was ordered to pay \$837 million and Broadcom must pay \$270 million to the California Institute of Technology.

Caltech had sued both tech giants in 2016, alleging that Apple products including iPhones, iPads and Apple Watches used Broadcom components that infringed on its patents related to wireless data transmissions. While Broadcom made the chips at issue in the trial, jurors may have hit Apple with a bigger tab because it makes billions of dollars selling iPhones and other devices that incorporate the technology.

"Think of the patented technology as a piece of property that was stolen and sold to someone else," said analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group. "It doesn't matter if they had a go-between steal it for them, they were not allowed to benefit from a theft even if they were downstream."

Tangled past

The analyst, who did not attend the trial,



This combination of pictures shows the Apple logo and signage is displayed outside the Broadcom offices. — AFP

wondered whether an Apple relationship with Broadcom strengthened years ago during legal brawling with US chip giant Qualcomm played into the jury's decision. Some industry insiders believe Apple supported Broadcom's failed bid to buy Qualcomm in a hostile takeover campaign.

Broadcom in 2018 abandoned efforts to

take over US smartphone chipmaker Qualcomm after its bid was blocked by President Donald Trump over national security concerns. Qualcomm had rejected the unsolicited offer from Broadcom, which makes an array of chips for wireless communications, set-top boxes and electronic displays.

Broadcom last year moved its headquarters from Singapore to California. Meanwhile, Apple and Qualcomm agreed in early 2019 to "dismiss all litigation" against each other worldwide in what had been a sprawling battle over royalty payments.

Repercussions?

Both Apple and Broadcom planned to appeal the verdict. "While we thank the members of the jury for their service, we disagree with the factual and legal bases for the verdict and intend to appeal," Broadcom said in response to an AFP inquiry. In court documents, Apple and Broadcom had said Caltech's claims "are based solely on the incorporation of allegedly infringing Broadcom chips in Apple's iPhone, Mac, and other devices."

"Broadcom manufactures the accused chips,

while Apple is merely an indirect downstream party whose products incorporate the accused chips," court filings argued.

Broadcom was the main target of the lawsuit but Apple was also named as it is one of Broadcom's biggest customers. Caltech welcomed the ruling. "As a nonprofit institution of higher education, Caltech is committed to protecting its intellectual property in furtherance of its mission to expand human knowledge and benefit society through research integrated with education," the institute said.

Analyst Enderle expected repercussions from the ruling to go beyond Apple to other Broadcom customers who used the chips at issue. "Caltech will go down the list of Broadcom customers and look for out-of-court settlements with anyone who used the compromised technology," Enderle said.

The analyst wondered whether the jury award signaled a new onslaught of patent battles in the tech industry. "Typically, we go through waves of patent wars," Enderle said. "I think it's a case where, after a period of time, people age out or forget that there are significant penalties for this stuff." — AFP

Nintendo logs 9-month profit leap, upgrades annual forecast

TOKYO: Japanese gaming giant Nintendo yesterday reported a leap in sales and profit for the nine months to December, upgrading its full-year profit forecast on strong demand for its popular Switch console. Net profit for April-December rose 16.4 percent from a year earlier to 196.4 billion yen (\$1.8 billion), with sales for the period up 2.5 percent at 1.0 trillion yen, partially thanks to the start of sales in China through Tencent in December.

The Kyoto-based firm revised upward its full-year forecasts, now projecting a net profit at 210 billion yen for the fiscal year to March, compared with its earlier estimate of 180 billion yen. But it left its annual sales forecast unchanged at 1.25 trillion yen. Sales of both its regular Switch platform and the Switch Lite—a smaller, cheaper version—are growing steadily with powerful titles, including the Pokemon series, though analysts are weighing the possible impact of the new coronavirus outbreak on production in China. "Nintendo Switch Lite launched in September... and Nintendo Switch performed well without losing momentum, resulting in significant sales growth for the entire Nintendo Switch family," the company said in a statement.

The Switch, launched in March 2017, has become a huge global seller, helped by innovative, family-friendly titles that have wowed critics and gamers alike. "Pokemon Sword" and "Pokemon Shield", both released in November, became multi-million-unit sellers, following big hits of "Super Mario Maker 2", "The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening", and "Fire Emblem: Three Houses"—all released in the first half. — AFP

Samsung says Q4 net profit slumps 38%

SEOUL: The world's biggest smartphone maker, Samsung Electronics, reported a slump in fourth-quarter net profits yesterday, blaming weakening demand in key products and falling chip prices. Net profit in the October-to-December period was 5.23 trillion won (\$4.4 billion), down 38 percent from a year ago, it said in a statement. "Fourth-quarter profit dropped from a year earlier due to the continued fall in memory chip prices and weakness in display panels," Samsung said in a statement.

The firm is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung Group, by far the largest of the family-controlled conglomerates known as "chaebols" that dominate business in the world's 12th-largest economy. But it suffered a series of difficulties in 2019, with the global memory chip market—which has driven profits in recent years—hit by rising supply and falling demand.

The premium smartphone market has also grown fiercely competitive, with buyers waiting longer before upgrading to new models. Samsung said it expects "weak sales from seasonality in memory chips, OLED and consumer electronics" in the first quarter of 2020 as the firm navigates "continued uncertainties in the global business environment". Operating profit dropped more than 30 percent year-on-year to 7.2 trillion won, while sales in the fourth quarter stood at 59.9 trillion won.

For full-year 2019, the firm reported net profit of 21.7 trillion won, down 51 percent from a year ago.

Samsung shares closed down 3.2 percent in Seoul. Samsung has been strained by a trade war between China and the US and caught in a diplomatic row between Seoul and Tokyo over wartime history, with Japan imposing tough restrictions on exports crucial to South Korean tech giants in July.

In another shadow hanging over the firm, its vice chairman and de-facto leader Lee Jae-yong is on trial for the second time over a sprawling corruption scandal that led to the impeachment of



SEOUL: Samsung's Galaxy Note 10+ 5G smartphone is displayed at a showroom in Seoul yesterday. The world's biggest smartphone maker, Samsung Electronics, reported a slump in fourth-quarter net profits yesterday, blaming weakening demand in key products and falling chip prices. — AFP

South Korea's former president Park Geun-hye. A guilty verdict and long prison sentence would deprive the firm of its top decision maker. Lee was initially jailed for five years in 2017 on multiple charges including bribery, then released after several of his convictions were quashed, only for the Supreme Court in August to order a retrial.

In the mobile business, strong demand for Samsung's mid-range A-series handsets gave the firm a much-needed boost over the last few quarters, said Gerrit Schneemann, a senior analyst at IHS Markit. The premium devices, such as the latest Galaxy Note that was widely available in the fourth quarter, faced competition from Apple—which reported its best-ever quarter powered by the new iPhone 11 and iPhone 11 Pro models. "A strong quarter from Apple in key markets will have had an impact on Samsung," Schneemann told AFP. In 2020, Samsung is pinning its hopes on increasing availability of 5G telecom services driving sales of its handsets—it is a world leader in the technology—and said it will roll out an "enhanced" 5G lineup. — AFP

Business

BoE slashes Britain's growth forecast on eve of Brexit

Interest rate kept at 0.75% amid growth challenges

LONDRES: The Bank of England yesterday slashed its estimates for UK economic growth this year and next, one day before the country exits the European Union. It came as BoE policymakers, in governor Mark Carney's final monetary policy meeting, voted to keep its main interest rate at 0.75 percent by a 7-2 majority.

Some analysts had expected Carney to have joined the ranks of those demanding a quarter-point rate cut to 0.50 percent. The minutes of the latest meeting showed that two doveish policymakers had cited "downside risks" to the bank's projections arising from "Brexit uncertainties and a weaker world outlook".

Britain's economy, lifted by the country's post-election political stability, risks fresh turbulence as Prime Minister Boris Johnson seeks tricky Brexit trade deals amid global threats that include the coronavirus. Recent positive British economic data offset weaker figures at the end of 2019, but this is not expected to have a lasting impact despite government promises of major infrastructure spending.

Meanwhile, the Bank of England has kept its main interest rate at 0.75 percent, while slashing its estimate for UK growth this year, it said yesterday one day before the country exits the European Union. The BoE said the British economy would expand by only 0.8 percent this year, down sharply on its previous 1.2-percent forecast.

"There's still a huge amount of uncertainty over Brexit ahead of the deadline at the end of this year," OANDA analyst Craig Erlam said.

After today, Britain faces an 11-month Brexit period that expires on December 31, by which time Johnson will try to strike new trade deals with the EU and other countries around the world.

Erlam said that, despite data pointing to a slight uplift for the UK economy late last year, the outlook was far from rosy.

'Huge sense of relief'

"If the government can do as they promise then the honeymoon can begin in 2021," he said. Investors have been reassured by December's election triumph for Johnson's right-wing Conservative party, which coasted to victory on a pledge to get Brexit done on January 31.

The near-term health of Britain's economy will also be dictated by how key events—ongoing US-China trade talks and fallout from the spreading deadly coronavirus—will impact global growth, according to analysts. "Our view is that the economy will see some pick-up in the early months of 2020 but then have difficulty kicking on from that," said EY economist Howard Archer.

A key indicator for the health of the UK economy is the British pound, which has gained strength in recent months following heavy losses in the wake of the 2016 Brexit referendum.

'Key risk event'

Markets.com analyst Neil Wilson said that London-Brussels trade talks due to start on March 3 were "without doubt... the chief risk event for sterling and for UK equities going into the rest of 2020." The United States has said it hopes to reach a trade deal with Britain by the end of the Brexit transition.

The UK economy is experiencing mixed fortunes, with sliding investment but record low unemployment. Turning to the outlook, economic growth is forecast to slow slightly to 1.2 percent this year, according to the BoE's most recent outlook.



In this file photo, Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England arrives for a Financial Stability Report press conference at the Bank of England in London. —AFP

Erlam cautioned that GDP growth reflected the long-running turmoil that has haunted financial markets and businesses since Britons voted to leave the EU. The economy grew by 1.8 percent in 2017 before slowing to 1.4 percent in 2018 — and is expected to have hit 1.3 percent in 2019. —AFP

H&M reshuffles management, reports strong Q4 earnings

STOCKHOLM: Swedish clothing retail giant Hennes and Mauritz (H&M) yesterday announced a reshuffling of its top management, while reporting stronger than expected fourth quarter earnings.

H&M announced that after more than 20 years as chairman of the board that Stefan Persson would be stepping down at the next annual general meeting in May. "The timing is favorable for making this change now since we have gradually improved profits and have a strong position," Persson said in a statement.

Stefan Persson, son of H&M founder Erling Persson, said that he wanted his son Karl-Johan Persson to take over the reins. Karl-Johan Persson has been serving as chief executive of the company for more than a decade and as a result of his father's decision he decided to "vacate the position". The board named current chief operating officer Helena Helmersson to replace him.

Meanwhile the company's profit after financial items for the fourth quarter rose to 5.4 billion Swedish kronor (\$557 million or 506 million euros), compared to 4.4 bil-



STOCKHOLM: Karl-Johan Persson (right), current CEO of Swedish clothing retail giant Hennes and Mauritz (H&M), and the company's designated CEO Helena Helmersson pose as they arrive for a press conference at the company's headquarters in Stockholm yesterday. — AFP

lion the year before. For the full year the profit rose to 17.4 billion kronor, up from 15.6 billion in 2018. From 2018 to 2019 the operating margin improved by 0.1 percentage points to 7.5 percent.

After being slow to adapt to the advent of e-commerce and facing increased competition, the retail giant its stock price more than halved between 2015 and 2018, but it has begun to regain investor confidence. "The H&M group's transformation work continues to bear fruit," outgoing CEO Karl-Johan Persson said in a statement.

"Among other things, we have invested

in digitalization, a more efficient supply chain—including new logistics centers and logistics systems, and in tech infrastructure, advanced analytics and AI," he added.

For the full year, sales increased by six percent in local currencies, driven both by in-store sales and online sales, which increased by 18 percent. H&M shares were up almost nine percent on the Stockholm stock exchange following the report. In 2020, the company plans to open 200 new stores, mainly in South America, Russia, Eastern Europe and Asia, while closing 175, mainly in Europe, the United States and China. —AFP

Tesla stock zooms as carmaker marks earnings 'turning point'

NEW YORK: Tesla shares surged yesterday after strong quarterly earnings accelerated the evolution of Elon Musk's electric car pioneer from troubled start-up to the world's second most valuable automaker.

The company cautioned about a potential impact from the new coronavirus sweeping China, a hub for production and sales, but investors cheered as Tesla said it was again bringing forward the launch of its new Model Y crossover vehicle. Better-than-expected revenue and profit in the fourth quarter to December sent Tesla stock up nearly 10 percent after hours on the Nasdaq exchange, to \$636.54.

That took Tesla's valuation further past the \$100 billion mark, which it hit this month, making it worth more than Volkswagen and second only to Toyota among the world's leading carmakers, although it is still miles behind them in terms of production.

And while Tesla has become a favorite for early adopters of electric cars, the established players are hitting back with a fleet of models as governments around the world encourage alternative technologies to help combat climate change. Still, Tesla called 2019 "a turning point" after years of losses on the back of super-charged spending to develop cars such as the mainstream Model 3 sedan. This month, Tesla started to roll out the first Model 3s built at a giant factory in Shanghai.

Helped by Shanghai coming online, the group said it was planning to deliver more than half a million vehicles this year, 36 percent more than 2019. —AFP

Sports

Hastings steps in for Russell for Scotland Six Nations opener

EDINBURGH: Fly-half Adam Hastings has been given the task of replacing Finn Russell while Edinburgh number eight Nick Haining will make his debut as Scotland kick-off their Six Nations campaign against Ireland tomorrow.

Russell was told he would not be involved at the Aviva Stadium after being disciplined following a drinking session. It is unclear whether the Racing 92 star will feature at all during this year's championship but Hastings will get his chance to impress after being handed the number 10 jersey for the Dublin opener.

Australian-born Haining will win his first cap against Andy Farrell's team while Edinburgh prop Rory Sutherland will make his first international appearance in three-and-a-half years. Back-rower Hamish Watson and scrum-half Ali Price — both injured in the Scots' opening World Cup clash with Ireland in September — make their return to Gregor Townsend's team while there is also a comeback for Huw Jones at centre after he missed the cut for the tournament in Japan. The match will also see Stuart Hogg lead out the team for the first time since being handed the Scotland captaincy on a permanent basis. Ireland swept Townsend's team aside 27-3 in Yokohama and the coach is looking for a major improvement this weekend.

Townsend, who has spent the week in Spain preparing his team, said: "We have managed to cover a lot of work in the two weeks we've been together and we've been impressed with how our players have taken on information and bonded as a team.

"Our goal is always to play to our potential. The challenge to do this starts tomorrow against Ireland. "Playing to our potential starts with our collective mindset. That means being alert, focused and resilient right from the beginning, to be ready for the physical battle that lies ahead and able to stay in the fight throughout the 80 minutes." Townsend added: "We must be a relentless collective on the pitch and a nightmare for the Irish to deal with, while having the ability and awareness to impose our game at that intensity."

Scotland team (15-1)

Stuart Hogg (capt); Sean Maitland, Huw Jones, Sam Johnson, Blair Kinghorn; Adam Hastings, Ali Price; Nick Haining, Hamish Watson, Jamie Ritchie; Jonny Gray, Scott Cummings; Zander Fagerson, Fraser Brown, Rory Sutherland
Replacements: Stuart McNally, Allan Dell, Simon Berghan, Ben Toolis, Cornell du Preez, George Horne, Rory Hutchinson, Chris Harris. — AFP



LONDON: File photo shows Six Nations international rugby captains (L-R) France's captain Charles Ollivon, Scotland's captain Stuart Hogg, England's captain Owen Farrell, Wales' captain Alun Wyn Jones, Italy's captain Luca Bigi and Ireland's captain Jonathan Sexton pose with the trophy during the 6 Nations Rugby Union launch event in east London on January 22, 2020. — AFP

New era adds to Six Nations intrigue

LONDON: The first Six Nations following a World Cup is often a time of renewal but the 2020 Championship has a particularly fresh feel ahead of this weekend's opening round. Only England coach Eddie Jones and Scotland counterpart Gregor Townsend remain from last season's edition, with Grand Slam champions Wales, Ireland, France and Italy all under new management.

England appear the team to beat after reaching last year's World Cup final in Japan. But the already tough task of reviving morale following a crushing 32-12 defeat by South Africa has been compounded by the salary-cap scandal engulfing English and European champions Saracens.

There are seven Saracens in Jones's squad, including captain and playmaker Owen Farrell. Jones, doing his best to deflect attention from the situation at Saracens, recently proclaimed in typically bullish fashion that "my aim is to make England the greatest rugby team the world has ever seen," even though his current deal ends next year.

Since the inaugural 1987 edition, the World Cup has become the yardstick by which Test teams are judged no matter how much success they enjoy in the intervening four years. — 'Rugby to remember'. But Jones has loftier ambitions: "I think you can win Grand Slams without playing great rugby, as you can win a World Cup without playing great rugby," he said. "I am talking about playing sustainable rugby that people remember."

England open their Six Nations away to France, who but for the reckless loss of control

that saw Sebastien Vahaamahina sent off against Wales, might well have reached a World Cup semi-final. 'Les Bleus' have won the last two Under-20 world titles and former France scrum-half Fabien Galthie is now in charge of a youthful squad featuring Alexandre Roumat, Damian Penaud and Romain Ntamack, all of whose fathers played Test rugby.

It is 10 years since France were last crowned champions of Europe but there are signs the 2023 World Cup hosts may be on the verge of coming good. "We're trying to put together a team for the long-term," said Galthie. To see this Six Nations as England and France's to lose ignores Wales, now coached by Wayne Pivac after his fellow New Zealander Warren Gatland called time on a 12-year reign that included three Grand Slams and two World Cup semi-finals. Pivac has spent the past five years coaching the Scarlets and Wales lock Jake Ball, who played under him for the Llanelli-based club, said: "I think Wayne is very clear on the way he wants to play... We want to play an exciting brand of rugby." Ireland travelled to Japan with high hopes only to suffer fresh World Cup woe as a shock pool defeat by the hosts preceded a quarter-final thrashing by New Zealand. By then Andy Farrell, assistant to former boss Joe Schmidt, had already been installed as the New Zealander's successor.

But can someone so closely associated with the old regime preside over a new era especially as this is the first time Farrell, the father of the England captain, has been in a head coach role? — AFP

Gatland return, Puma priority

WELLINGTON: Super Rugby launches its 25th season this weekend, just three months after South Africa won the Rugby World Cup in stunning fashion and Japan reached the last eight for the first time in their history.

But many of the victorious Springbok squad are playing in Europe while the Japan's only franchise the Sunwolves will say goodbye at the end of the campaign. Here are five talking points ahead of Friday's big kick-off:

ARGENTINA COME BEFORE JAGUARES

Jaguares coach Gonzalo Quesada is downplaying suggestions the South Americans can go one step further than last year's breakthrough effort and win the championship in only their fifth year. Their post-World Cup losses are relatively light, although significant, with only Pablo Matera, Tomas Lavanini, Juan Manuel Leguizamón, Ramiro Moyano and Enrique Pieretto taking flight. But Quesada is looking at the big picture for Argentina rugby, filling the gaps with young talent and with plans not to risk player burnout before the international season as the 10th-ranked Los Pumas target the top eight before the draw is made in November for the 2023 World Cup. "I think the message is clear that the priority, and most important, are Los Pumas," he said. "The national team is the largest to which one can aspire. That is clear in all heads and (what we are) working on."

WARRENBALL OR CHIEFLY FLAMBOYANCE?

After 12 years in charge of Wales and two tours as head coach of the British and Irish Lions with one to come, Warren Gatland is undoubtedly the most experienced Super Rugby coach

this year and he has wasted no time making his mark at Waikato Chiefs. He baffled the pundits when naming his line-up for Friday's season opener against the Auckland Blues at Eden Park by naming All Blacks openside flanker Sam Cane at number eight. Toiroa Tahuriorangi gets the nod at scrum-half over Brad Weber and debutant 21-year-old Kaleb Trask starts at fly-half ahead of Aaron Cruden.

He's also dumped the fashionable co-captain idea, which the Chiefs had run with for several years, and put Cane in sole charge.

Yet to be unveiled is whether the Chiefs will adopt the confrontational "Warrenball" style of play or continue with their traditional attacking flair. Loose forward Luke Jacobson, who enjoys Gatland's short, sharp training sessions over lengthy, exhaustive affairs, hinted the 2012 and 2013 champions would be "playing an exciting brand of footy, it's in our DNA".

LION ROBERTS, GIANT STORMERS

Western Stormers will beef up their midfield for their opener against Wellington Hurricanes when they throw former Wales and British and Irish Lions centre Jamie Roberts into an immediate starting debut at Newlands on Saturday.

The 33-year-old 6ft 4in (1.93 metre), 110 kilogramme (243lb) new recruit Roberts will line up at 12 alongside Ruhan Nel (1.91m, 101kg) in a massive central combination. "We are going to play our strongest team," Stormers coach John Dobson said.

"All the Springboks are available and we have a British and Irish Lion in Jamie Roberts. We have to start well. There is no holding back this side. Maximum effort and maximum team, the best team that we can put out. — AFP

Flames fight past Oilers in SO

EDMONTON: Andrew Mangiapane scored twice in regulation, Sean Monahan netted the lone shootout goal, and goaltender David Rittich sparkled yet again in the tiebreaking showdown as the visiting Calgary Flames beat the Edmonton Oilers 4-3 Wednesday night. Rittich made 31 saves through regulation and overtime and capped a perfect shootout with an old-school pokecheck. He has won all six games he's played this season that have gone to shootouts, surrendering only two goals against 21 shooters. Monahan scored with a five-hole shot on Oilers goalie Mike Smith, who made 25 saves over the 65 minutes. The Rogers Centre buzzed in anticipation of the Battle of Alberta, which was highlighted by a pair of fights. Monahan dropped the gloves with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins for his first NHL fight. Then came the expected bout between Calgary's Matthew Tkachuk and Edmonton's Zack Kassian to settle the score from their last meeting.

Maple Leafs 5, Stars 3

William Nylander scored a goal in his fifth consecutive contest as visiting Toronto skated to a victory over Dallas. Auston Matthews and Tyson Barrie each collected a goal and an assist, and Zach Hyman and Andreas Johnsson also tallied for the Maple Leafs, who set a franchise record by scoring at least four goals in eight straight road games. Alexander Radulov scored two goals, Denis Gurianov also tallied, and Ben Bishop turned aside 29 shots for the Stars.

Predators 5, Capitals 4

Yannick Weber scored his first goal of the season with 4:37 to go, giving Nashville a win at Washington. The struggling Pred-

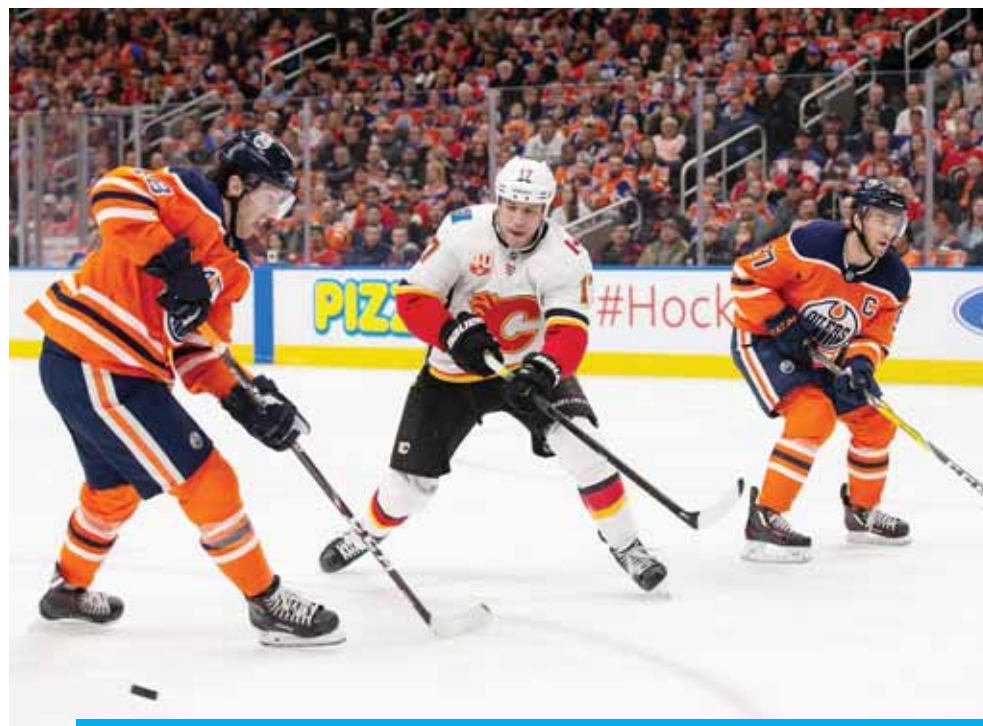
ators, who got two assists from Filip Forsberg, had to come back from a 4-3 deficit with two unanswered goals in the third period. Nashville had gone 4-7-1 in its previous 12 games. Ryan Johnsen's short-handed tally tied the contest three minutes in the third period. Nashville also got goals from Jarred Tinordi (the first of his NHL career), Mikael Granlund and Rocco Grimaldi. Richard Panik scored twice and Alex Ovechkin and Tom Wilson added tallies for the Capitals. Ovechkin, with career goal No. 693, is now one goal shy of Mark Messier for eighth in the NHL's all-time list. He broke a tie for ninth with Steve Yzerman (692).

Lightning 4, Kings 2

Steven Stamkos scored two goals, and Erik Cernak delivered the go-ahead score early in the third period as Tampa Bay rallied from a two-goal deficit to earn a victory at Los Angeles. Tyler Johnson also scored for the Lightning while goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy made 32 saves. Nikita Kucherov had two assists to extend his points streak to five games. Stamkos also has a five-game points streak. Kings defenseman Drew Doughty saw his consecutive games played streak end at 460 when he was a scratch because of an undisclosed injury. It was the longest games-played streak in Los Angeles history and the fifth longest active streak in the NHL.

Ducks 4, Coyotes 2

Adam Henrique scored two first-period goals, and John Gibson finished with 25 saves to lead Anaheim over visiting Arizona. Hampus Lindholm and Carter Rowney also scored goals, and Derek Grant added a pair of assists



EDMONTON: James Neal #18 and Connor McDavid #97 of the Edmonton Oilers try to cover Milan Lucic #17 of the Calgary Flames during the second period at Rogers Place in Edmonton, Canada. — AFP

for the Ducks, who won for the third time in their past four games. Lawson Crouse and Vinnie Hinostroza each had a goal and an assist for Arizona, which lost its third straight game while also taking its fifth consecutive road defeat. Nick Schmaltz assisted on both tallies.

Canucks 5, Sharks 2

Rookie Quinn Hughes and Tanner Pearson each had a goal and an assist as Vancouver

rallied for a victory at San Jose. Tyler Myers, Jake Virtanen and Brandon Sutter also scored for the Pacific Division-leading Canucks, who opened a five-game trip with their fourth consecutive victory and their 13th in the past 16 games. Jacob Markstrom made 38 saves. Tomas Hertl and Brent Burns scored for the Sharks, who lost for the first time in their past five home games. Martin Jones stopped 20 of 24 shots. — Reuters

Scandal-hit Astros hire veteran Dusty Baker as manager

LOS ANGELES: The Houston Astros, seeking a steadying force after firing manager A.J. Hinch in the wake of the sign-stealing scandal that rocked baseball, Wednesday hired Dusty Baker as their new manager.

Baker is a three-time National League Manager of the Year and at 70 becomes the oldest manager in the major leagues. Hinch was sacked on January 13, just an hour after he and Astros executive Jeff Luhnow were suspended for the 2020 season by Major League Baseball for their failure to prevent an illegal sign-stealing scheme during Houston's 2017 World Series-winning campaign.

"Throughout his successful career, Dusty has embodied the qualities that we were looking for in a manager," Astros owner Jim Crane said in a statement. "He's a winner, and more importantly, a strong leader who has earned the respect of not only his players but of virtually everyone that he has touched in baseball."

"We're extremely excited to name Dusty as the new leader of our ballclub." Baker's managerial resume includes eight playoff appearances and a National League pennant as manager of the Giants in 2002 — when San Francisco fell one win shy of a World Series title.

He has guided four clubs to the post-season. Baker will be managing an American League team for the first time, and said he's looking forward to having another chance to claim the World Series title that has eluded him.

"I'm extremely thankful for this opportunity," Baker said. "This is a great ballclub with outstanding players that know how to win. I applaud Jim Crane for the leadership he has shown in recent weeks and look forward to working with him and the players to bring a championship to the City of Houston."

But he takes over an Astros team that will be in the spotlight for all the wrong reasons after MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said an investigation found that the club had violated rules against use of electronic and mechanical devices to decipher opposing team's signs — most often between pitchers and catchers — in order to gain a tactical advantage. The investigation concluded that the sign-stealing in 2017 was "player driven" but said that Hinch knew of it and that there "simply is no justification for Hinch's failure to act." Luhnow, who was also sacked by the Astros shortly after he was suspended by MLB, said he wasn't aware of the scheme. — AFP

N Zealand injured pace trio ruled out of India ODIs

WELLINGTON: Struggling New Zealand will have their bowling stocks further tested after their three leading seamers were ruled out from the squad named yesterday for the one-day series against India.

New Zealand's fortunes have plummeted since making the World Cup final last year, losing three Tests against Australia and three Twenty20s against India. Pace bowlers Trent Boult (broken hand), Lockie Ferguson (calf strain) and Matt Henry (broken thumb), who were all injured in Australia, have not recovered in time for the three ODIs against India which start next week after the final two Twenty20 fixtures. Kyle Jamieson has been called into the squad for the first time while Scott Kugeleijn and Hamish Bennett are recalled after last playing ODIs in Ireland in 2017. Tom Latham, who broke a finger on his right hand in the third Test against Australia, has been cleared to resume playing.

The series will be the first ODIs for

New Zealand since they beat India in the World Cup semi-finals last year then lost to England in the final, and coach Gary Stead said they were under no illusions about the task ahead.

"We've seen from the Twenty20 series (India) are clearly as strong as ever," he said. "Tim Southee has an important job leading our new look pace attack, which has a huge opportunity against some of the very best batsmen in the world."

"While the bowling line-up has a fresh look, the batting is very settled and we'll likely have the same top eight batsmen from the World Cup finals."

New Zealand squad:

Kane Williamson (capt), Hamish Bennett, Tom Blundell, Colin de Grandhomme, Martin Guptill, Kyle Jamieson, Scott Kugeleijn, Tom Latham, Jimmy Neesham, Henry Nicholls, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor. — AFP

Sports

Lillard's first triple-double carries Blazers past Rockets

PORTLAND: Damian Lillard recorded 36 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds for his first career triple-double to lead the Portland Trail Blazers to a 125-112 victory over the visiting Houston Rockets on Wednesday night. Lillard made six 3-pointers to tie the NBA record of 33 over a four-game stretch. The mark was originally set by Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors from Feb. 22-27, 2016. CJ McCollum added 22 points and Trevor Ariza tallied 21 as Portland won for the third time in the past four games. Carmelo Anthony collected a season-best 13 rebounds as the Trail Blazers held a 50-39 advantage on the boards. Houston's Russell Westbrook scored 39 points, the eighth time in his past nine appearances he has recorded 30 or more points. James Harden had 18 points but shot just 5 of 18. He has made only 69 of 210 shots (32.9 percent) over his past 10 appearances.

INDIANA PACERS 115 - CHICAGO BULLS 106

T.J. Warren scored 25 points, and Victor Oladipo drilled a clutch 3-pointer to force overtime in his long-anticipated return from injury as Indiana posted a victory over Chicago in Indianapolis. In his first action in more than a year after recovering from a right knee injury, Oladipo scored nine points on 2-for-8 shooting in 21 minutes. He delivered the biggest shot of regulation, tying the game at 100 with a deep 3-pointer with 10.3 seconds left. Domantas Sabonis amassed 15 points and 11 rebounds for Indiana. Chicago's Chandler Hutchison scored a career-high 21 points, and Zach LaVine added 20 as the Bulls saw their two-game winning streak snapped.

Grieving Lakers return to training after Bryant's death

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers, reeling from the death of team icon Kobe Bryant, "want to represent what Kobe was about" as they press ahead with the NBA season, coach Frank Vogel said Wednesday.

"We want to represent what Kobe was about more than anything," Vogel said. "We've always wanted to make him proud, and that's not going to be any different here."

Vogel, 46, spoke to reporters at the team's practice facility, where star players including LeBron James and Anthony Davis turned out but did not meet with the media.

Vogel said the club had a simple directive for players still coming to terms with Bryant's death in a helicopter crash on Sunday: "You guys can speak when you're ready, and not before."

But the timetable for returning to NBA action is set, with the Lakers to host the Portland Trail Blazers at Staples Center arena on Friday.

That is less than a week since Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter Gianna and seven other people were killed when the Sikorsky S-76

MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 127 - NEW YORK KNICKS 106

Jae Crowder scored 10 points during a decisive run to open the second half, and visiting Memphis climbed to .500 for the first time this season by beating New York. Dillon Brooks scored a game-high 27 points to lead seven players in double figures for the Grizzlies, who have gone 11-3 this month to reach .500 (24-24) for the first time since Dec. 31, 2018. Marcus Morris Sr. scored 17 points to lead the Knicks. A brawl nearly broke out with 48.1 seconds left when Crowder stole an inbounds pass by Julius Randle intended for Elfrid Payton, the latter of whom shoved Crowder as he went up for a 3-pointer. Payton was charged with a flagrant-2 and was ejected along with Crowder and the Knicks' Marcus Morris Sr. New York's Damyean Dotson and Memphis' Jonas Valanciunas were also issued technical fouls.

SAN ANTONIO SPURS 127 - UTAH JAZZ 120

DeMar DeRozan poured in 38 points and Patty Mills added 18 off the bench as short-handed San Antonio surprised visiting Utah. Murray added 16 points for the Spurs, who snapped a three-game losing streak. San Antonio played for the second straight game without LaMarcus Aldridge (thumb). Donovan Mitchell led the Jazz with 31 points. Jordan Clarkson added 20, and Bojan Bogdanovic and Rudy Gobert scored 17 points each for Utah, which has dropped two games in a row. Gobert also grabbed 19 rebounds.

helicopter slammed into a rugged hillside in thick fog in Calabasas, northwest of Los Angeles.

The chopper was headed to Bryant's Mamba Sports Academy in Thousand Oaks, where his daughter was set to play a basketball game.

When the team convened on Tuesday, Vogel said, they "did some things that we thought would be therapeutically beneficial. "We got in the gym for some team shooting work, no real practice working on anything in particular. I wanted our guys to come in mentally free but to get a sweat, touch the ball and be around each other. "Then we had a lunch where we all just spent time together and grieved together." That lunch reportedly included sharing tales of Bryant, but Vogel found himself unable to offer any such reminiscences on Wednesday.

"There's some questions I'm just not ready to answer," said the coach, who had to ensure that every team member had been informed of Bryant's death. "It's just strengthened what we've felt all year about our current group, which is we've become a family in a very short time."

"It's something that you talk about in the NBA with your teams, but this group in particular has really grown to love each other very rapidly and we understand the importance and the opportunity we have this year," Vogel said of a squad that takes a Western Conference-leading record of 36-10 into the game against Portland. "This has just brought us closer together."

Ticket prices for Friday's game, where the Lakers are expected to honor Bryant's memory, have skyrocketed on re-sale site StubHub.com, with seats priced hundreds — and in some cases



NEW YORK: Elfrid Payton #6 of the New York Knicks makes the steal from Dillon Brooks #24 of the Memphis Grizzlies in the first half at Madison Square Garden in New York City. —AFP

OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER 120 - SACRAMENTO KINGS 100

Nerlens Noel converted lob passes from Dennis Schroder into dunks on consecutive possessions during a second-quarter flurry, propelling Oklahoma City over host Sacramento. Schroder finished with a game-high 24 points to go with nine assists, and rookie Luguentz Dort surprised the Kings with a career-best 23 points, helping the Thunder win for the sixth time in their last seven games. Bogdan Bogdanovic had a team-high 23 points for the Kings, who saw a two-game winning streak end.

BROOKLYN NETS 125 - DETROIT PISTONS 115

Spencer Dinwiddie scored 10 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter as Brooklyn pulled away to beat Detroit. Dinwiddie helped the Nets end a four-game home losing streak and win for only the fourth time in their past 17 games. After changing his number from No. 8 to No. 26, Dinwiddie shot 8 of 13 and scored his second-most points as a reserve this season. Reggie Jackson scored 23 points for the Pistons, who lost their fourth straight and fell to the Nets for the second time in five nights. — Reuters



LOS ANGELES: People stand near a makeshift memorial to NBA star Kobe Bryant, who was killed along with his daughter and seven others in a helicopter crash on January 26, in LA Live Plaza outside Staples Center, in Los Angeles. — AFP

thousands — of dollars above their face value.

Meanwhile, Vanessa Bryant broke her silence on Wednesday, saying she is "devastated" and struggling to imagine life without her husband and daughter.

"We are completely devastated by the sudden loss of my adoring husband, Kobe - the amazing father of our children; and my beautiful, sweet Gianna," she wrote in an Instagram post.

She said they are fighting to keep going and take comfort in the memories of the life they had

together. "Kobe, and our baby girl, Gigi, are shining on us to light the way. Our love for them is endless - and that's to say, immeasurable.

"I just wish I could hug them, kiss them and bless them. Have them here with us, forever." Also, federal investigators completed their inspection of the crash site and handed it over to local authorities.

Police on horseback and all-terrain vehicles were brought in to secure the area, which was becoming a pilgrimage point for fans. — AFP

Djokovic powers past Federer into Australian Open final

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic shattered the hopes of ailing rival Roger Federer yesterday to sweep into a record eighth Australian Open final and move closer to his 17th Grand Slam crown. In the 50th instalment of one of sport's greatest rivalries, the Serb shrugged off a tentative start to reinforce his recent dominance, showing no mercy to the Swiss maestro in a 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 6-3 win. He will play either fifth seed Dominic Thiem or seventh-ranked German Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final, but it will take a monumental effort to prize another title from the 32-year-old. Of the seven Melbourne finals Djokovic has made, he has won them all.

If any extra motivation was needed, winning on Sunday will see the Serb reclaim the number one ranking after Rafael Nadal was sent packing in the last eight. "Respect to Roger for coming out tonight when he was obviously hurt and not even close to his best in terms of movement," said defending champion Djokovic, who is into his 26th Grand Slam final.

"He started well at the beginning and I was pretty nervous. It was very important for me to win that first set. Mentally I relaxed after that." It was the fourth time Djokovic had beaten Federer at the semi-final stage in Melbourne after doing the same in 2008, 2011 and 2016.

Federer, the 2018 champion, came into the match carrying a groin injury that he picked up in his five-set, come-from-behind quarter-final

win against Tennys Sandgren. He was seen around Melbourne Park before the match with tape on his upper right leg and there were even rumours that he might pull out.

But that is not in the 38-year-old's nature — he has only ever given up four walkovers in his long career — and the show was on.

Djokovic was clear favourite after beating the third seed in every Grand Slam meeting since Wimbledon 2012, but in their 50th career clash it was Federer who initially set Rod Laver Arena alight. The opening game, on Federer's serve, lasted six minutes in an indication of what might be in store. Then against the odds the 38-year-old, the oldest man in a Grand Slam semi since Jimmy Connors in 1991, broke Djokovic on his first service game with an unbelievable backhand passing shot.

The edge didn't last long with the Serb immediately hitting back to even it up. But the power and finesse of the Federer game was troubling Djokovic, who was on the back foot and was broken once more to go 4-1 behind.

Federer had three break points to make it 5-1, but Djokovic dug deep to fend them off as he clawed back, breaking once more as the Swiss was serving for the set. It went to a tiebreaker which the second seed dominated to pull off a remarkable turnaround in a set that Federer threw away.

Federer took a medical time at the end of it, apparently for a back issue, and he wasn't



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return against Switzerland's Roger Federer during their men's singles semi-final match on day eleven of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

moving as freely in the second set. But he clung on until he fluffed an easy shot at the net to hand Djokovic set point at 4-5 and the Serb cracked a top-quality crosscourt volley to go two sets to one in front.

Djokovic was pumped and Federer rapidly running out of steam. When the Swiss star was broken to go 4-2 behind in the third, there was no way back as his rival extended his winning record over him to 27-23. — AFP

Unseeded Muguruza happy to fly under radar — into Melbourne final

MELBOURNE: Garbine Muguruza said she revelled in the underdog role after the unseeded former world number one battled into her first Australian Open final yesterday. The 26-year-old Spaniard fought back in both sets to defeat fourth seed Simona Halep 7-6 (10/8), 7-5 and set up a championship decider with surprise-package Sofia Kenin on Saturday.

Muguruza is unseeded at a Grand Slam for the first time since 2014 after her ranking slipped to 36 at the end of a poor 2019 by her high standards. That meant a tricky path to the final in Melbourne, where temperatures soared close to 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) yesterday.

"It's difficult, you never know who you're going to face right away, not being seeded," said the two-time Grand Slam winner. "I knew whatever match, it was going to be tough, even how I started the tournament not feeling well."

"I'm happy to not be in the spotlight, it's good." Muguruza was hindered by a viral illness in her tournament opener and lost the first set 6-0 to American qualifier Shelby Rogers. But she recovered her form and fitness to beat three top-10 seeds on her run to the final.

Muguruza, who was restrained in her celebrations, is the first unseeded player to reach the Melbourne women's final since Belgium's Justine Henin in 2010. Muguruza and Halep, two former French Open and Wimbledon champions, were too close to split in a nervy first set at a steamy

Rod Laver Arena.

Muguruza squandered two set points in the tie-break while saving two more for Halep, and then clinched it with a stop volley that the Romanian couldn't get back over the net. It was the first set that Halep — also a former number one — had dropped all week and she reacted by mangling her racquet and slumped in her chair, shaking her head.

The 28-year-old recovered her poise and broke Muguruza for a 3-2 lead in the second set, before Muguruza broke back and then held to make it 6-5. Halep, so serene in Melbourne up until now, cracked as she served to stay in the tournament, netting a backhand as Muguruza surged forward on the second match point.

Barty pooper

Earlier Kenin, the feisty American 14th seed, stunned world number one and home hope Ashleigh Barty 7-6 (8/6), 7-5 to reach her first Grand Slam final. Moscow-born Kenin, 21, the last American left in Melbourne, was the party pooper once more.

She had already brought the fairytale run of 15-year-old Coco Gauff to an end in the fourth round with the aggressive style of play that has become her trademark over the past fortnight. Kenin looked shell-shocked in the immediate aftermath of victory over Barty, saying: "She's such a tough player, she's playing really amazing. I



MELBOURNE: Spain's Garbine Muguruza hits a return against Romania's Simona Halep during their women's singles semi-final match on day eleven of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

knew I had to really find a way to win.

"I'm just speechless, I honestly can't believe this. I've dreamed about this moment since I was five years old." "I've worked so hard to get here," added Kenin. "I really had to fight out here. There's a reason she's number one."

Kenin, who had a breakthrough 2019, winning

her first three WTA titles, was contesting her first Grand Slam semi-final, and it was Barty's first time in the last four in Melbourne.

But if the locals hoped Kenin would be cowed by the occasion and her top-ranked opponent, the French Open champion, they were to be mistaken. — AFP

Sports

Amateurs Epinal topple Lille, PSG beat Pau in French Cup

PARIS: Fourth division Epinal sprang a French Cup shock on Wednesday, the amateurs from the Vosges mountains knocking out top-flight Lille 2-1 to join Paris Saint-Germain, 2-0 winners at Pau, in the quarter-finals.

The come-from-behind upset matched fellow fourth-tier amateur outfit Belfort's shock defeat of Ligue 1 Montpellier on penalties 24 hours earlier. Loic Remy put Lille into an early lead against the minnows who had ended Reunion islanders' JS Saint-Pierroise's dreams of becoming the first team from a French overseas territory to reach the last 16.

And they continued their adventure by hitting back hard in the second half with a double from Jean-Philippe Krasso. "We were never in the match," complained Lille coach Christophe Galtier.

"You have to congratulate Epinal who deserved this win. We didn't deserve to get a lot out of the way we played." PSG ensured they did not get spellbound by the magic of the Cup at third division Pau.

Neymar stayed in Paris and Kylian Mbappe remained on the bench but the services of the world's two most expensive footballers weren't required as captain Leandro Paredes and Pablo Sarabia scored in either half for a drama-free 2-0 win.

"It wasn't easy, it was our fifth consecutive away game," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel. "We made a lot of changes but the lads did really well." PSG, beaten in last season's final, have won the competition a record 12 times, two more than Marseille who also progressed by beating Strasbourg 3-1.

A group of around 600 Marseille lawyers dressed in courtroom robes demonstrated against the government's pension reforms, brandishing banners before kick-off and after Bouna Sarr's 32nd minute opener from the stands proclaiming "Marseille lawyers are going to win".

And Marseille's fans had a nervy wait before the final verdict of the Velodrome drama played out before them was certain. Dimitri Payet's penalty gave the hosts a healthy half-time lead but with Benjamin Corgnet putting Strasbourg back in business on 59 minutes Andre Villas-Boas's side could only breathe easy after Boubacar Kamara's goal deep in injury time.

On Tuesday Rennes, who had denied PSG a 13th title, took another step closer to retaining the trophy by edging a nine-goal thriller with top flight Angers 5-4.

Saint Etienne beat Monaco and Ligue 1 strugglers Dijon needed a 119th winner against plucky fifth division amateurs Limonest. The last 16 concludes later with Lyon at Nice. — AFP



PAU: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Mauro Icardi (c) is challenged by Pau's French defender Alassane Diaby (R), during the French Cup round-of-16 football match between Pau and Paris Saint-Germain, at the Stade du Hameau Stadium in Pau, southwestern France. — AFP

Perez joins Roma from Barcelona

MADRID: Barcelona forward Carles Perez has joined Roma in a deal worth 15.5 million euros, the Spanish club announced yesterday.

Roma will pay Barca 1 million euros for an initial loan until June 30. The deal includes a compulsory option to buy in the summer for 11 million euros, with a further 3.5 million euros due in additional payments.

Barcelona will also retain first refusal if Roma want to sell Perez in the future.

"I know that I am leaving a very important club in Barcelona but I am joining an equally important club in Roma," said Perez.

The Spaniard came through Barca's youth academy and was given his La Liga debut by coach Ernesto Valverde last season.

But despite playing 12 times this term, Valverde's sacking put Perez's future in doubt and new coach Quique Setien has agreed to let the 21-year-old leave.

He joins a Roma side sitting fourth in Serie A and with ambitions to qualify for next season's Champions League.

"We are hugely satisfied with Carles' arrival in Rome," said club chief executive Guido Fienga.

"Carles learned his trade in one of the best youth academies in Europe, and has been playing for a club with so much talent at its disposal. We are all hopeful that he can immediately have a significant role to play within our squad." — AFP



Carles Perez

Atletico travel to Liga leaders Real Madrid in midst of crisis

MADRID: La Liga leaders Real Madrid host neighbours Atletico tomorrow, with the visitors on their worst run of results since Diego Simeone took charge in 2011. The Argentine coach has revolutionised Atletico's fortunes over the past nine years. But their form has nosedived this season, culminating in an embarrassing Copa del Rey elimination at the hands of third-tier side Cultural Leonesa last week.

Winless in their last four in all competitions, having drawn nine of their 21 La Liga games this season, they dropped out of the top four at the weekend. Someone acknowledges they need to make changes if they are to qualify for next season's Champions League.

"We need to work hard, looking for answers (to what is going on), and make decisions, especially me, in terms of improving the side," he said. "We need to get back our calm, I've got a good squad, we'll get players back into the fold and have more competition for places and we'll go into Saturday's game determined to win it."

Atletico will be without injured club record signing Joao Felix for the trip to the Bernabeu as well as long-term absentee Diego Costa. But club captain Koke looks set to return following a hamstring issue.

Real, who are unbeaten in all competitions

since October and moved three points clear at the top of La Liga last weekend, have no new injury concerns, with Eden Hazard and Marco Asensio both still out.

On Sunday, second-placed Barcelona will be hoping to take advantage of any Madrid slip-up when they host Levante at Camp Nou. New coach Quique Setien has had some teething problems as his side look to adapt to his possession-based style, however the Spaniard insists the process will take time and that patience is the name of the game.

"We want to improve and ensure that everything we coach is seen out on the pitch," he said. "We know the route we want to take and why we want to take it. There are things we'd like to see right now but we can't see them. But we've only had a few training sessions together and you need to be backed up by what you see in games, but it's still very early in the process for that."

Luis Suarez remains absent with a knee issue, while Ousmane Dembele will miss the game through a muscle problem.

Elsewhere, fourth from bottom Mallorca host fifth from bottom Valladolid on Saturday in what could be a crucial game in the race for survival, while third-placed Sevilla host Alaves on Sunday as they look to tighten their grip on a Champions League spot. — Reuters

Liverpool sink West Ham to move an incredible 19 points clear

LONDON: Liverpool moved an incredible 19 points clear at the top of the Premier League as Mohamed Salah and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain secured a 2-0 win at West Ham on Wednesday. Jurgen Klopp's side have turned the title race into a procession and the runaway leaders saw off struggling West Ham to make it a remarkable 23 victories from 24 league games this season.

Salah opened the scoring with a first half penalty at the London Stadium and Oxlade-Chamberlain wrapped up Liverpool's 15th successive league win after the interval. Second placed Manchester City are now so far behind Liverpool that the question is not if but when the Reds clinch their first English league title since 1990. The Reds have won 31 of their past 32 league fixtures, only dropping points in a 1-1 draw at Manchester United in October. With 14 games left, Liverpool's incredible run has given historic overtones to their impending title coronation.

The European and World champions are now 41 games unbeaten in the league — just eight away from the 49-match English top-flight record set by Arsenal's 'Invincibles' across 2003 and 2004. Matching that Arsenal team's achievement in going an entire league season without defeat is within Liverpool's reach, as is Manchester City's Premier League record of 100 points. Liverpool's latest success on a chilly night in east London will be just a footnote when the full story of their likely title triumph is written, but they still managed to record another small piece of history.

They have now beaten all 19 of the other

teams in the league at least once this season — the first time the club have achieved that feat in the top-flight. Klopp attracted criticism for announcing he and his first-team players won't be present for the FA Cup fourth round replay against Shrewsbury next week as it falls within the Premier League's winter break.

Instead, Klopp will send Liverpool's youth team to the match, but at this rate they will win the title so early that his stars will have plenty of time to put their feet up in the final weeks of the domestic season.

Faced with West Ham's massed defence and lacking the pace and penetration usually provided by the injured Sadio Mane, Liverpool initially monopolised possession without a cutting edge. Salah and Jordan Henderson finally combined to open up West Ham for the first time.

Andrew Robertson was the beneficiary and the left-back's clip over Lukasz Fabianski was trickling towards the goalline when Issa Diop got back to clear. It wasn't vintage Liverpool but their pressure eventually produced Salah's opener from their first shot on target in the 35th minute.

Roberto Firmino deftly controlled Trent Alexander-Arnold's pass and flicked the ball into the six-yard box, where Divock Origi was bundled over by Diop. Jonathan Moss awarded the penalty and, after a lengthy VAR check for a possible handball in the build-up, Egypt forward Salah stepped up to send Fabianski the wrong way for his 16th goal of the season. Manuel Lanzini wasted a golden opportunity to equalise early in the second half when the West Ham



LONDON: West Ham United's French defender Issa Diop (2R) vies with Liverpool's Dutch midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Liverpool at The London Stadium, in east London. — AFP

winger scuffed straight at Alisson Becker.

Firmino almost doubled Liverpool's lead when he swivelled onto Robertson's cross and forced Fabianski to save.

Liverpool's second goal punished David Moyes' team in ruthless style as they authored a swaggering counter-attack in the 52nd minute. Breaking from a West Ham corner, Henderson found Salah and he flicked a superb

pass with the outside of his boot to Oxlade-Chamberlain, who raced clear to slot a cool finish past Fabianski.

Liverpool were still surprisingly creaky at the back, but Angelo Ogbonna headed over from close-range. Declan Rice's effort was saved by Alisson, with the rebound deflected onto the post by Alexander-Arnold, before Alisson denied Rice with another fine stop. — AFP

English Premier League table

English Premier League table after yesterday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Liverpool	24	23	1	0	56	15	70
Man City	24	16	3	5	65	27	51
Leicester	24	15	3	6	52	24	48
Chelsea	24	12	4	8	41	32	40
Man Utd	24	9	7	8	36	29	34
Tottenham	24	9	7	8	38	32	34
Wolves	24	8	10	6	35	32	34
Sheff Utd	24	8	9	7	25	23	33
Southampton	24	9	4	11	31	42	31
Arsenal	24	6	12	6	32	34	30
Crystal Palace	24	7	9	8	22	28	30
Everton	24	8	6	10	28	35	30
Burnley	24	9	3	12	28	38	30
Newcastle	24	8	6	10	24	36	30
Brighton	24	6	7	11	27	34	25
Aston Villa	24	7	4	13	31	45	25
West Ham	24	6	5	13	27	40	23
Bournemouth	24	6	5	13	23	37	23
Watford	24	5	8	11	21	36	23
Norwich	24	4	5	15	24	47	17

'Sloppy' Man City must learn despite reaching League Cup final

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola called on Manchester City to learn the lessons of a 1-0 home defeat to Manchester United on Wednesday despite progressing to a third successive League Cup final 3-2 on aggregate.

The holders enjoyed the vast majority of the chances but could not find a way past the inspired David de Gea and went behind to United's first attempt on goal 10 minutes before half-time when Nemanja Matic fired home.

United's hopes of completing a miraculous comeback were extinguished when Matic was then sent-off 15 minutes from time and City held on to face Aston Villa at Wembley on March 1.

"In 180 minutes we were better than United," said Guardiola. "We created chances to score a lot of goals and didn't convert. We need to learn to be more clinical." City started like they did in racing into a 3-0 lead within 38 minutes of the first leg at Old Trafford as they swarmed all over the visitors, who had De Gea to thank for keeping them in the tie.

"I can't really comprehend how we lost this game," said City midfielder Kevin de Bruyne. "I think we got sloppy. "For me Manchester United didn't have one chance today." Sergio Aguero was first to threaten with a diving header that the Spaniard parried to

safety before using his legs to repel Riyad Mahrez's effort.

Bernardo Silva flashed a shot across goal before more De Gea acrobatics denied Aguero again at his near post. United had not even mustered a shot in anger for the first 35 minutes, but suddenly the tie was back in the balance when Matic connected sweetly from the edge of the box after City failed to clear a free-kick into the box.

The hosts did have the ball in the net before half-time when Raheem Sterling finished off a flowing team move, but the England international was denied his first ever goal against United by an offside flag.

Sterling contrived to miss another glorious chance to kill the tie off just before the hour mark as he rounded De Gea but blasted over with just defenders on the line to beat. Guardiola then could not believe his eyes when David Silva tried to tee up Ilkay Gundogan rather than shoot with just De Gea to beat after Harry Maguire was caught in possession.

The tension among the home support was eased when Matic finally paid for persistent fouling when he chopped down Ilkay Gundogan to cut short a City counter-attack. "It's hard to go here and score a goal with 11, nevermind 10," said United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. "It's never a sending off for me - it's a joke."

Aguero finally beat De Gea with a deft finish only to also be flagged offside in the closing stages as United salvaged some pride, if not their chances of a first trophy since 2017. "I'm so proud of these players," added Solskjaer. "They've beaten City now twice at their place. They've given us everything."

United executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward has not been present at recent games as animosity towards his part in the club's declining fortunes on the field has grown. However, Woodward was in attendance at the Etihad just a day after a hooded mob attacked his home with flares and graffiti. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Elbourne, Victoria: Spain's Garbine Muguruza hits a return against Romania's Simona Halep during their women's singles semi-final match on day eleven of the Australian Open tennis tournament Yesterday. — AFP

Unseeded Muguruza happy to fly under radar

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