



**2** Teachers who had traveled must provide health report



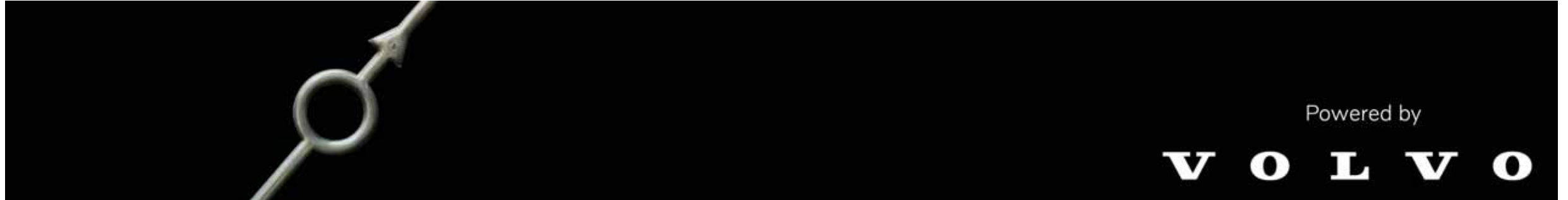
**6** Mahathir rejects new PM as scandal-plagued party returns



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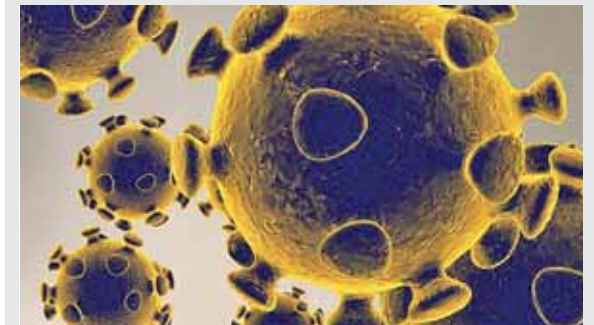
**28** Chelsea stumble at Bournemouth, West Ham ease relegation fears



# Kuwait calls on citizens to avoid travel; no new coronavirus cases

Catholic churches closed in Kuwait • Qatar confirms first case • Iran deaths jump to 43

## Roche Diagnostics, Central Circle rise up to the challenge



WASHINGTON: This handout illustration image obtained Feb 27, 2020 courtesy of the US Food and Drug Administration shows the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Health ministry officials have praised the efforts of Roche Middle East and its partner Central Circle Company for their rapid response to the coronavirus problem in Kuwait. The companies produce (Roche) and distribute (Central Circle) the diagnostic kits and equipment necessary to test for the coronavirus, along with many others.

As the number of cases rises dramatically in the region, the demand for these tests has drastically increased, creating a global bottleneck in supply. The demand for other necessary items such as facemasks and hand sanitizers has also shot through the roof. Numerous co-ops and pharmacy outlets have sold their "future seven-month supply", according to a major co-op distributor.

It's noteworthy mentioning that personal hygiene is still the most important factor in preventing transmission of the disease, according to medical sources at the MoH and international advice from the WHO. For now, the public is still awaiting responses from the Kuwaiti health ministry. There have been mixed reviews related to the government's response to this crisis in the country. For now, companies are still scrambling to provide the necessary amounts of test kits and protective equipment required to satisfy the increasing demand.

KUWAIT: Kuwait called on its citizens to avoid traveling over concerns about the spread of the coronavirus, a health ministry official said at a media conference yesterday. The state has not registered any new coronavirus infections over the past 24 hours. Assistant Secretary at the Health Ministry Dr Buthaina Al-Mudhaf said, adding the ministry and other state bodies are continuing to take measures to counter the coronavirus, and the efforts have been fruitful.

The total number of people infected with the disease in Kuwait is 45, while no one has died, the health ministry said on Friday. Kuwait will continue to evacuate citizens from heavily-infected coronavirus countries. Mudhaf said yesterday, revealing that 35 travelers coming from Iraq were sent into quarantine, while 52 Kuwaitis arriving from Italy were under health inspection. All border entry points in Kuwait - whether air, land, or sea - are under continuous supervision to detect the coronavirus, she said, affirming that all those infected with the virus are in good health and recovering.

The infected patients are receiving topnotch medical care at specialized facilities dedicated to combating the coronavirus. "There are no fees for expats subjected to COVID-19 tests," Mudhaf underlined, noting that that expats found infected will be dealt with according to the

Continued on Page 24



KUWAIT: Director of the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO EMRO) Dr Ahmad Al-Mandhari speaks during a press conference held by the health ministry yesterday. — KUNA

## US, Taliban sign historic deal to withdraw troops

DOHA: The United States signed a landmark deal with the Taliban yesterday, laying out a timetable for a full troop withdrawal from Afghanistan within 14 months as it seeks an exit from its longest war. The agreement is expected to lead to a dialogue between the Taliban and the Kabul government that, if successful, could ultimately see an end to the grinding 18-year conflict. Taliban fighter-turned-dealmaker Mullah Baradar signed the accord alongside Washington's chief negotiator Zalmay Khalilzad, in a conference room in a luxury hotel in the Qatari capital. The pair then shook hands, as people in the room shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest).

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo looked on as the two inked the deal, and alluded to the difficult work that remains to be done. "I know there will be a temptation to declare victory, but victory for Afghans

will only be achieved when they can live in peace and prosper," he said. The Taliban swept to power in 1996, banning women from working, closing girls' schools, and forbidding music and other entertainment.

Since the US-led invasion that ousted them after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks, America has spent more than \$1 trillion on fighting and rebuilding in the country. About 2,400 US soldiers have been killed, along with unknown tens of thousands of Afghan troops, Taliban fighters and Afghan civilians. "We're seizing the best opportunity for peace in a generation," Pompeo told a press conference.

US President Donald Trump, who has promised to finish America's "endless wars", urged the Afghan people to embrace the chance for a new future. "If the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan live up to these commitments, we will have a powerful



DOHA: US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar shake hands after signing a peace agreement during a ceremony in the Qatari capital yesterday. — AFP

path forward to end the war in Afghanistan and bring our troops home," he said on the eve of the signing.

The Taliban's chief negotiator Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai hailed another

"day of victory" in Afghanistan's long history of repelling foreign powers. "This is the kind of day that our ancestors celebrated after they defeated the British

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## Luxembourg becomes first country with free public transport

LUXEMBOURG: Luxembourg yesterday became the first country in the world to offer free public transport, as the small and wealthy EU country tries to help less-well-off workers and reduce road traffic. Some cities elsewhere have already taken similar, partial measures. But the transport ministry said it was the first time such a decision covered an entire country. The free transport, flagged as "an important social measure", affects approximately 40 percent of households and is estimated to save each one around €100 (\$110) per year.

Not all passengers were aware of the change, which was brought forward one day ahead of schedule. "It's free? I didn't know," said a woman in her 50s who gave her first name as Dominique as she waited at Luxembourg's main train station. Transport workers were concerned about what impact the measure would have on their job security. "We don't yet know"

what will happen to their positions, said one ticket seller at the station who declined to give his name. "All the public transport workers are worried. It's not yet clear."

The measure is part of a plan intended to reduce congestion. Private cars are the most used means of transport in the Grand Duchy, accounting for 47 percent of business travel and 71 percent of leisure transport. With more than 200,000 people living in neighboring France, Germany and Belgium who work in Luxembourg and most of them driving in, that makes for major traffic jams at peak hours. The population of the tiny country is just 610,000 and those cross-border workers account for half the total employees.

The capital city of Luxembourg has invested in its public transport network, notably by building a tram network, but commuters complain it is still patchy.

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## Erdogan asks Putin to step aside in Syria

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday that he had asked President Vladimir Putin for Russia to step aside in Syria and leave Turkey to deal with Syrian government forces alone, after 34 Turkish soldiers were killed this week. Government forces, backed by Russian air power, have waged a major assault to capture the northwest province of Idlib, part of the last remaining territory held by rebels backed by Turkey.

Syrian and Russian warplanes yesterday kept up air strikes on the Idlib city of Saraqeb, the Syrian Observatory war monitor reported. The strategic city sits on a key international roadway and has been a flashpoint of fighting in recent days. Turkey said its forces destroyed a "chemical warfare facility", just south of Aleppo, in part of its military retaliation after its soldiers were killed. "We would not want things to reach this point but as they force us to do this, they will pay a price," Erdogan said. Syria's state media denied the attack and the



EDIRNE, Turkey: A man takes cover behind an umbrella as he throws a mattress in a fire during clashes with Greek police in the buffer zone at the Turkey-Greece border in Pazarkule yesterday. — AFP

existence of such a facility.

Turkish strikes using drones and smart missiles late on Friday that hit Hezbollah headquarters near Saraqeb killed nine of its members and wounded 30 in one of the bloodiest attacks on the Iran-backed group in Syria, according to a commander in the regional alliance backing Damascus. The Syrian Observatory said 48

pro-Damascus troops had been killed by Turkish strikes in the past 24 hours.

With diplomacy sponsored by Ankara and Moscow to ease tensions in tatters, Turkey has come closer than ever to confrontation with Russia on the battlefield. Speaking in Istanbul, Erdogan said he had told Putin in a phone

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## Local

# Teachers traveling during break must provide health report before resuming work in Kuwait

## Co-ops make products against COVID-19 infection available for shareholders free of charge

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** Teachers who leave Kuwait during the schools' impromptu coronavirus-related suspension will not be allowed to show up to work after the end of the break on March 15 unless they provide reports from the Ministry of Health (MoH) certifying they are clear of any infection. This announcement was made by Ministry of Education's (MOE) assistant undersecretary for public education Osama Al-Sultan, and after he chaired a recent meeting with educational zone directors to discuss the latest developments and precautionary measures the ministry plans on applying in various schools after resuming the second term.

During the meeting, Sultan stressed the need to activate the role of crisis teams and handed each director a special mobile with a hotline to use in submitting real-time reports of the latest developments in case of detecting any suspected cases. Sultan also urged directors to circulate emergency numbers to all school directors to communicate 24/7 with school health departments. Sultan urged school directors to take all precautionary measures prior to resuming school by sanitizing all classes, seats, water closets and corridors, and supply facemasks for all students.

Chairman of Kuwait University's (KU) teaching staff society Dr Ibrahim Al-Humud said meanwhile that suspending school and the absence of all students and teaching staff members ought to be utilized to enhance

COVID-19 prevention measures through three steps, starting with strict sanitization of all classes, labs and facilities, equipping college clinics with the needed detection devices and connecting those clinics with MoH centers, in addition to preparing publications with guidelines for both students and staff members.

### Full packages

Meanwhile, Kuwait Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies (KUCCS) Chairman Meshaal Al-Sayyar said all co-ops have been instructed to prepare full packages of products to be used to prevent COVID-19 infections and distribute them to shareholders free of charge. Sayyar added that the packages will include various sanitizers and antiseptics and that each co-op will invite shareholders to get them once they are fully prepared and ready. Sayyar added that all local antiseptic product factories have been notified and urged to provide local co-ops with all their production to face any increase in demand. He also noted that KUCCS recently received 250,000 facemasks out of a million pieces to be distributed for free. This comes as the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) announced yesterday closing three pharmacies and a commercial store for violating the laws and regulations on selling products needed to prevent coronavirus infections.

### Prison visits stopped

In the meantime, well-informed security

sources announced that, effective today, all visits to the central prison and prison inmates will be suspended for a fortnight. In collaboration with MoH, the correctional facilities directorate provided a special medical team to examine all officers, warrant officers and all laborers dealing with the prison and mandated all members to wear facemasks inside the prison.

### Sign language

The information ministry announced plans to launch sign language services accompanying all KTV 1 and KTV2 news programs from 2 pm this afternoon. In this regard, official ministry sources said that the service will be launched upon direct instructions from assistant undersecretary for TV Saud Al-Khalidi.

### Staff layoffs

Informed sources said MoH has suspended listing expat temporary employees to be laid off until the current coronavirus situation is over. The sources added that MoH had been instructed to prepare lists and databases of expats working for monthly payments pending their termination after keeping those needed, especially since their numbers had been multiplying without real productivity, which made the ministry earlier to link their monthly payment to their actual work, as some of them were appointed without showing up for work. Further, the sources said Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah plans to sign the termination decision once the current



**KUWAIT:** Muslim men wearing protective masks perform Friday prayers at a mosque in Kuwait City on February 28, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

urgent situation is over, exempting bedoons and notifying expats by the end of July.

### Voter registration

In other news, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced finishing voter registrations and displaying them at various committees

until March 15, before publishing the lists in the official gazette so that voters can check them and officially request any amendments and transfers. The ministry added that final adjustments will be done by April 5 in order to update the lists prior to the coming parliamentary elections.

### local spotlight

## The virus



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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The coronavirus is spreading rapidly in the world, and the Middle East is no exception. Now it is here in Kuwait. On Feb 24, Kuwait reported its first cases. The most common questions and debates are about how it arrived here, who brought it, what should we do, are closing schools enough, should we start storing food and medical supplies, etc. Are we confronting a direct threat of illness and death when mingling with infected people, and are we witnessing a new epidemic?

Inquiries, arguments, prayers, medical advice and tweets have been abundant in the past few days. Five of the nine Middle Eastern countries that reported infections said their first cases were travelers from Iran. These countries are Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq and Oman.

I believe the emergence of cases in Kuwait was only the first shock. The worst part was the government procedures in dealing with the matter, which caused the biggest jolt in the hearts of Kuwaitis. The government measures were totally inconsistent with the seriousness of the unknown virus. The lack of a suitable quarantine and isolation for possibly infected people was the biggest shock indeed! Authorities moved a group of people from the airport to a local hotel and now they are transferred to a coastal resort - shouldn't a quarantine site be in a hospital?!

Several people blamed the minister of health as the person in charge for the absence and lack of precautionary medical preparations. Many people expressed their anger and disappointment over the government's failure on facing the situation on social media, specifically Twitter. I also think it was bad enough for some doctors to air their personal opinions, which I think the ministry of health needs to control, because the statements varied between exaggeration or ignoring the issue.

No one can ignore the virus - it is all over the world. The virus has no vaccine yet and can be fatal for the elderly and those with health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. I think all MENA governments including Kuwait must shut all borders with infected states to protect their populations and monitor all arrivals to the country. This I believe requires collaborative communication and hard work to reduce the risks of disease importation and transmission and boost the number of survivors who get sick from the virus.

The government needs to act in a transparent manner by clearly informing the people what is happening. This is a public health issue. People should be provided updated information, not to make them afraid, but to give them the right guidance to remain aware. All what most people wish to see now is an effective quarantine for infected people, because poor control at healthcare facilities might lead to a disaster and turn a few cases into greater numbers, something no one wishes happens.

## Masks available at Kuwait's supplies centers

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced yesterday that medical face masks will be available for distribution at the supplies storage centers throughout the country. The measure is in line with instructions by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan held meetings with representatives of government departments for coordination on the masks' distribution. The ministry said in a statement that the conferees had worked out a plan for the masks' distribution, with deployment of volunteers by the Public Authority for Youth. The meeting involved the commerce undersecretary Abdullah Al-Afasi, the social affairs undersecretary Abdulaziz Al-Shuaib, the assistant undersecretary for medicines and food supervision Abdullah Al-Bader, the assistant undersecretary for administrative and financial affairs at the Civil Service Commission Bader Al-Hamad, Chairman of the Kuwaiti supplies company Salah Al-Klaib and representatives of the ministry of interior and defense.

### Sterilizing products

Earlier yesterday, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) and representatives of sterilizing products factories met to discuss measures to provide goods used in countering the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In a press release, the ministry affirmed that it was paramount to tackle the latest challenges caused by the coronavirus, saying that any product, which could reduce chances of contracting COVID-19, should be readily available to the masses as part of the measures to counter the disease. Participants in the meeting stressed that it was a national priority and duty for all to get involved in the efforts to halt the spread of coronavirus, the statement indicated.

## Civil Defense Committee in session to guard against coronavirus risks

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh said Friday the Civil Defense Committee is in permanent session to tackle the risks posed by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). "The safety of public health is the top priority because citizens are the real riches of the country," he said in a statement released by the Interior Ministry's General Directorate of Security Relations and Media following a meeting by the interagency committee. The meeting, chaired by Saleh, also gathered Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and Undersecretary of the Interior Ministry and Head of the Committee Lt Gen Essam El-Nahham as well as other senior officials. Saleh commended the efforts of competent state bodies that "mobilized their human and technical resources to fend off the COVID-19 risks and protect the safety of all citizens and residents," according to the statement. The meeting reviewed the precautionary measures implemented by the various state bodies, and ways to maximize benefit from their cooperation and reach the desired targets.

Saleh highlighted the need to continue the public awareness campaign to educate the citizens and residents about the preventive measures and refute fake news and rumors being circulated on some mass media. He urged reliance on the official sources such as the websites of the Ministry of Interior and other government bodies for credible news. During the meeting Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah affirmed that the Ministry of Health continues keeping a close watch on the developments of COVID-19 infections and screening the arrivals from areas hit by the virus. "We are in contact with the World Health Organization (WHO) to keep updated on the developments of the COVID-19 outbreak worldwide and adopt the necessary precautions to prevent its spread in Kuwait," the statement quoted the



**KUWAIT:** A man shops for facemasks at a pharmacy in Kuwait. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

### Bursa trading

In the meantime, Kuwaiti bourse company announced that trading at the stock market would resume today as regular. However, the main trading hall will be shut and visitors' seats at external hallways will be removed as a measure to limit peoples' gathering. Traders will be allowed to be present at the brokerage bureaus to process transactions. All necessary hygiene and sanitation precautions are in place at the bourse building.

### Inspecting ships

In another development, Kuwaiti Ports Authority said Friday that a medical team is accompanying their crews and boarding ships arriving in the country in order to examine its crews, and to ensure that they are free of the emerging coronavirus, known as (COVID-19). The Authority's spokesperson Nasser Al-Shulaimi said in a press statement that instructions had been issued in coordination with the Ministry of Health to inspect ships that will be stopped in a designated area, and their crews would make their inspection before being authorized to dock on Kuwaiti docks. Shulaimi added that instructions were issued to keep crews inside ships as another "precautionary measure" to prevent transmission of the virus. The spokesperson noted that the authority's highest management is monitoring the situation closely. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh chairs the Civil Defense Committee's meeting on Friday. — KUNA

minister as saying. Sheikh Dr Basel noted that the Kuwaiti government suspended all flights to some neighboring countries to stem the spread of the infections to Kuwait and protect the public health.

Representatives of the different state bodies to the Committee reviewed the progress of interagency cooperation and their respective plans for guarding against the COVID-19 spread around the clock. The meeting gathered representatives of the ministries of Defense, Interior, Health, Foreign Affairs, Information, Finance, Education, and Social Affairs, as well as the Kuwait National Guard, the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the General Administration of Customs and Kuwait News Agency. — KUNA

## Some teachers called to work despite closure

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Despite an announcement by Kuwait to suspend classes at schools and universities for two weeks from today, some teachers at various private schools in Kuwait have been asked to report to work today. Some said they have to report for the planning and reprogramming of school calendars to cope with the loss of the two weeks. "We were told to report in order to plan for the graduation and changes in school calendar activities," a vice principal of a school in Kuwait told Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity.

One school in Salwa said there was a plan to continue school activities in a hotel. "I hope it's just a rumor, because definitely it's against the ministry of education's directive," a teacher said. "I believe what this school is doing is wrong. They are deliberately going against the directive against public gatherings by having over 200 plus staff members go to work during these weeks. It could be very harmful for everyone's health," another teacher argued.

An announcement by a bilingual school said: In view of current conditions in the country and in line with the ministry of education's decision to suspend studies for students and workers in all schools, it has been decided to adhere to the scheduled holiday which starts from March 1, 2020 to March 14, 2020, and to resume school on Sunday, March 15, 2020. To make up for this two-week period, it was decided to cancel the vacation that was scheduled for April 12 to April 16, 2020, and the other week will be compensated by attendance on five Saturdays.

## Kuwaitis in US urged to put travel plans on hold

**WASHINGTON:** Kuwait's Embassy in Washington asked its nationals in the United States to postpone their travel plans pending further notice on the exit and entry process against the backdrop of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak worldwide.

A statement by the embassy advised the Kuwaiti citizens and students in the US to keep updated on COVID-19 and abide by the guidelines set in this regard by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through the website [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). Warning against inaccurate news relating to the disease. It also called on them to contact the following phone numbers for any information: The embassy's hotline: +12022620758, Consulate New York hotline: +19172426688, and hotline of the Cultural Office in Washington: 1+ 2023642104.

### Kuwaitis in Italy evacuated

Meanwhile, a special airplane, operated by Kuwait Airways, evacuated on Friday dozens of Kuwaiti nationals from the Italian capital, in cooperation with Kuwait Embassy and in response to the spread of Coronavirus, known as COVID-19. Kuwait's Charge d'Affaires, Sami Al-Zaman said during his supervision of the procedures for the travel of citizens at Rome International Airport that the special flight, operated by Kuwait Airways, took off on time with 53 Kuwaitis wishing to return home.

Zaman indicated that the embassy is in continuous contact with the rest of the Kuwaitis who did not leave yesterday in preparation for facilitating their travel on the upcoming Kuwaiti airline flights scheduled starting from today. The official noted that the first plane evacuated more than 100 citizens from Milan last Wednesday. Many countries halted flights to and from Italy due to the emergence of many Covid-19 infections in Italy. — KUNA



Local

# Travelers from Kuwait have to sign 'health undertaking'

Cabinet calls on Kuwaitis not to travel unless necessary



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti men, wearing protective masks, shop in Kuwait City on February 26, 2020. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



The Arabian Gulf Road almost empty on Thursday, an unusual scene during the national holidays.

KUWAIT: In the light of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) worldwide, passengers leaving Kuwait via airports or land outlets have to undertake to comply with the safety rules set forth by the ministries of health and interior upon their return. The regulations include remaining in a 14-day quarantine if need be pursuant to Act 8 (1969) and cooperation with the competent authorities in order to curb the spread of the virus and protect the public health in Kuwait, the Ministry of Health said in a statement on Thursday. In case of failure to meet the obligations, travelers would be liable to legal measures stipulated in the above-

mentioned law, the statement reminded. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday urged nationals who are currently abroad to return home. In light of a statement made earlier by Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh calling on citizens to abstain from travelling except for necessities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged Kuwaiti nationals who are abroad to return to Kuwait. The Foreign Ministry said the call was intended to spare them hazards of infection of coronavirus and relieve them of rapid and changing precautions for

entry and departure for travelers, undertaken by states as precautions against the virus. Minister Saleh said in his statement earlier that calls for not traveling abroad came to ensure citizens' safety and prevent them from being subjected to coronavirus countermeasures implemented by other nations.

government is keen on safety of citizens and residents of the country and is following up on developments concerning the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Al-Mezrem said in a statement.

The government has already taken some precautionary measures in this regard, such as closing schools and relieving civil servants of electronic punch in/out for work temporarily. Public sector employees who are not compelled to show up at work are those who have been instructed by the Ministry of Health to quarantine themselves at their houses, the spokesperson explained further. —KUNA

**Work proceeds normally**

Meanwhile, work at the public sector is proceeding as regular and there is no need under current circumstances to stop it, official Kuwaiti government spokesperson Tareq Al-Mezrem said on Friday. The

## WHO taking measures to spread awareness, counter misinformation

KUWAIT: WHO is following up the number of cases in the region and the misinformation spread over various means of communication and the media that strikes panic, Director of the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO EMRO) Dr Ahmad Al-Mandhari said. Procedures are divided into three levels - the first depends on WHO's recommendations, second on Kuwait's specific techniques and the third on WHO's additional measures. Awareness in Kuwait targets all age groups in society, in addition to publishing these instructions in all outlets of the country.

WHO relies on the media and health workers on the frontlines to provide accurate information and report to the Ministry of Health (MoH), he noted. The media plays a pivotal role in assisting WHO's efforts and the concerned authorities in every country to contain this outbreak and manage it correctly. In the context of containing the spread, there are three main priorities - protecting health workers, protecting the most vulnerable especially the elderly and

individuals suffering from chronic diseases, and protecting the most at-risk countries.

WHO launched weeks ago the regional preparedness and response plan aiming to expand the scope of alertness to prevent expanding COVID-19 and its early detection, Mandhari pointed out. He underscored the significance of transparent communication with specialists of WHO in terms of numbers and other details, as well as exchanging this information in a timely manner. Kuwait's MoH cooperates with WHO in full transparency in order to protect citizens and residents.

Meanwhile, Mandhari inspected yesterday the Jaber Hospital as part of inspection of the national measures against coronavirus. Mandhari said that his tour of the hospital was intended to check on patients infected with the virus and examine health precautions in this respect. He lauded the high-level precautions that have been taken by Kuwait in dealing with the epidemic outbreak. In the last 24 hours, MoH reported no COVID-19 cases in Kuwait. — KUNA

## Man arrested in citizen's murder-robbery

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Police arrested the suspected killer of a citizen whose burnt body was found in the Rehaya desert, the Interior Ministry's relations and security information department said. Jahra and Farwaniya detectives carried out investigations, located and followed the suspect, then arrested him. The suspect confessed to killing the victim in a robbery. He said he took the body wrapped in a carpet to the Rehaya desert, where he burned it. The suspect had three credit cards and KD 90 belonging to the victim. Meanwhile, another police statement said the partner of the suspect was also arrested, adding he was also involved in the killing.



KUWAIT: Firemen battle a blaze following an accident reported on Fahaheel Expressway.

**Expressway accident**  
Quraïn firemen responded to an accident on Fahaheel Expressway, where a vehicle hit a lamppost. Four Kuwaitis with fractures and wounds were handed to

paramedics. Meanwhile, firemen from the Sulaibikhat and Doha fire stations put out a fire in the chimney of a restaurant in a Sulaibikhat supermarket. No injuries were reported.



Damage left by a fire reported inside a Sulaibikhat supermarket's restaurant.

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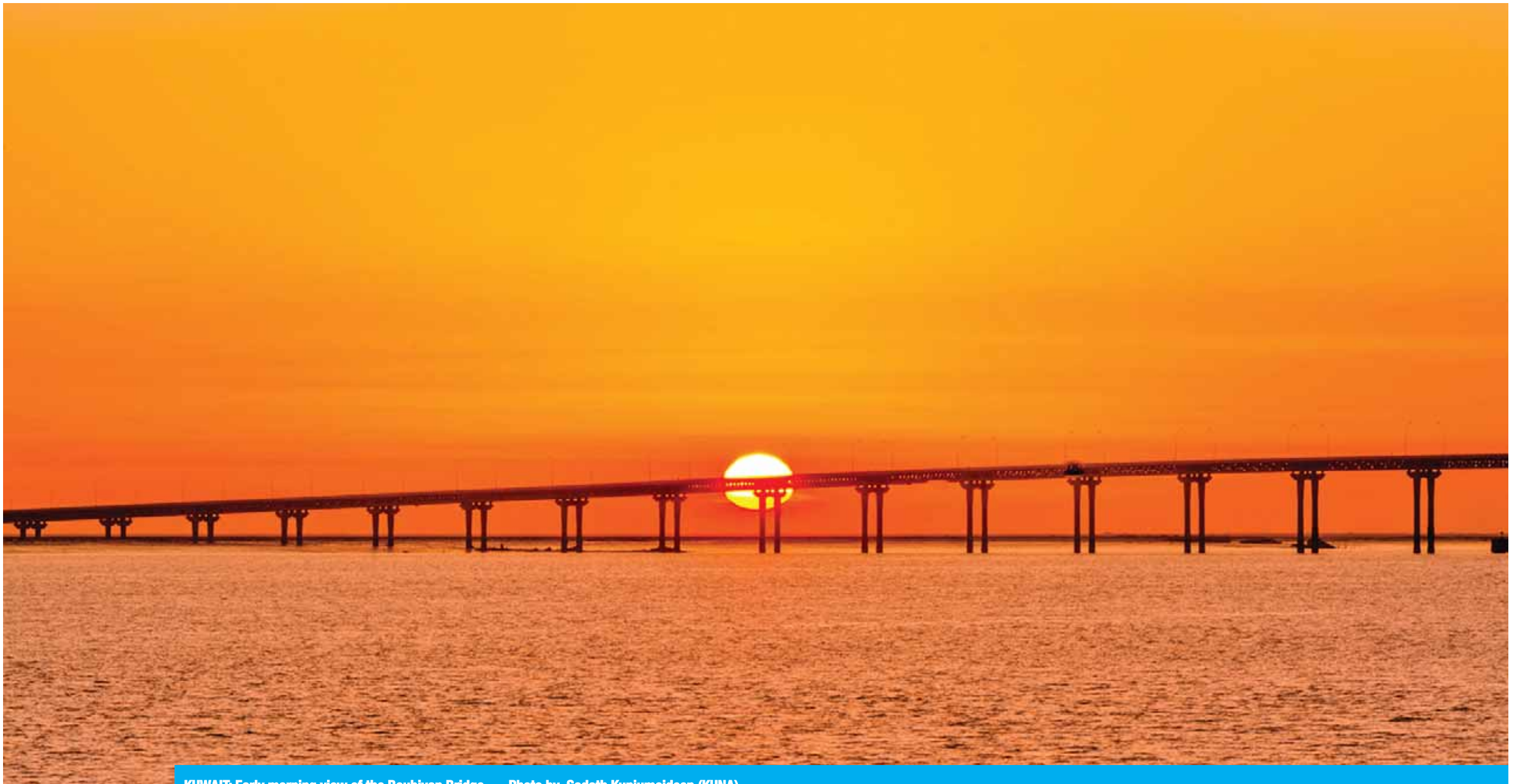
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## Local

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Early morning view of the Boubiyah Bridge. — Photo by Sadath Kunjumoideen (KUNA)

# 'Kuwait's Voice' mirrors significant cultural diplomacy: Diwan official

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VIENNA: Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah (fifth from left) attends the 'Kuwait's Voice' festival. — KUNA

VIENNA: A Kuwaiti cultural event held in Vienna, Austria reflects the concept of cultural diplomacy as the key to mutual understanding and respect, said a Kuwaiti official Friday. The event, which included a performance by Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center's Orchestra, is part of the Arab-Austrian Cultural Year and synchronizes with Kuwait's national festivals.

The festival, held under the rubric 'Kuwait's Voice,' together with other art activities, is chiefly meant to promote and strengthen Kuwaiti-Austrian cooperative bonds, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah said. It also

echoed the mutual willingness of both friendly countries to carry on deepening bilateral ties and propping up common understanding in various realms, he opined.

Cultural diplomacy is a gateway to fruitful cooperation purposed to fan out a noble Kuwaiti message spearheaded by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the 'Humanitarian Leader,' with a view to creating peace and disseminating a global culture of amity, he added. Former Austrian President Heinz Fischer and a number of politicians and accredited ambassadors in Vienna as well as media representatives attended the event. — KUNA



VIENNA: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Slovakia Yusuf Al-Shemali (left) and Slovak officials cut the cake during the ceremony. — KUNA photos

## Kuwait diplomatic mission in Slovakia marks national days

VIENNA: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Slovakia Yusuf Al-Shemali hosted a ceremony combating Kuwait's 59th National Day and 29th Liberation Day, which was attended by many politicians and parliamentarians of Slovakia including friendly nation diplomats. Shemali extended congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His

Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the people of Kuwait on the occasion of the country's national and liberation days.

The ambassador welcomed Slovakian government officials who attended the function. Both countries share a special relationship that has prospered in many fields, especially economically with a recent agreement signed to promote investment between the nations, said Shemali. Deputy Speaker of Slovakia's National Council Martin Klus gave a statement expressing joy and congratulating the State of Kuwait on this occasion, and on the relations both parliaments share. Present at the ceremony was former Minister of Foreign Affairs Pavol Demes, Deputy Minister of Environment Norbert Kurilla, Head of Foreign Affairs administrations, in addition to members of diplomatic corps. — KUNA



Local

# Arab Labor Organization follows up on Palestinian cause: President

## Kuwait's Interior Minister arrives in Tunisia for Arab meeting

CAIRO: The Arab Labor Organization (ALO) is keen on following up on the Palestinian cause "and keeping it always alive at regional and international quarters," the organization's president said. Mariam Al-Aqeel, also Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs, lauded ALO's board for its constant concern for reminding the world of the just cause as the Arabs' top question. Aqeel, addressing inaugural session of ALO's 92nd round of the organization's board, indicated at Israel's systematic annihilation of the Palestinians' civil and infrastructural installations, its policy of "economic annexation," breaking up the West Bank into separated zones, pursuing the settlement policy and expropriation of Palestinians' lands. It also indicated at recurrent disappearance and detention of Palestinians and illegal killings "that have been taking place on daily basis under watchful eyes of the international community."



CAIRO: Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel (right), attends the inaugural session of ALO's 92nd round of the organization's board. — KUNA photos

ALO's president criticized the US peace plan saying it "has undermined what has remained of the Palestinian people's rights, namely the right to self-determination and the right for Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland." The American plan strengthens the occupation and defies resolutions of the UN Security Council and the

General Assembly as to non-recognition of the settlements and the Palestinians in diaspora's right to return. "It also deprives the Palestinians of the right to resist because it blends terrorism with the right to resist the occupation," she said. The meeting's agenda addresses implementation of the 91st session resolutions, a report about conditions

of Palestinian people, namely the workers, in the occupied territories, ALO's plans and its 2021-2022 budget.

### Arab ministers meet

In other news, Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh



TUNIS: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh is seen following his arrival to Tunisia yesterday.

arrived in Tunisia yesterday to partake in the 37th Arab Interior Ministers' meeting. Minister Saleh and his fellow Arab officials are scheduled to discuss a host of issues and reports during the session, due to kick off today.

He was received at the airport by Tunisian Minister of Interior Hisham Al-

Mashish, Secretary General of the Arab Interior Ministers Council Dr Mohammad bin Ali Koman, State of Kuwait Ambassador to Tunisia Ali Al-Dhafiri and senior officers of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior. The minister was seen off upon his departure at Kuwait International Airport by senior Interior Ministry officials. —KUNA



Children attend a ceremony organized by the Kuwaiti Tarahum charitable team for more than 550 Syrian orphans in Sanliurfa, Turkey.

## Kuwait continues humanitarian duty assisting needy

KUWAIT: Kuwait's humanitarian aid activities continued to cover several areas and targeted people that are most in need. The Kuwaiti Tarahum charitable team affiliated to the International Islamic Charitable Organization organized a ceremony for more than 550 Syrian orphans in the city of Sanliurfa southeast of Turkey. Head of the Turkish Ataa Association in Sanliurfa, said that the ceremony came as part of the team's campaign titled 'As One Body 95' and on the occasion of the national holidays of Kuwait. He pointed out that Tarahum team will also organize humanitarian trips for the Syrian refugees in the cities of Gaziantep and Kahraman Marash in cooperation with Ataa organization.

On Friday, the State of Kuwait delivered its voluntary donation worth \$500,000 to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The fund director general, Peter Sands, met during a ceremony for receiving the Kuwaiti donation with the State of Kuwait Permanent Representative to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva, Jamal Al-Ghunaim. The talks touched on health conditions in many countries "where we

work," said Sands during the ceremony, organized at headquarters of the State of Kuwait mission. Sands warned that appearance of coronavirus in countries known for spread of HIV, Malaria and Ebola will lead to repercussions similar to those that had been seen with the Ebola virus eruption in West Africa. Meanwhile, Ambassador Ghunaim has re-affirmed Kuwait's support for the fund to help it fight TB and Malaria.

Moreover, Amiri Diwan Advisor and Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq said that the initiative of providing one billion meals to the poor worldwide achieved great success. In its endeavor of directing efforts of local, regional and global humanitarian organizations to combat hunger in 2019, the initiative's programs, projects and partnerships came in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals to eradicate world hunger by 2030. Maatouq said in a press conference last Sunday that participating organizations have multiplied this goal threefold by distributing nearly three billion meals. He indicated that the number of implemented projects reached 331,961, with a completion rate exceeding 100 percent.

Over 132 million beneficiaries of these projects benefited from the pledges that initially aimed at nearly 99.5 million, with a completion rate of 133 percent, Maatouq explained. Kuwait-based IICO is one of the largest humanitarian organizations in the Muslim world, operating as an independent, multi-faceted charity that provides its humanitarian services to those in need without discrimination or intolerance away from interference in politics or ethnic conflicts. — KUNA

## Kuwait's Foreign Minister attends Mubarak's funeral



CAIRO: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah offers condolences to the family of late President Mohammad Hosni Mubarak. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah writes in the book of condolences.

CAIRO: Representing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah offered his deep condolences to the family of late President Mohammad Hosni Mubarak in the Mosheer A-Tantawi Mosque in Cairo, Egypt on Friday. The representative was received by Kuwait Ambassador to Egypt Mohammad Al-Thuwiekh.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, in the presence of Minister of

State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel, met with members of the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission to Egypt and the Arab League. He appreciated their efforts to carry out their respective tasks, including provision of care to the Kuwaiti nationals and students in Egypt. Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel attended the meeting, which was hosted by Kuwait's Embassy in Cairo. Representatives of Kuwait's technical offices in Egypt and the Kuwaiti student union were also in attendance. — KUNA

## Kuwait launches program for Jordan's Syrian refugees



KUWAIT: Kuwait-based charity 'Al-Rahma International' initiated yesterday a "comprehensive" humanitarian program geared towards Syrian refugees residing in Jordan, with university students taking part in the endeavor. The five-day program mainly deals with providing healthcare for widows and orphans, according to the director of the charity's office in Syria and Jordan Waleed Al-Suwailem, who pointed out that volunteers doled out aid across camps housing refugees in the Hashemite Kingdom. As part of the Kuwaiti charity's efforts to provide "all-encompassing" aid for Syrian refugees, he added that the program also entails conducting intricate surgical procedures on refugees suffering from a wide array of ailments. The program included a noble cause as well, as some 17 couples were united in holy matrimony, the official revealed, with help from a team of volunteers overseeing the joyous occasion. He went on to applaud Amman's generosity for accommodating thousands



of Syrian refugees, thanking his fellow compatriots for never failing to come to the aid of humanity. — KUNA





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					Day	Date	Time
1	Selection of Cargo General Sales Agency (GSA) in Kuwait	20-02-2109-ITC	BD 500	BD 15	Monday	6/4/2020	14:30

**NOTE: Tender documents can be purchased online using e-Tendering system starting on 27 February 2020**

- Tenderers who are eligible to supply/provide the goods/ services/ works specified above are kindly requested to purchase the tender document online through the e-Tendering portal <http://www.tenderboard.gov.bh> (for assistance please contact the Tender Board help desk on Tel: +97317566617).
- An Initial Bond should be enclosed for the amount specified above or at a rate of 1% of the quotation value whichever of the amount is lesser, provided that no initial bond's value shall be less than BD 100/- . Ensure that the Initial bond is in a form of Certified Cheque, Cash, Bank Guarantee or Insurance Policy, valid for the duration specified in the tender documents.
- Sealed offers should be addressed to the attention of Gulf Air Tender Office, 2nd Floor, Wing A, Muharraq, Kingdom of Bahrain not later than the closing date mentioned above, before 14:30 hours.
- Ensure that the provisions of the general tender regulation No. (36) for the year 2002, and its executive regulation No. (37) for the year 2002, in addition to any other condition specified in the tender document are completed. Incomplete submittals will be rejected.
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  - Enclose a copy of the Commercial Registration Certificate valid for the current year, related to the subject tender.
  - Fill the unit rate and total cost in the submission form which will be provided as part of the tender invitation.
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  - Ensure that your company's seal stamp is on all the original documents and copies thereof, which form part of the offer.
- This advertisement is considered to be a supplementary to the tender documents.

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Train-bus crash kills at least 18 in Pakistan

Biden counting on South Carolina as 'Super Tuesday' looms



DAEGU, South Korea: South Korean soldiers wearing protective gear move to spray disinfectant as part of preventive measures against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus at Dongdaegu railway station yesterday. —AFP

# WHO raises risk alert to highest level

## South Korea coronavirus cases surge; death toll mounts

SEOUL: South Korea reported its biggest surge in new coronavirus cases yesterday as concerns grew of a possible epidemic in the United States and the World Health Organization raised its risk alert to its highest level. The virus has rapidly spread across the world in the past week, causing stock markets to sink to their lowest levels since the 2008 global financial crisis over fears that the disease could wreak havoc on the world economy.

More than 2,900 people have died and over 85,000 have been infected worldwide since it was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. The vast majority of infections have been in China but more daily cases are now logged outside the country, with South Korea, Italy and Iran emerging as major hotspots.

South Korea has the most cases outside China, with 3,150 infections as 813 more patients were reported yesterday—the country's biggest increase to date. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un warned top party officials of the "serious consequences" of failing to prevent an outbreak on their side of the border. The impoverished nation, with a weak and ill-equipped healthcare system, has closed its borders to

prevent the spread of the disease into its territory. The virus has also spread to new zones in recent days, reaching nine new countries including Azerbaijan, Mexico and New Zealand, as well as reaching sub-Saharan Africa with Nigeria reporting its first case. "We have now increased our assessment of the risk of spread and the risk of impact of COVID-19 to very high at global level," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters on Friday.

European nations are scrambling to contain the outbreak as new infections mounted in several countries—many linked to virus hotspot northern Italy—including in France where a surge of new cases was confirmed Friday. President Emmanuel Macron yesterday chaired a ministers' meeting on curbing the outbreak, after officials warned the epidemic had reached a "new stage". "The virus is circulating in our territory and we must curb its spread," French Health Minister Olivier Veran said Friday.

Meanwhile in the US, health officials reported three more cases of the new coronavirus transmitted to people who did not travel overseas or come in contact with anyone known to be ill, indicating the disease was spreading in the country. There are now four such cases in

the United States, all on the Pacific seaboard, in addition to some 60 other infections in the country. "The virus is here, present at some level, but we still don't know to what degree," said Sara Cody, director of public health for California's Santa Clara County, the heart of Silicon Valley where tech giants like Apple and Google are based.

### Economy, events hit

US Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell said the central bank stood at the ready to intervene if needed, given the "evolving" risks to the world's largest economy posed by the outbreak. Official data released in China yesterday showed the extent of the damage caused to the world's second-largest economy, with manufacturing activity falling to its lowest level on record as key industries ground to a standstill under drastic containment measures. More global events were disrupted due to the epidemic, with the United States delaying a regional summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations due in Las Vegas next month. "This is not a time for panic. It is time to be prepared—fully prepared," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

South Korea's epidemic is centred in its fourth-largest city, Daegu, whose streets have been largely deserted for days, apart from long queues at the few shops with masks for sale. Three women in the Daegu area died of the illness, taking the national toll to 17, authorities said yesterday. South Korea's total is expected to rise further with screening of more than 210,000 members of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, a secretive entity often accused of being a cult that is linked to around half of the country's cases. Yesterday, South Korea also reported its first reinfection case with a 73-year-old woman testing positive for a second time after recovering from the virus. While China reported 47 more deaths yesterday, it recorded 427 infections—fewer new cases than South Korea—following unprecedented quarantine efforts locking down tens of millions of people in the worst-hit cities.

South Korean officials say they are not considering a citywide quarantine for Daegu similar to the lockdown imposed on Wuhan. In Iran, unnamed health sources told the BBC that at least 210 people had died of the coronavirus—far beyond the official death toll, but Tehran angrily denied that figure. The death toll in Iran jumped to 43 yesterday. —AFP

## Top Home Office mandarin quits over Patel's behavior

LONDON: Britain's top official in the ministry responsible for policing resigned yesterday after clashes with Home Office minister Priti Patel, in the latest test of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's plans for overhauling how government is run. Johnson forced the resignation of his finance minister this month as part of a shake-up of how the government operates amid reports that he wants to change other top government officials.

Philip Rutnam said he was stepping down because he had become the "target of vicious and orchestrated campaign against him", which he alleged Patel was involved in. The civil servant's resignation comes after reports last weekend of tensions between the pair and allegations that Patel mistreated officials and tried to remove Rutnam from her department, which she has denied. The Home Office declined to comment yesterday when asked for Patel's response to Rutnam's resignation and allegations.

Rutnam, who has worked in government for 33 years, took the unusual step of making a statement outside his home, in which he also said he would sue the government over his departure. "My experience has been extreme. But I consider there is evidence that it was part of a wider pattern of behavior," Rutnam said. "I have received allegations that her conduct has included shouting and swearing, belittling people, making unreasonable and repeated demands - behavior that created fear."

### No engagement

Rutnam said he had made attempts to reconcile the situation with Patel, at the request of the prime minister. "But despite my efforts to engage with her, Priti Patel has made no efforts to engage with me to discuss this," he said. Rutnam said that this gave him "very strong claims" for constructive dismissal, which he would be pursuing. Mark Sedwill, the country's top civil servant, thanked Rutnam and expressed regret at his decision to resign. Rutnam said the Home Office had offered him a financial settlement to avoid his public resignation - but said he hoped his decision to pursue damages would lead to changes. Catherine Haddon, senior fellow at the Institute for Government, said Rutnam's comments that he had turned down a settlement could have significant ramifications. "Behavior of ministers has not been tested in court in this way," she said. "It would be extraordinary to see it played out there."

Sajid Javid quit as finance minister this month after losing a power struggle with the prime minister over who should control Britain's economy. In other changes, Johnson's office has already tightened its grip on the advisers who are hired by ministers to provide media and policy support. Patel was forced to resign as Britain's aid minister in 2017 over undisclosed meetings with Israeli officials. —Reuters

## Mahathir rejects new premier

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's political crisis deepened yesterday after 94-year-old Mahathir Mohamad rejected a decision by the king to pick his rival as the next prime minister, insisting he had enough backing to return to the role. Ex-interior minister Muhyiddin Yassin was earlier named for the job by the monarch, who appoints the country's premiers after deciding who has backing from MPs, signalling a defeat for Mahathir and the return of a scandal-plagued party to power.

It capped a week of turmoil that began when Mahathir's "Pact of Hope" alliance collapsed and he resigned as prime minister following a bid by his rivals to form a new government and push out leader-in-waiting Anwar Ibrahim. Their alliance stormed to a historic victory in 2018 that broke the six-decade stranglehold on power of a corruption-riddled coalition, but it was riven by infighting over who should succeed the world's oldest leader.

The victory of Muhyiddin and his coalition, which is dominated by the country's ethnic Malay Muslim majority, was a shock as Mahathir had appeared to be in

the lead, and it sparked widespread public anger. Not only does the win remove a democratically elected government but it also signals the return to power of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the scandal-plagued party of disgraced ex-leader Najib Razak.

UMNO was the lynchpin of a long-ruling coalition toppled from power at historic elections two years ago amid allegations Najib and his cronies looted state fund 1MDB. Najib is now on trial for corruption. The coalition also includes a hardline Muslim party pushing for tougher Islamic laws in Malaysia. Addressing supporters outside his Kuala Lumpur house, Muhyiddin said: "I urge all Malaysians to take the decision that has been made by the palace today well." The palace earlier said the king believed Muhyiddin had enough support and he would be sworn in today.

### Not My PM

But after meeting his political allies, Mahathir said he had received the backing of 114 MPs to be prime minister - above the required number of 112 - and released a statement listing their names. Mahathir said he would send a letter to the king explaining this, and added the number of MPs that Muhyiddin claimed to have supporting him was "not accurate". Anger was growing at the surprise decision to name Muhyiddin premier and allow UMNO back into power. The hashtag



KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's incoming prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin (center) and his family wave to the press outside his home yesterday. —AFP

NotMyPM was trending on Twitter, and a small group of protesters gathered in downtown Kuala Lumpur.

"These are not the people we voted for," one protester, who only gave her surname Soon, told AFP, as chants of "long live the people, rise up" rang out. "These are not the people who were given the democratic mandate two years ago." The political crisis began when a group of ruling coalition lawmakers joined forces with opposition parties in a bid to form a new government without

Anwar and stop him becoming premier.

After the government fell, Mahathir was appointed interim premier and he and Anwar initially launched separate bids for power, reviving their old rivalry. But as Muhyiddin's bid quickly gained support and it became clear that he could get into power with UMNO, Mahathir and Anwar did a volte-face and joined forces again yesterday. A growing number of their allies threw their support behind Mahathir to become premier - but it was too little, too late. —AFP

## Erdogan denounces 'massacres' against Muslims in India

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hit out Thursday against "massacres" of Muslims in India after communal riots in New Delhi left at least 33 dead. "India right now has become a country where massacres are widespread. What massacres? Massacres of Muslims.

By who? Hindus," Erdogan said during a speech in Ankara after violence broke out this week between mobs of Hindus and Muslims over a citizenship law. Over 200 people were injured and 33 killed since late Sunday in clashes that saw mobs of Hindus and Muslims fight running battles, armed with swords and guns. Thousands of properties and vehicles were touched in the violence. According to a document seen by AFP the victims are a roughly even mix of Hindus and Muslims, based on their names.

Erdogan, a devout Muslim, sees himself as a defender of Islam, often taking public stands on issues concerning the faith and its followers. He accused the mobs attacking Muslims of hurting children studying in private tuition

centers with "metal sticks as if to kill" them. "How will these people make global peace possible? It is impossible. When making speeches—since they have a large population—they say 'we are strong' but that is not strength," Erdogan added.

The unrest is the latest bout of violence over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's citizenship law, which triggered months of demonstrations that turned deadly in December. Critics say Modi wants to turn the officially secular country into a Hindu state. Many of the 200 million Muslims in India fear the citizenship law—combined with a mooted citizens' register—will leave them stateless or even sent to detention camps. —AFP



## International

## Ethiopia's Abiy faces outcry over crackdown on rebels

## Ordinary civilians bearing the brunt of military operations

**NEKEMTE, Ethiopia:** Desta Garuma, a 27-year-old rickshaw driver, never showed much interest in politics, so his family has no idea how soldiers concluded he was involved in a rebel movement active in Ethiopia's Oromia region. But one day in January, five truckloads of soldiers followed him home, shouting that they had identified a *shifita*, or bandit - a euphemism for rebel. As his mother and younger sister covered inside, the soldiers fatally shot Desta three times in the back, according to witnesses.

"When I heard the shots I said, 'Oh my God, they killed my son,'" Desta's mother, Likitu Merdasa, told AFP. "My son was not a troublemaker. We hoped he would be able to improve his life as well as mine. But now he has been taken from me before his time." The killing is one of an array of abuses that residents, opposition politicians and rights groups accuse soldiers of committing in and around Nekemte, a market town in Oromia, as part of a crackdown on rebels that has intensified this year.

Community leaders contend ordinary civilians are bearing the brunt of the operations, which include mass detentions, an internet blackout and restrictions on political activity. The Ethiopian military rejects claims that its activities endanger civilians. Yet Nekemte residents say the soldiers' presence recalls life under past authoritarian regimes in Ethiopia, tarnishing the image of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the Nobel Peace laureate trying to steer the country toward landmark elections in August.

This is especially disheartening for the Oromo ethnic group, who had hoped they would benefit from the appointment of Abiy, himself an Oromo, as prime minister in 2018. "When the reform came, we all hoped this kind of thing would not happen to Oromo people," Likitu said. "But now they're coming to the doors of our houses and killing our children in front of us."

## Escalating operations

The military is ostensibly targeting the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), blamed for a spate of assassi-

nations, bombings, bank robberies and kidnappings in Oromia. The OLA, believed to number in the low thousands, broke off from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), an opposition party that spent years in exile but was allowed to return to Ethiopia after Abiy took office. The government has offered little specific information about military operations in Nekemte and the broader region that surrounds it, known as Wollega.

But there are signs that counterinsurgency efforts have escalated since January, said William Davison, Ethiopia analyst for the International Crisis Group (ICG), a conflict-prevention organization. "It appears the government decided to make a renewed effort to entirely remove the threat of armed groups from the area," Davison said. Brigadier General Tilahun Ashenafi, foreign relations director of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, defended the military's actions, saying he had "no idea" about civilian casualties. Soldiers are acting in a "very good way in that region in order to clear anti-peace elements", he told AFP.

## Beatings, detentions

But many residents of Nekemte see the military, not the rebels, as the main source of instability. Asfaw Kebede, a 60-year-old community leader, told AFP he grew alarmed last year at the jailing without charge of young men in Kumsa Moroda Palace, a one-time tourist attraction that residents said had been turned into a makeshift detention facility. When Asfaw started bringing the men food, soldiers locked him up too, holding him in a dark cell for six weeks with roughly 100 other detainees. All the men were deprived of proper food and medical care, Asfaw said.

The palace teemed with snakes and mice, and when they entered the cells inmates who scrambled to get away were beaten with batons, he said. Opposition political parties have also been affected by the military presence. Representatives of both the OLF and the Oromo Federalist Congress said their offices had been



**NEKEMTE, Ethiopia:** Likitu Merdasa holds a portrait on Feb 26, 2020 at her home of her son Desta Garuma, a 27-year-old rickshaw driver, allegedly killed by security forces. —AFP

closed multiple times and their members detained. Such tactics are fuelling sympathy for the OLA, said Tamirat Biranu, head of an evangelical church in Nekemte. "Young people are very sad about this and also they are angry at the government," he said. "Because of this, some of the youth are joining the rebels."

As bad as things might be in Nekemte, they are likely worse in rural areas farther west, where phone service has been cut for months, said Asebe Regassa, a lec-

turer at Wollega University. "Killings are occurring on a daily basis in rural areas," Asebe said, adding that farmers are afraid of harvesting their crops, fearing soldiers will accuse them of growing food for the OLA. The military operations are "clearly taking a heavy toll," said Laetitia Bader of Human Rights Watch (HRW). "Ahead of the 2020 national elections the government should be working to build trust with communities," she said. —AFP

## Fleeing Syrians set up camp underground

**TALTUNAH:** In a field dotted with olive trees in embattled northwestern Syria, Shamseddin Darra steps down into the gloomy underground shelter he and his family now call home. After fleeing a deadly offensive by government forces on their home region of Idlib, they found nowhere else to go.

Beyond rolling hills in the village of Taltuna, Darra, his three brothers, their wives and more than a dozen children share a small room in the belly of the earth. "We're living here for lack of a better option," says 35-year-old Darra, who calls their makeshift shelter "the cave". "We didn't have any tents. We stayed in the town mosque for two days. We looked for a place to stay but found nothing," he explained.

After they found the abandoned shelter, dug out by villagers earlier in the civil war to hide from air strikes, they cleaned it out and moved in.

Backed by Russia, government forces have been chipping away at Syria's last major rebel bastion since December. The region is run by jihadists and allied rebel groups, and is home to around three million civilians. The violence has forced 900,000 of them to flee their homes or shelters, more than half of them children.

## 'Scorpions and snakes'

Inside their new underground home, Darra's children huddle on a carpet around a tray covered in small bowls of hummus and dried oregano in olive oil. Sunshine seeps in only from the staircase, the only source of light to cast away the dank darkness.

In a corner, the family has piled its scant belongings under a red and navy blue blanket. "We're suffering from the humidity. The kids are sick," he said, as nearby one of them started crying. "And there are bugs," added Darra, wearing a thick black hooded sweatshirt. Not far off, 40-year-old Abu Mohammed had also set up camp in an underground bunker. He and around 40 people now share the space, where they have thrown a plastic rug on the ground and piled plastic jars of pickled olives and other food along the uneven wall.



**TALTUNAH, Syria:** Members of a family of internally displaced Syrians eat together in an underground shelter in this village on Feb 23, 2020. —AFP

When we first arrived, "the cave was dirty. There was animal excrement," said Abu Mohammed, wearing a black leather jacket and sporting a greying beard. "The villagers warned us there were scorpions and snakes, but we had no other option," he said. Of those newly displaced since

December, some 170,000 live out in the open or in unfinished buildings, the United Nations says. AFP correspondents have seen families without shelter forced to camp out in their cars, sleep in schools or mosques, or even make home in an abandoned prison. —AFP

## Jailed Kurdish leader becomes literary star

**ISTANBUL:** He may be languishing in jail but with his books flying off the shelves, Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas has joined an illustrious line of Turkish prison writers. A former presidential candidate and persistent thorn in the side of Turkey's current leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Demirtas has spent more than three years in jail and faces up to 142 years more if convicted of ties to Kurdish militants, which he denies.

"I am engaged in a major battle of wills because I am a political prisoner and this is motivating me to expose my creativity," Demirtas said in written responses sent to AFP through his lawyers from his cell in western Edirne city. Despite the possible sentence hanging over him he has found some consolation in his ever-growing number of readers as sales of his books, written in Turkish, reach into the hundreds of thousands.

His first book, *Seher* (Dawn), was published in 2017 -

a collection of short stories that contain glimpses into daily lives of ordinary people including women characters whose voices often go unheard. It has turned into a runaway success, translated into 16 languages with 240,000 copies printed. Demirtas has followed up with another short story collection "Devran", and now a full novel, "Leylan." "I would without hesitation choose literature" over politics, Demirtas said.

## 'Naive'

The charismatic politician, who founded and led the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), was once nicknamed the "Kurdish Obama" by some admirers for his rhetorical skills. But the 46-year-old former lawyer was detained in the sweeping crackdown that followed a failed coup in July 2016, which Erdogan's critics say was used as a pretext to remove opponents and civil society activists. "Today politics is nothing more than a collective swindle. We are jailed because my friends and I are not involved in this fraud ring," Demirtas said.

"Literature is, however, a more naive, cleaner domain," he said, where "every reader is at least free to make his own decisions". Writing is also a form of "resistance" to the monotony of prison life, he added. "There is nothing here but four walls and a door. We



**ANKARA:** Dipnot publishing house director Emir Ali Turkmen poses with the books "Leylan" and "Seher" written by Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas on Feb 13, 2020. —AFP

spend almost all our time in a small cell... everything is directed towards weakening the human will and wrecking one's personality." Despite his widespread popularity, Demirtas has many detractors in Turkey's bitterly divided political scene. —AFP

## Ultra-Orthodox army service looms over Israel vote

**JERUSALEM:** When Yossi Levy decided to quit studying at an ultra-Orthodox Jewish yeshiva to join the Israeli army, his brother told him he would be better off dead. But he went ahead to serve in a unit for young men from the ultra-Orthodox community, or haredi in Hebrew. "My heart wasn't in what I was doing at my yeshiva," said 29-year-old Levy, referring to a Jewish academy devoted to the Talmud, the body of Jewish law and legend. "I decided to challenge myself," he

told AFP. "I also challenged my family." At Israel's creation in 1948, haredim were exempted from the military service that was mandatory for all other Jewish citizens - and were also largely exempted from working. The leaders of the new Jewish state wanted this community - which was hit particularly hard by the Holocaust - to rehabilitate by focusing on religious study. But the military exemption has since become a controversial subject, with more secular Israelis having grown increasingly resentful.

The issue is at the centre of a political stalemate that is forcing the country to hold its third general election inside a year tomorrow. The army, long seen as Israel's melting pot, has also sought ways for haredim to enlist while maintaining their religious identity. But that has raised con-

cern among haredi leaders who say military service threatens community cohesion by removing young men from yeshivas and exposing them to a new lifestyle.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has remained in office partly through haredi political alliances, has failed to broker a compromise. His 2018 proposal that sought to establish quotas for haredi military service, without making it mandatory for all ultra-Orthodox, failed to make it through parliament - one factor that broke up his coalition. Israeli lawmakers have also come under added pressure to resolve the haredi service impasse by the supreme court, which has ruled the exemption violates the principle of equality.

But it is unclear whether tomorrow's vote could lead to a solution. Polls say that Netanyahu's rightwing Likud and the cen-

trist challengers Blue and White are again running neck-and-neck, with further stalemate possible. After deadlocked polls in April and September, the leader of the secular, nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party, Avigdor Lieberman, was in a position to play kingmaker.

But the former Netanyahu ally refused to join a Likud coalition, accusing the prime minister of failing to tackle ultra-Orthodox military exemption. The coalition talks following tomorrow's vote will likely be frenzied. Some analysts have suggested that haredi leaders, who currently control 17 of 120 parliamentary seats, could even come to terms with Blue and White. Regardless of the election result, most experts agree the haredi draft conundrum needs to be solved, especially given the Supreme Court's position. —AFP

## Rampant graft spurring protests in Lebanon

**BEIRUT:** The Lebanese government had frozen recruitment but then, around the time of a key election, thousands of people suddenly landed civil servant jobs. The alleged corruption case is just one of many stirring public anger in Lebanon, where protesters are calling out rampant graft they say has brought the economy to its knees.

Cronyism in the public sector, bribes, conflicts of interest and dodgy procurement deals-Lebanese have been angrily detailing their complaints in waves of mass protests since October, crying out that enough is enough. The authorities have said they are determined to root out corruption, and state prosecutors frequently say they have launched a probe or questioned an official.

But experts and protesters are sceptical. How, they ask, are they expected to believe in change from leaders who benefit from the system and whose interest is to preserve it? In August 2017, Lebanon passed a law to halt all recruitment in the public sector. But after that decision and through 2018, more than 5,000 people were taken on in murky circumstances, a source at the oversight body for public administrations said. That period coincided with the country's first parliamentary election in nine years.

"It's buying votes," says Assaad Thebian, who heads the anti-graft non-governmental organization Gherbal Initiative. "When you give someone a job, you're buying their loyalty and that of their relatives," he said. Lebanese media have also accused key political parties of arranging hundreds of illegal hirings at state-owned telecommunications firm Ogero in 2017 and 2018. Anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International said in December that almost one in two Lebanese had been offered a bribe for a vote.

## 'No political will'

Parliament's finance committee investigated 5,000 hirings, and the file has been transmitted to the Court of Audit. Committee chairman Ibrahim Kenaan said it was not his place to analyse what had happened. "But logically, it's a political issue," he said. "It was a period of elections. Maybe it was easy to just provide someone with a job."

"Maybe it's to do with... people being used to no one being held accountable." But the lawmaker, who represents the Free Patriotic Movement of President Michel Aoun, now under fire for its record in power, said things would change. "Now there's accountability-at least we're trying," he said. Laws are being drafted to prevent illicit enrichment and retrieve stolen public funds, Kenaan said.

But anti-graft activist Thebian warns political will is lacking. "It's strange that a state that wants to battle corruption has not yet fired a single civil servant, tried a single minister or official," he said. Protesters say they are fed up with a political class dominated for decades by the same powerful families who also pull strings in business. As they are hit by an acute liquidity crisis and price hikes, they ask how they can trust a political elite with ties to the banking sector.

Lebanon is weighed down by a huge public debt, most owed to local banks benefiting from high interest rates. "The major problem is conflict of interest-perceived or actual," said Jad Chaaban, an economics professor at the American University of Beirut. "There is no way that you, as a minister or prime minister or member of parliament, can act against the interest of the institution that you have shareholding in." —AFP



## International

# A Jewish president? Sanders and Bloomberg vie to bust US barrier

## More than two-thirds of American Jews oppose Trump

WASHINGTON: White House hopefuls Bernie Sanders and Michael Bloomberg could hardly be more different in their politics, but in one striking way they share a similarity marking a milestone in US presidential campaigning: both men are Jewish. Should Senator Sanders, the progressive torchbearer and current Democratic frontrunner, or centrist billionaire Bloomberg, who is polling in third, win the nomination and then the election against incumbent Donald Trump, America would have the first Jewish president in its history.

The contest may have reached a peak Jewish cultural moment at a recent Democratic debate when Sanders and Bloomberg, both 78-year-olds either born or living in New York, compared their heart health on stage. And yet the fact that two Jews are in prominent positions in the 2020 race - 16 months after a white nationalist murdered 11 worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue - has been met with muted celebration within the Jewish community, and a sense of detachment among the broader public, observed Rabbi Adam Kligfeld.

"It's amazing, stunning, surprising and odd how little is being made of that data point," Kligfeld, senior rabbi at Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles said. "Maybe that's a good sign." The two are also drawing concerns. Sanders is a self-described democratic socialist, while Bloomberg is a multi-billionaire accused of buying his way into the presidential race. There is little love lost between them, as evidenced in January when Bloomberg sand-bagged his fellow member of the tribe during an address at a Miami synagogue. "I know I'm not the only Jewish candidate running for president," the media tycoon said, between quoting Leviticus and jokes about Wolfie's deli.

"But I am the only one who doesn't want to turn America into a kibbutz." The rise of Sanders has sparked a debate about whether values embraced by Jews, like social justice, are best achieved through

policies including universal health care, or by unwavering defense of Israel. Sanders antagonized many in the community Sunday by announcing he was boycotting the upcoming annual meeting of AIPAC, Washington's influential pro-Israel lobby, because it provides a platform for "bigotry."

Sanders has repeatedly insisted he supports Israel but opposes policies that he says hurt Palestinians. In Tuesday's debate he branded Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a "reactionary racist." Sanders' dominance in the race has been a point of pride for some Jews, but anxiety for others. "Sanders is a harder person to cheer for than what the centrist Jewish community fantasized would be the first time they had the chance to consider a Jewish candidate," Kligfeld said.

### 'Proud' Jewish identity

For several decades Jews have voted overwhelmingly Democratic. More than two-thirds of American Jews oppose Trump, despite his proclamations that he is Israel's most ardent defender, according to pollster Gallup. But only 11 percent of Jewish voters support Sanders for president, while eight percent back Bloomberg, Pew Research Center polling from January shows. Kligfeld noted how much less of a focus their faith is compared to 20 years ago, when Democratic moderate Joe Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, was the vice presidential nominee.

Al Gore's running mate stirred a spirited debate about Judaism and the White House, notably about how Lieberman could serve as vice president if he observed the Sabbath rule barring work from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. That Sanders and Bloomberg are less observant than Lieberman may have assuaged similar concerns. With Trump accused of stoking flames of a culture war, and amid a wave of anti-Semitic violence and other hatred, the success of Sanders and Bloomberg is notable.

"It's definitely significant (that) two very different



WASHINGTON: Democratic frontrunner Bernie Sanders (right) and former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg (left), both Jewish, are vying for the party's presidential nomination. —AFP

politicians but both of Jewish heritage and proud of their Jewish identity can be in such a prominent national political position," said Logan Bayroff, director of communications for J Street. The progressive pro-Israel group does not endorse candidates but has said it will support the Democratic nominee against Trump. Many policies of Sanders and other Democratic candidates "line up with our views and the views of the majority of American Jews," Bayroff said.

In his first presidential campaign, in 2016, Sanders largely avoided discussing his Jewishness. He has been more open about his identity this cycle. In December he used a blowtorch to light a Hanukkah menorah in Iowa, where he recalled how his father emigrated from Poland to flee anti-Semitic attacks. In November he wrote an essay in Jewish Currents magazine in which he said several relatives were "murdered by the Nazis." —AFP

## US reports fourth corona infection of unknown origin

LOS ANGELES: US health officials reported Friday a fourth case of novel coronavirus of unknown origin, indicating the disease was spreading in the country. The latest case is a boy under 18 in Washington State who tested "presumptive positive," local authorities said without releasing further details about the patient.

He is currently in home isolation in Snohomish County. The high school he attends will be shut until March 3 while it is deep cleaned, the Washington State Department of Health said. In neighboring Oregon, authorities said Friday an adult who had had contact with people at an elementary school had been hospitalized and was also considered "presumptive positive." A positive test is treated as "presumptive" until the results have been confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We've been expecting this and we're prepared for it," Oregon's Health Authority director Patrick Allen told reporters. The school will be closed until March 4 as it undergoes a deep clean, officials said, adding they would talk to employees and parents. Earlier Friday, Californian health authorities said an older woman was confirmed infected with unknown origin—the second such case in the northern part of the state. "This new case indicates that there is evidence of community transmission but the extent is still not clear," said Sara Cody, director of public health for Santa Clara County. "What we know now is that the virus is here, present at some level, but we still don't know to what degree," she added. The two cases in California are close to Silicon Valley, where tech giants like Apple, Google and Tesla are based. The latest infections have heightened fears of an outbreak across the country.

President Donald Trump, however, downplayed the risk in the US at a campaign rally in South Carolina, accusing Democrats and the press of stirring up hysteria. "We are preparing for the worst," he said. "My administration has taken the most aggressive action in modern history to prevent the spread of this illness in the United States." He called the coronavirus the Democrats' "new hoax." "The Democrats are politicizing the coronavirus. They're politicizing it," he said. "They don't have any clue. They can't even count their votes in Iowa." According to the Centers for Disease Control more than 60 people are infected with the disease in the United States, the majority of them in California. The state's governor Gavin Newsom said on Thursday 33 people had tested positive for the virus, and five of them had left California. Worldwide more than 85,000 people have been infected and over 2,900 have died. The escalating number of cases has sent stock markets tumbling and heightened fears the disease could wreak havoc on the world economy.—AFP

## Trump nominates controversial ally as intel chief

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump announced Republican lawmaker John Ratcliffe as his intelligence chief Friday, sparking fresh controversy over a crucial position that has lacked a permanent office holder for months. The 53-year-old Trump loyalist was nominated as director of national intelligence after Dan Coats stepped down in July last year, but withdrew from consideration after strong criticism of his credentials from Democrats and a tepid response from key Republicans.

Trump instead named counterterrorism expert Joseph McGuire as acting director, overseeing the 17 agencies of the intelligence community including the CIA and National Security Agency.

But he forced McGuire out on February 20 after a senior intelligence official told Congress in a closed briefing that the Russians were again supporting Trump's bid for reelection.

The revolving door continued to spin as Trump appointed another loyalist, Richard Grenell, two weeks ago. But the former ambassador to Germany had no relevant experience and was viewed as highly political. Some intelligence experts view the latest nomination as

a tactic by Trump to insure that Grenell stays on beyond the statutory limit for "acting" directors who haven't been approved by the Senate.

"The formal submission of his nomination will allow @RichardGrenell to continue to serve as Acting DNI past March 11 - and for another 210 days after Ratcliffe's rejection or withdrawal," said University of Texas security law professor Steve Vladeck.

### Outspoken defender

Ratcliffe has been an outspoken Trump defender, frequently appearing on Fox News to spread conspiracy theories and deny the intelligence community's conclusion that Russia tried to boost the president's election effort in 2016. Trump said Friday he had held back Ratcliffe's formal nomination while an unspecified "inspector general report" was being prepared.

"John is an outstanding man of great talent!" he tweeted. Trump has been determined to place someone politically close to him as chief of the intelligence community, which he views as hostile and full of leakers. He saw Coats, who was DNI for three years, as a political antagonist who protected the so-called "deep state" that Trump regards as a barrier to his agenda. He was especially upset when a CIA analyst filed a whistleblower complaint in August on his Ukraine dealings that led to his being impeached for abuse of power.

The Ratcliffe nomination could spark a battle in Congress, amid reports that Republicans on the Senate Intelligence Committee, which must approve the nomination, expressed strong doubts about him in August.

## Billionaire Steyer shakes up primary with slavery plan

MYRTLE BEACH: For centuries, South Carolina's Charleston was the largest port of entry for the transatlantic slave trade. Now, a billionaire activist named Tom Steyer is shaking up the state's Democratic primary by advocating slavery reparations for African Americans.

A California financier turned philanthropist and environmental campaigner, Steyer has poured tens of millions of dollars into the state ahead of the vote - with a single-minded focus on the black voters who make up 60 percent of its Democratic electorate. How South Carolina's African Americans vote in the White House primaries is traditionally a key indicator of which contender has nationwide support from the black community - a crucial Democratic constituency.

Flooding the airwaves with promises to compensate the descendants of slaves, and to invest in universities in historically marginalized black communities, Steyer - who lags far behind his Democratic rivals nationally - has hoisted himself into third place in state polls, behind Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders. "You've got to tell the truth about what happened," said Steyer during one of his final campaign stops at a Mexican restaurant in Myrtle Beach, drawing applause from the diverse crowd.

"You've got to repair what's done so that we can move on together," said Steyer - who says the United States needs to confront a "subtext of race" underpinning nearly every issue it faces, more than 150 years after the abolition of slavery in 1865. Teresa Skinner, an African-American retired nurse and veteran, was impressed. "Tom Steyer's bringing something new," said the 51-year-old. "It's just an enlightening thing." "He's just coming in as an individual that's wanting to make us better than what we are, and right now we're in a divided nation."

Robert Greene, a visiting professor at Claflin University, a historically black college in South Carolina, attributes Steyer's popularity squarely to his "very aggressive stance"



CHARLESTON: (Left to right) Democratic presidential hopefuls Former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg, Former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, Pete Buttigieg, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, Former Vice President Joe Biden, Indiana Senator Amy Klobuchar and Billionaire activist Tom Steyer arrive to participate in the tenth Democratic primary debate of the 2020 presidential campaign season co-hosted by CBS News and the Congressional Black Caucus Institute at the Gaillard Center in Charleston, South Carolina. —AFP

on reparations, "an issue that most of the other candidates will not touch." The idea of reparations has been the topic of contentious debate in the United States for decades, but has picked up steam in recent years. Last

April, students at Georgetown University in Washington voted to create a fund to compensate the descendants of 272 people enslaved at the Jesuit-run school who in 1838 were sold to finance its operations. —AFP

## Joe Biden counting on South Carolina as 'Super Tuesday' looms

COLUMBIA: Joe Biden scrambled to salvage his flagging presidential hopes Friday on the eve of South Carolina's Democratic primary, where nothing less than a decisive victory can help him rebound and challenge frontrunner Bernie Sanders. The former vice president is the firm favorite in the first state in the race with a substantial African-American Democratic electorate-but trails far behind the surging leftist in nationwide polls.

Both candidates will have a better picture of their prospects just days after South Carolina, with 14 states voting on "Super Tuesday" and a third of the delegates who formally choose the Democrat to face President Donald Trump in November up for grabs.

Biden, the former frontrunner who failed to notch a win in the first three states, said he hopes South Carolina will propel him into national contention. "I've worked hard to earn these votes, and I think I'll do well," the 77-year-old told CNN early Friday, before heading to a trio of 11th-hour events. "It's been the launching pad for Barack and I believe for me," Biden added, referring to the nation's first black president Barack Obama.

Biden leads in state polling, a dozen points ahead of Sanders and 20 points up on billionaire activist Tom Steyer, who is gunning for a third-place finish. Steyer has spent an

extraordinary \$23.6 million on ads in South Carolina, nearly 10 times the number two spender, former Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg, according to Advertising Analytics. Some polling has been misleading in the early contests. In Iowa for instance, Biden was second in polls before caucus night but finished fourth.

### Kaine endorses Biden

Biden and fellow moderates including Buttigieg and Senator Amy Klobuchar may well face a Sanders buzz saw come Super Tuesday, with the 78-year-old self-declared democratic socialist leading in the two biggest prizes including crown jewel California. Sanders is dominating there with 32.5 percent support, according to the RealClearPolitics polling average, with fellow progressive Senator Elizabeth Warren second. —AFP



SPARTANBURG, SC: Democratic presidential candidate former Vice President Joe Biden responds to a man asking for a photograph at a campaign event at Wofford University on Friday in Spartanburg, South Carolina. —AFP



## International

# For grieving families, Afghan peace deal brings doubt as well as hope

## Families endure horror in attack's aftermath

**KABUL:** For mother-of-four Nasima, the prospect of lasting peace in Afghanistan is almost too good to be true. The 45-year-old, whose husband Nasir Ahmad was killed in a massive truck bomb in Kabul blamed on Taliban insurgents, is one of thousands of grieving relatives in the war-weary country who look upon a promised peace deal with skepticism as well as hope.

Afghanistan has been at war for decades. The Soviet invasion dominated the 1980s, civil war followed, the hardline Islamist Taliban movement held sway for a few years before being ousted in a US-led assault, followed by 18 more years of conflict. Tens of thousands of civilians, insurgents, Afghan security personnel and foreign troops have died, and loved ones will look to planned deal between the United States and the Taliban with mixed feelings.

"Anyone who can carry out such a brutal attack, how can I believe that they will let others live in peace?" Nasima asked, speaking in her Kabul apartment surrounded by her children. But she would at least try to move on if the attacks really stopped. "If they (the Taliban) are serious about getting together for real peace, I am ready to forgive the suffering they caused me and my family."

The weekend agreement in Doha on an American troop withdrawal is connected to a wider push for reconciliation between the Taliban and the Afghan government, although major obstacles to lasting peace remain. One is the lack of trust between sides who blame each other for the heavy toll of war.

Nasima's husband left home early one morning in late May, 2017, in search of work so that he could afford to bring home "iftar", an evening meal served during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. He had not found a job for a few days. "A day before I had asked him about whether he found a job; he told me there were shops whose display windows needed cleaning for Ramadan

and he was confident he'd find work if he got there early," Nasima recalls.

At around 8:30 am, she heard a loud blast. Such was the intensity of the explosion that it shook the entire city. The truck bomb was deadliest attack in Kabul in 18 years of war. No one has claimed responsibility for at least 150 people who were killed, including Nasir Ahmad.

Nasima's memories of that day are harrowing, yet common among Afghans. "At the hospitals I saw bodies covered with blood, charred. The wounded were screaming. There were boxes full of human body parts," Nasima recalled. Nasima has washed dishes and clothes for the last three years to support her children - two daughters, Naiema, 15, Sabzina, 13, and two sons, Waris, 10, and Arif, 7. "I have lived my life and have had to suffer; but for my children I want peace," she added.

### Pain for peace

Families of Taliban fighters and security personnel have also faced loss. Haji Malik, 47, a shopkeeper in the northern city of Kunduz, lost his son, 18-year-old Sarajuddin, a Taliban fighter killed in a clash with international and Afghan forces in Paktika province in 2016. Sarajuddin ran away from home two years earlier to join the insurgents, and Malik remembered the intense pain he felt when he received word of his son's death. He never got to bury his son, he said, because the body was in such bad shape that he had to be interred before his father got there.

"This (the Doha agreement) is a chance for peace in Afghanistan, which has suffered through years of war," Malik told Reuters. "But if peace is coming, it should be real peace ... not only for a few days."

Habibullah Nazari, an officer in Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS), which has been on the frontline of the fight against the Taliban, was killed in an attack by the militant group. Nazari was preparing for a



An Afghan refugee (right) distributes sweets to celebrate the 'reduction in violence' agreed earlier between Taliban, US and Afghan forces, in the Khurasan refugee camp on the outskirts of Peshawar. — AFP

security mission along with six colleagues when a Taliban suicide bomber drove his explosive-laden vehicle into the NDS office in the western city of Herat. He was the sole breadwinner for his family of 12, said his

brother, Mohammad Gul, 23. "Losing a family member is very painful, but I will have no complaint if peace, real peace, is restored," said Gul. "I will believe my brother was martyred in the name of peace." — Reuters

## In Delhi, two tales of one deadly riot

**NEW DELHI:** Mehtab Ali and Rahul Thakur, a Muslim and a Hindu both 23, lived in adjacent streets. Both died this week in Delhi's worst religious riots in decades. As the accounts of family and friends of the two young men make clear, who or what sparked the several days of violence that left 42 people dead remains unclear.

Both lived in Hindu-majority Brijpuri, a district adjoining the Muslim-dominated Mustafabad, both part of the Indian capital's northeastern fringe that was the epicenter. The area is a nondescript low-rise warren of narrow streets, shops and places of worship that are home to people who for generations have rubbed along together. Today it resembles a warzone, littered with rocks, broken glass from Molotov cocktails, bullet casings and the charred remains of homes, shops, schools and vehicles.

### Rahul's death

Thakur was known as a quiet boy who used to teach children while himself preparing for competitive government examinations. He is survived by an elder brother and their parents. "He was one of the friendliest and most studious young men in the locality with a promising life ahead of him," Nitin Sharma, his close friend and neighbor, told AFP. According



NEW DELHI: Parveen (center) sits with relatives and other families at Al-Hind Hospital where they have taken shelter with other families after losing their homes following sectarian riots over India's new citizenship law, in New Delhi on Friday. — AFP

to Priyadarshan Suryavanshi, another neighbour, trouble started on Tuesday when people taking part in a nearby demonstration tried to block the road.

The sit-in protest was one of many to spring up in recent weeks over a new citizenship law that many Muslims worry is a first step to their marginalization or worse.

"When (the protestors) became aggressive, there was a pushback from those opposed to shutting roads and businesses. It soon spiralled out of control into a Hindu versus Muslim issue," Kapil Pandit, another resident, told AFP. Locals said a large Muslim mob from Mustafabad, which is across a small

bridge over a narrow drain from Brijpuri, started pouring in and throwing stones. "It was chaotic and loud, and we rushed out from our homes to see what was happening," said Sharma, who was with Rahul at the time.

"We hadn't even clearly understood what was happening when a bullet fired from the mob on the other side hit him. He cried out 'oh brother' and collapsed. We rushed him to a hospital but he couldn't be saved," Sharma added. The locals complained that the police took forever to respond to their desperate calls for help. "Most of the young men on the road were using sticks and stones to stop

that murderous mob armed with guns, petrol bombs, knives and oil from getting to our homes, families and businesses," Dipin Kumar, a local shop owner, said.

"It was a crazy, violent mob chanting religious slogans. 'I kept calling (the police) for hours and by the time they arrived, the Muslim mob had already burnt a school, looted some shops and done too much damage,' Kumar added. "Thank God they arrived. We'd be dead otherwise."

### Mehtab's death

Mehtab's home 100 meters (yards) away is similar to Thakur's, but the stories residents tell are different. "All this was started by them," one of Mehtab's three elder brothers said, referring to the Hindus in the neighborhood. "They intentionally approached the ongoing peaceful sit-in protest with very provocative sloganeering on Tuesday," he told AFP outside their family home.

"The matter escalated as more people came there to back the protestors from Mustafabad, across the small bridge on the drain," he added.

His Muslim neighbors said that soon many more people joined the Hindu group, which became ever more aggressive and suddenly started attacking the protestors, sparking panic. Mehtab's mother Khusnoodi said her son got back home just when the chaos started "but left again as he wanted to fetch milk to have some tea". That was the last time the family saw him alive. They were informed later that evening that he had died and was at one of the local hospitals. — AFP

## Pakistan halts Iran flights over coronavirus

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan has suspended all flights to Iran and closed land borders with its neighbor, officials confirmed on Friday, after Islamabad detected its first two coronavirus cases, both people who had recently travelled to the Islamic Republic.

Flights to and from China, the epicenter of the deadly outbreak, and Afghanistan, which also detected its first case this week, were still operating, however, and their land borders with Pakistan were also open. "Aviation Division has decided to cease all direct flights between Pakistan and Iran," civil aviation authority spokesman Abdul Sattar Khokhar said. No Pakistani airlines were operating between the two countries, meaning the move hits three Iranian carriers-Iran Air, Mahan Air and Taban Air.

The virus has now killed 2,856 people and infected more than 83,000 worldwide, with an increasing number of new cases being reported each day. New infections have slowed in China, which has nearly 2,800 deaths out of nearly 79,000 cases.

However Iran has emerged as a new hotspot for the virus, with at least 26 deaths and more than 245 infections so far. There are growing fears in Pakistan-sandwiched between China and Iran-over how the country would deal with the outbreak. Its porous borders, creaking hospitals, culture of hand shaking and hugging, and large illiterate populations in crowded urban centers mean containing the crisis could be a huge challenge.

Pakistan's two cases were detected in the capital Islamabad, and in the teeming port megacity of Karachi, in southern Sindh province. In Islamabad doctors at the city's largest public hospital told AFP they had not been provided with masks or other protective gear to treat suspected patients. While in Karachi, officials said they were scrambling to screen at least 1,500 people who had recently returned from Iran. The cost of surgical masks was shooting up in the city's markets, and with schools closed and some people staying inside its notorious traffic had eased.

Authorities this week also moved quickly to quarantine at least 270 people in southwestern Balochistan province, near the Iranian border, after a group of pilgrims returned and briefly mixed with other residents. — AFP



KARACHI: Local residents gather near the wreckage of a bus following a collision between a train and a passenger bus in Sukkur district yesterday. — AFP

## Train-bus collision kills at least 18 in Pakistan

**KARACHI:** At least 18 people were killed and dozens more injured when a passenger train rammed into a bus on Friday in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, officials said. The incident took place in Sukkur district, where the incoming Pakistan Express-on its way from Karachi to Lahore-hit the bus, which was heading to Sargodha in central Punjab province.

"At least 18 people have been killed and 55 wounded,"

Rana Adeel, a deputy commissioner in Sukkur, told AFP, warning that the death toll could rise as some of those hurt were in critical condition.

Senior railway official Tariq Kolachi, who was at the scene, confirmed the updated toll to AFP and said the rescue operation was ongoing but complicated by the darkness.

Kolachi said the accident occurred at an unmanned railway crossing, and the bus split into two because of the force of the crash. "All those killed and injured were passengers from the coach," he said, adding that an assistant train driver sustained minor injuries.

Rail accidents are common in Pakistan, which inherited thousands of kilometers (miles) of track and trains from former colonial power Britain. The railways have seen decades of decline due to corruption, mismanagement and lack of investment. — AFP

## Indian police detain hundreds after riots in Delhi

**NEW DELHI:** Indian police said on Friday they had detained hundreds of people and were keeping a heavy presence in northeast New Delhi, days after the worst bout of sectarian violence in the capital in decades. At least 38 people were killed in Hindu-Muslim violence this week, police said, amid mounting international criticism that authorities failed to protect minority Muslims.

Media said the toll was likely to rise. Delhi police spokesman M S Randhawa said police were collecting evidence, reviewing video footage of the violence and had already detained more than 600 people.

"The detentions were important to bring the situation under control," Randhawa told reporters, adding that there had been no new reports of violence. The clashes began over a citizenship law that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government introduced in December providing a path to Indian citizenship for six religious groups from neighboring countries - but not Muslims.

Critics say the law is discriminatory and comes on top of other measures such as withdrawal of autonomy for Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir that has deepened disquiet about the future of India's 200 million Muslims. Critics of the government however blamed this week's violence on members of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was trounced in local Delhi elections at the beginning of the month. The BJP has denied the allegations.

The violence morphed into street battles between Hindu and Muslim groups with the police largely ineffective in ending the violence. The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) has condemned the violence against Muslims and vandalism of mosques and Muslim-owned properties.

US Democratic presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders accused President Donald Trump of failing on the issue of human rights after he refused to be drawn into criticizing New Delhi for its handling of the violence. Trump was on a state visit to India when the violence broke out. — Reuters

## India Muslims pray under armed guard after deadly riots

**NEW DELHI:** Muslims in India's capital held regular Friday prayers under the watch of riot police, capping a week which saw 42 killed and hundreds injured during the city's worst sectarian violence in decades. Scores of mosques in New Delhi's northeast held their first sermons since mobs armed with swords, guns and acid razed parts of the district on Monday. The violence was triggered by protests against a citizenship law seen by many critics as anti-Muslim and part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda.

Paramilitary police patrolled the streets outside, still littered with broken shards of glass, stones and other debris. Dozens of volunteers stood outside the main mosque in the neighborhood of Mustafabad, home to some of the week's worst violence, urging devotees to disperse immediately after prayers. "These are testing times. We have to be patient," said the presiding imam, after calling on his congregation to stay calm.

Fear and tension were rampant through the neighborhood, with police barring Muslim worshippers from what was left of one of several mosques set ablaze by Hindu rioters on Monday. Nearby, a group of residents in the Hindu-dominated Shiv Vihar area blocked the lane leading to one of the local mosques with the burnt-out frames of motorcycles, which they said were set alight by Muslims. "No one will be allowed to enter until the rioters are caught," they shouted at a crowd of Muslims seeking entry. — AFP



## Analysis

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## Washington Watch

## Bloomberg's abuse of constitutional rights of Arabs and Muslims

By Dr James J Zogby

"Mike will bring us together," is one of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's campaign slogans, invoking his claim that, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he brought New Yorkers together. The "together", however, did not include hundreds of thousands of New York's Arab Americans and American Muslims.

For them, Bloomberg's time in office, was marked by a New York City Police Department (NYPD) massive surveillance program that put individuals' rights and freedoms at risk, weakened the foundations of our democracy, and seriously compromised our values as an open and inclusive society.

A Pulitzer Prize winning investigation conducted by Associated Press reporters found that during Bloomberg's tenure, the NYPD, working with a few CIA officials, monitored Arab and Muslim-owned businesses, mosques, and "mapped" areas of the city where high concentrations of Muslims and Arab immigrants were known to live.

In order to accomplish these objectives, the NYPD coerced and entrapped Muslims to act as spies. In one instance, the police scoured records of taxi drivers looking for those who had unpaid tickets and other violations. Those who also had immigration status issues were given the option of acting as spies or facing possible deportation. Once turned into informants, they were then asked to go to popular gathering places (coffee shops, stores, etc.), attend religious services, and other community events in order to report on who was present and what was said. This material was then entered into extensive surveillance files, even when the activities attended and the words spoken were innocent and protected by the First Amendment.

The compiled reports were categorized as "SECRET". After the AP made them public, we learned that the contents of these reports were, in fact, trite. They were, however, dangerous, since they represented ethnic profiling at its worst and an extension of the long arm of the state into the normal everyday activity of communities.

One report, for example, on "Egyptian Locations of Interest" purports to map "centers of activity" or "hang-outs" for Egyptian Americans that could be used as "listening posts" where informants could go to "listen to neighborhood gossip...[and] get a feel for the community". The report goes on to present a demographic profile of where people of Egyptian descent live in New York City and describes, with pictures attached, all of the restaurants and other businesses where Egyptians and other Arab immigrants in the city congregate or shop.

There is another similar report on "Syrian Locations of Concern" which includes such noteworthy information about a travel agency as - "Observed a female named 'Rasha' working in the travel agency, she recommended the Royal Jordanian Airline."

The "SECRET" reports on these New Yorkers represented violations of the fundamental and guaranteed rights of citizens to be free of intrusive government surveillance as they go about their normal everyday activity.

It must also be pointed out, especially after reviewing the "reports" what an enormous waste of resources the entire effort had been. Not only did it alienate the Arab community from the police the city government, it also expended countless hours of valuable labor to produce files and reports that were of no value. What we have since learned was that the net result of this Bloomberg program has been zero - no arrests, no leads, and no benefit to the effort to keep New York safe. Not a positive outcome for Bloomberg - who claims to be the "data candidate."

At the time the program was uncovered, then Mayor Michael Bloomberg denied that any profiling was involved saying "we don't stop to think about religion. We stop to think about the threats and focus our efforts there," ignoring the statements in the beginning of each of the "SECRET" reports that note that they are targeting specific ethnic and religious communities.

Years later, Bloomberg's response has actually been worse. In an interview with PBS Newshour this week, Mayor Bloomberg suggested it was "natural" to map entire communities and spy on their most mundane behavior. Further, while his defenders claim that no court has ruled against the NYPD's mapping of Muslims and Arabs, the record suggests otherwise. An opinion by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals stated clearly that "to infer ... individual disloyalty prove[s] group disloyalty and justify discriminatory action against the entire group is to deny that under our system of law individual guilt is the sole basis for deprivation of rights." The court noted that "We have been down similar roads before" and invoked a series of past injustices that most Americans denounce today.

**NOTE:** Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute

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Students and activists of All Bengal Anti-Communal Students Struggle Committee hold placards and shout slogans to protest against India's new citizenship law and the recent violence in New Delhi during a demonstration at North Bengal University campus on the outskirts of Siliguri on Friday. — AFP

## Deadly riots expose India's Hindu-Muslim divide

Gul Mohammad had a flourishing footwear business until masked men armed with crude petrol bombs burnt down his shops during Delhi's sectarian riots, shattering the harmony between Hindus and Muslims in the neighborhood. The Hindu-majority neighborhood of Ashok Nagar on the northeast fringes of India's capital was once held up as an example of how people from different religious backgrounds could live side-by-side peacefully.

Now, it is rife with suspicion and hatred as locals traumatized by the violence that has killed at least 38 people and injured many said they were struggling to come to terms with what happened. "I had two shops here for the last 10 years and they burnt them down," Mohammad told AFP in a quivering voice as he broke down in tears. "I was here since my childhood, I worked very hard (to set up the business) but now I have lost everything."

Nearby, Mohammad Rashid Khan looked blankly at the charred remains of his three-storey home once filled with laughter and festivities. "We only survived because we were away for a wedding in the village. How can we trust anyone now after what has happened to us?" Khan told AFP. The violence, the worst in Delhi in recent years, broke out after protests against a citizenship law that critics say is anti-Muslim descended into battles between Hindus and Muslims on Monday and Tuesday.

### Fearing for their lives

In the wake of the violence, stories emerged of people

beaten, stabbed or shot to death by mobs, but also of Hindu neighbors who offered refuge to their Muslim friends. Goat farmer Anwar Chotu, 58, was dragged out of his home in Shiv Vihar, shot dead and his body thrown into a fire by rioters, his brother Mohammad Chotu told AFP. Waiting outside the morgue to collect his body, Mohammad Chotu said he managed to stay alive after fleeing to his Hindu neighbor's home with his wife and five children. "They gave us refuge and protected us even after some of the attackers banged on their door to check if they were hiding us," he said.

Bilkis, a mother-of-seven whose house in Ashok Nagar was also destroyed during the rampage, said her Hindu neighbors took in her family as she blamed outsiders for the mayhem. "They (Hindu neighbors) gave us buckets of water to douse the fire. They also offered us tea," said Bilkis, who uses only one name. Muslim residents of Ashok Nagar - a poor, working-class neighborhood crisscrossed by narrow alleys and open sewers - said they had always felt welcomed.

But overwhelmed by grief over losing their homes and livelihoods, and believing they were targeted by mobs, some said they didn't know if they could trust their neighbors again. "Our (Hindu) neighbors really tried to help us a lot. But at times like this, our faith gets shaken. We never ever imagined that something like this will ever happen," Mohammad Saleem told AFP.

Contract laborer Faisal said only the local mosque and the homes and shops of the five to six Muslim families in

the neighborhood were attacked. "Everything else is intact," the 26-year-old told AFP. "The attackers wore masks, we don't know who they were. But we know that someone helped them to identify our homes and shops."

### Cultural diversity or divide?

Some 80 percent of Indians identify as Hindus. Muslims are the largest minority group, making up 14 percent - or 200 million people - of India's population. India has long taken pride in its secular traditions and pledges of equality and fraternity. But religious strife is not uncommon and has exploded into riots claiming thousands of lives. In 1984, at least 3,000 people - mostly Sikhs - were killed in clashes that erupted after the assassination of India's then-prime minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh security guards.

In 2002, some 1,000 people - mostly Muslims - were killed in riots started by a mob torching a train compartment carrying Hindu activists in Gujarat state. In 1992, Hindu-Muslim riots claimed more than 2,000 lives. Critics say the fault lines have worsened under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist government, citing recent policies including revoking India's only Muslim-majority region Kashmir's semi-autonomy.

Outside the morgue, Hindu and Muslim families waiting for the bodies of their loved ones to be released were united by one emotion - grief. "Nothing can be achieved through violence. It is just senseless and no-one is a winner here," said Vinod Kumar, whose uncle Vir Bhan was shot dead during clashes on Monday. — AFP

## Trump allies hope to ride anti-socialist rhetoric to victory

Conservative activists are enthusiastically taking up Republican President Donald Trump's re-election rallying cry that his Democratic adversaries are pursuing a radical socialist ideology that will ruin the United States. Conservative students, rightwing media personalities and pro-Trump fundraisers and fans have gathered just outside Washington this week for the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) that appears to have crystallized Republican messaging for the election.

Its theme was "America vs Socialism", taking aim at the candidates competing for the Democratic Party's nomination to challenge Trump in the Nov 3 election, especially Senator Bernie Sanders, the current front-runner and a self-described democratic socialist. In speeches, panels and private conversations, senior Republican leaders decried socialism, hoping the message will res-

onate with voters. "As we watch the rise of socialism today on the floor of the House of Representatives, on the floor of the United States Senate, and among the ... presidential candidates on the Democratic side of the aisle, we must be vigilant," Representative Liz Cheney of Wyoming said a session titled "Socialism: Wrecker of Nations and Destroyer of Societies."

The Democratic candidates are a mix of moderates such as former Vice President Joe Biden, businessman Michael Bloomberg, former South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg and US Senator Amy Klobuchar and candidates further to the left including Senator Elizabeth Warren and Sanders. Except for Sanders, the Democratic candidates do not identify themselves as socialists. Leading Democratic elected officials including House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi have said socialism is not the view of their party, arguing that it is Trump and his allies on the right who are out of the political mainstream and a threat to American democracy.

Some of the Democratic candidates have focused on policy proposals aimed at reducing American income inequality through steps such as expanded government-provided healthcare, student debt forgiveness and higher taxes on the wealthy. The idea that America's rich should pay more has broad public support, a Reuters poll found in January.

## With Taliban deal, US shifts away from two decades of war

In making peace with the Taliban, the United States is moving to end its longest-ever war and also signalling a major shift: After two decades, an era of global US military interventionism is winding down. Since the Sept 11, 2001 attacks killed 3,000 people and traumatized the American psyche, the debate in Washington has been not whether but how to wage a worldwide "war on terror". The 2003 invasion of Iraq set off worldwide protests but Afghanistan had been cast in Washington as "the good war" with Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump both reluctantly ramping up troop levels.

Under an agreement signed yesterday in Qatar, Trump is expected to start pulling out troops and leave the future of Afghanistan to negotiations between the Islamist militants and the internationally recognized government in Kabul. Adam Wunische, an Afghanistan expert at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a new Washington think tank that promotes military restraint, said that a "responsible withdrawal" from Afghanistan had been the major taboo in Washington.

"There are some places where we accept the higher risk of terrorism, but politicians are terrified of the prospect of a terrorist attack originating from Afghanistan and then having to explain it to their constituents. And

that's because of the memory and scar of 9/11," he said. "I think the election of Trump was not necessarily a shift in itself but it was an indication that the shift had occurred - that someone could run on ending endless war and win."

Wunische doubted that the United States could turn back to a pre-Trump policy, with even critics advocating a "more nuanced" interventionism rather than pushing for a return to massive military deployments. All Democrats seeking to replace Trump have supported some form of withdrawal from Afghanistan, with none facing the political pressures of Obama who toured Afghanistan and Iraq in the midst of his 2008 campaign.

Representative Ro Khanna, a prominent supporter of Democratic presidential front-runner Bernie Sanders, pointed to Al-Qaeda's expansion around the world and the Taliban's dominant position in swaths of Afghanistan despite nearly 19 years of war. "Thinking we are going to bomb our way out of terrorism has just proven false," Khanna said. "There was a very broad consensus that the initial strikes on Afghanistan were justified. But 20 years later? No one said that we were trying to reshape Afghanistan society."

### Selective war

Despite Trump's campaign vows to finish "endless wars", the United States still stations more than 200,000 troops overseas - and he has rushed 20,000 additional troops into the Middle East over the past year. The Trump administration, while saying its broader goals are to counter China and Russia, has engaged in rising confrontation with Iran, in January killing the cleric state's most prominent general in a drone strike as he visited Iraq.

A senior diplomat from a US ally saw a change in

Washington but said it was a mistake to believe Trump was fully retreating from military involvement. "Trump isn't an isolationist, he's a selectionist. He wants to pick and choose where the US will be active," the diplomat said. "That sounds fine until there is a vacuum and it gets filled by other, much more problematic powers like Russia."

Russia has deployed in force into Syria, where both Obama and Trump resisted calls for greater intervention to try to stop President Bashar al-Assad's brutal crushing of opposition. Trump was criticized across the political spectrum last year for how he abruptly pulled US forces from northern Syria, allowing Turkey to attack US-allied Kurds, but he faced few calls at home for an extended military deployment.

### Weary public

Since Sept 11, US-led wars have led directly to the deaths of more than 800,000 people and cost the United States some \$6.4 trillion when including the future costs of care for veterans, according to Brown University's Costs of Wars Project. Lawmakers have increasingly spoken of revising a vast war authorization - approved by Congress days after September 11 with only one dissenting vote - that last year was used to justify US deployments or military action in 15 countries.

Support for military action has waned sharply since the Iraq debacle. In a Sept 2019 Gallup poll, 43 percent of Americans said the Afghanistan war was a mistake from the start. But the mood may be more weariness than anger. Unlike during the Vietnam War, for which Americans were drafted, there are few major protests demanding a withdrawal from Afghanistan, where 22 US service members died last year. — AFP



## Business

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NEW YORK: In this file photo, people walk through a Manhattan shopping mall in New York City. The dreaded coronavirus is putting the global economy at the greatest risk of recession since the 2008 financial crisis. — AFP

## Economy wavers as world comes to standstill

## Coronavirus puts global economy at greatest risk of recession since the 2008 crisis

WASHINGTON: The world is coming to a standstill as the new coronavirus spreads: schools have closed in Japan, rallies are banned in Switzerland and flights are canceled worldwide. That is putting the global economy at the greatest risk of recession since the 2008 financial crisis.

"With the partial exception of the Black Death in 14th century Europe, every major pandemic has been followed by an economic recession," said Professor Robert Dingwall, researcher at the University of Nottingham Trent in England. "I don't think there is any good reason to think it would be different this time."

Long before the outbreak, the International Monetary Fund cautioned that the global economy was "fragile" and beset by risks, and even the expected slow growth could falter if one of the risks materialized. Economists warn the coronavirus could provide just such a shock, especially since despite the emergency measures to try to contain the COVID-19 outbreak, it has been

expanding daily, moving outwards from central China where it erupted in December.

As of January, production plants had been shut down in China and entire cities confined. Saudi Arabia has stopped pilgrims from traveling to Mecca, and on Friday, the iconic Baselworld watch fair was canceled, as was the Geneva auto show.

Football matches are played without spectators and behind closed doors in Italy, while uncertainty hangs over the Olympic Games set to open in Tokyo in July. Over 84,000 people have been infected with the virus worldwide, and 2,800 have died, according to data from official sources compiled by AFP.

## Fatal blow

All eyes are now on the United States. Though largely unscathed so far, health officials say an outbreak is inevitable. If excess caution takes hold in the world's largest economy, especially among American consumers, it could be a fatal blow to growth.

As President Donald Trump blamed the media for exaggerating the danger, others worried about the real impacts. If there is an outbreak, "the reaction is likely to be extreme," said Gregory Daco, chief economist of Oxford Economics.

"It would have a very, very negative impact. The economy would fall into recession immediately," he told AFP. And in this crisis, the financial markets "accelerate the feeling of panic." Wall Street ended the week with losses not seen since the 2008 global financial crisis.

Beyond shuttering production, closings schools or forcing employees to telework, consumption, which accounts for two-thirds of the US economy, would come to a screeching halt.

While officials have confirmed only 15 cases in the United States—just three of which are not related to travel—anxiety about the illness is apparent: in Washington, people are reluctant to shake hands during conferences, subway users eye their cough-

ing neighbors, and Americans are postponing their travel. And if the US economy sneezes, the world will catch a cold.

The IMF already lowered its global growth forecast for 2020, taking into account the impact on China, the world's second-largest economy, but that was before the contagion spread to the rest of the world.

"There's a lot that we don't know," IMF spokesman Gerry Rice told reporters this week. "It's fast-moving. We are still learning." The fund is still deciding what to do about the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank, the semi-annual gathering of officials. The meetings draw thousands of participants from all over the world, but it seems unlikely they will be held in their usual format in Washington.

## Fear and loathing

Faced with "an obvious economic hit to both production and consumption... we need clear, confident and unified profes-

sional and political leadership," Dingwall said. However, that is "always difficult to achieve in a country where responsibility for public health is as decentralized as it is in the US."

And the British researcher cautions it is hard to manage public fear in the "raucous" US political atmosphere. Barry Glassner, a retired American sociologist and author of a book *The Culture of Fear*, stressed that "nations and individuals need to take precautions, and among those should be counteracting fear."

Fears about the epidemic are "spreading at least as fast as is the virus itself and is potentially more dangerous," which could lead to less rational responses and behavior. Rosemary Taylor, a professor at Tufts University who is an expert in epidemics, said minimizing the threat risks failing to prepare the public. "I think the potential threat at the moment is not that the US is instituting draconian measures, but that it is doing too little." —AFP

## European airlines chart path through coronavirus crisis

LONDON: European airlines are reducing flights to Italy due to coronavirus as part of drastic cost-cutting in an industry rocked by fallout from the deadly outbreak. Big global carriers had already cancelled flights to China—including Air Canada, Air France-KLM, American Airlines, British Airways, Delta, Finnair, Lufthansa, United Airlines and Virgin Atlantic.

But worldwide panic intensified this week over the rapidly-spreading coronavirus or COVID-19, which has killed more than 2,800 people and infected more than 83,000 worldwide—the vast majority in China—and which is now hitting Italy the hardest in Europe.

Britain's low-cost carrier EasyJet on Friday announced it would axe 500 flights to Italy due in March, alongside plans for freezes on hiring and pay. Other airlines implementing some Italy route cutbacks include Air France, British Airways owner

IAG, Belgium's Brussels Airlines and Hungary's Wizz Air.

## 'Significant softening'

"Following the increased incidence of COVID-19 cases in northern Italy, we have seen a significant softening of demand and load factors into and out of our northern Italian bases," EasyJet said. "We are also seeing some slower demand across our other European markets. As a result we will be making decisions to cancel some flights, particularly those into and out of Italy."

IAG added it would trim its Italy flights due next month, warning also that its earnings outlook had been "adversely affected". International Airlines Group, which owns also Ireland's Aer Lingus and Spain's Iberia, added: "Capacity on Italian routes for March has been significantly reduced through a combination of cancellations and change of aircraft gauge and further capacity



LONDON: In this file photo, a British Airways 747 aircraft flies over roof tops as it comes into lane at Heathrow Airport in west London. European airlines are reducing flights to Italy due to coronavirus as part of drastic cost-cutting in an industry rocked by fallout from the deadly outbreak. — AFP

reductions will be activated over the coming days.

"We also expect to make some capacity reductions across our wider shorthaul network."

Brussels Airlines said it had experienced a "negative booking trend", with flights to northern Italy

the worst affected. "As a result, Brussels Airlines will reduce by 30 percent the frequency of its flights to northern Italy for the coming two weeks." In Paris, an Air France spokesperson told AFP that it would trim flights this weekend to Bologna, Milan and Venice. — AFP

## UK court clears Barclays bankers over Qatar funding

LONDON: A UK court on Friday acquitted three former Barclays executives of conspiracy to commit fraud over the British bank's emergency fundraising from Qatar during the 2008 global financial crisis.

It follows an acquittal last year over the affair of former Barclays chief executive John Varley. On Friday, Richard Boath, Roger Jenkins and Thomas Kalaris were themselves found not guilty at a retrial in London. The trio, all in their early 60s, "were today acquitted of fraud in the UK's first trial of bank executives for misconduct during the 2008 financial crisis", Britain's Serious Fraud Office, which had brought the case, said in a statement.

"Our prosecution decisions are always based on the evidence that is available, and we are determined to bring perpetrators of serious financial crime to justice," added the SFO after the three men were found not guilty at London's Old Bailey court.

The fraud office's charges had concerned emergency funding secured from Qatar more than a decade ago. To avoid asking the UK government for a taxpayer bailout during the financial crisis, Barclays raised nearly £12 billion from investors in the Middle East, including the Qatari state sovereign wealth fund. As part of the deal, Barclays loaned \$3.0 billion to the State of Qatar. — AFP



Business

# Markaz unveils 'iMarkaz', Kuwait's first personalized investment app

## Ushering in new digital experience to investor journey

**KUWAIT:** Underlining its continuing commitment to seeking innovative ways to add value to its customers, Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" yesterday announced the launch of the first personalized investment app in Kuwait, iMarkaz. Offering a new level of user experience to prospective clients, the interactive digital platform provides initial investment advice tailor-made to their investment needs and goals.

iMarkaz aims to allow potential investors to build their investment portfolios within minutes and connects them to Markaz experts who will ensure the portfolios fulfil their financial objectives efficiently. The app users can look forward to benefitting from the company's full-fledged services in asset management, investment banking, direct investments and real estate.

Manaf A Al-Hajeri, CEO, Markaz, said: "In keeping with our commitment to building sustainable wealth for our clients and partners, we have been actively pursuing tech-

nological innovation to introduce new products and services that will offer superior value to investors. With the launch of iMarkaz, we have cemented our stellar reputation as a pioneer of groundbreaking investment banking and asset management solutions in Kuwait and the wider region. We are confident that the new digital platform, which is supported by our highly-experienced finance professionals who have unrivalled in-depth market knowledge, will resonate well with our tech-savvy customers."

Al-Hajeri added: "Incorporating new possibilities of communication technology and featuring an intuitive and user-friendly interface, iMarkaz seeks to bring in a new level of digital experience to the investment journey of our clients. In addition to providing seamless and memorable user experience, the app will open up a new world of opportunities for aspiring investors with a tap of their fingertips."

Hussein A. Zeineddin, Executive Vice President,

Systems & Operational Control, Markaz, said: "The Launch of iMarkaz comes as part of our ongoing efforts to enhance all aspects of the investment experience of our clients."

The new platform aims to provide investment advice to investors based on their financial goals, risk profile, and investment preferences in an easy and efficient way. Leveraging on the chatbot technology, the app will take investors on a step-by-step digital journey where both Markaz and investors will share their views in order to construct the best portfolio model that is suitable to them. It will provide investment recommendations suitable to all classes of investors, from retail to private, and offer conventional as well as Shariah-compliant securities, including Markaz elite products and best international ETFs.

Our customers can also use the app to gain exposure to multiple asset classes, including equities, fixed income, real estate and alternatives securities, as well as markets

around the world such as developed markets and emerging markets."

He added: "We have relied on our extensive experience and our track record in wealth management services in addition to our unmatched database of investors' information to build reliable and accurate investment plans and better analyze our clients' investment needs and preferences. At Markaz, we believe in the importance of face-to-face interactions to maintain trust and credibility. With this in mind, we are providing app users with the opportunity to meet Markaz relationship managers and discuss any potential investment opportunity."

iMarkaz joins the company's extensive portfolio of industry-first offerings in Kuwait that includes Mumtaz, the first domestic mutual fund, Idikhar, the first money market fund, and MREF, the first real estate investment fund, as well as Forsa Financial Fund, the first options market maker in the GCC.

## Coronavirus slows China's major projects in Asia

**COLOMBO:** From an artificial island in Sri Lanka to a bridge in Bangladesh and hydropower projects in Nepal and Indonesia, China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road plan is stuttering under the effects of the deadly coronavirus. The outbreak that emerged in China in late December and spread to dozens of countries has cut off the Chinese labour supplies and equipment imports needed to keep major infrastructure projects running.

More than 133 countries have imposed entry restrictions on Chinese citizens or people who have visited China to prevent the spread of the disease, data from China's National Immigration Agency showed. China itself has imposed quarantines and travel curbs across the country to contain an epidemic that has killed more than 2,700 and infected around 79,000. Sri Lanka requires 14-day quarantine for people arriving from China, and insists projects ensure Chinese staff are restricted to construction sites and their dorms.

At Colombo's Port City—an artificial island the size of central London that is to house one of South Asia's biggest financial centres—work was progressing at a snail's pace as nearly a third of the Chinese workers who left for the Lunar New Year holidays have not returned.

The March opening of South Asia's tallest free-standing communications tower—built with Chinese state funding in the heart of Colombo—has also been delayed by two months. "Major construction projects in Sri Lanka that are funded by China mostly employ Chinese construction workers and they have hit a snag," Nissanka Wijeratne, secretary of the Sri Lanka Chamber of Construction Industries, told AFP.

At the Port City project along Colombo's main seaboard, the cafeteria for Chinese workers was half empty recently. "Most of our Chinese colleagues want to return, but the local staff are afraid to work with them," said a Chinese foreman who only offered his surname, Xia. "Work is



At Colombo's Port City — an artificial island the size of central London that is to house one of South Asia's biggest financial centres — work is progress. — AFP

slow and it isn't clear when things would return to normal." Temperatures of all workers at the site are taken several times a day and masks and hand sanitisers have been distributed. Two top Chinese decision-makers at the Port City project who had to return to prevent work from coming to a standstill were quarantined at a five-star hotel, said project manager Bimal Gonaduwa. "At the beginning there was a lot of panic among local workers, but now things have subsided," Gonaduwa said. A small pharmacy near the Port city project was doing a brisk sale in an "ayurvedic-amulet" used to "ward off infections."

The red strings with a ball of crushed wild turmeric coated in Asafetida powder tied to its center are mostly bought by workers at "China projects," the pharmacist Anjana Paramesh said.

### Bridge, hydropower projects

The regulator of Chinese state-owned companies last week said the outbreak had caused "difficulties" for some overseas investments. Some Chinese state-owned enterprises were "isolating the personnel to be dispatched (overseas) for 14 days in China and then another 14 days upon their arrival in the host countries before they begin work," said Peng Huagang, secretary general of the state-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission.

Bangladesh has stopped issuing visas to Chinese visitors including Chinese workers.

Some 3,000 Chinese workers are employed at the China-funded \$2.5 billion 1,320-megawatt Bangladesh China Power Company at the southern port of Payra. Nearly two-thirds of them had returned to China during the Lunar New Year in January, said project manager Abdul Moula.

"Our plan is to start full scale operation by next month. But if at least 300 Chinese workers don't come back by this month ... power production could be delayed," he said. At the \$3.5 billion Padma Multipurpose Bridge, being built by state-owned China Major Railway Bridge Company, nearly one-third of the 980 Chinese workers have yet to return, said project manager Dewan Abdul Kader.

On Indonesia's Sumatra island, work at the China-backed Batang Toru hydropower plant has ground to a halt due to a lack of Chinese workers, after Indonesia halted all flights to and from mainland China. Construction of the \$6 billion Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project will also be delayed, according to Indonesia's investment affairs minister Luhut Pandjaitan.

In Nepal—home to more than a dozen Chinese-backed hydropower projects—many Chinese workers who left on holiday have also not returned. — AFP

transactions startup Square, and that Dorsey intends to live part of each year in Africa.

Twitter early this month reported that it added millions of new users and boosted ad revenue in the fourth quarter, sparking optimism over its growth prospects. Dorsey said during an earnings call that the results capped "a great year for Twitter" and that Twitter has been able to boost users by making the service "more instantly relevant."

"This is an incredibly strong foundation to build upon," he told analysts. The latest report suggested Twitter is making headway as it seeks to keep pace with bigger social networks like Facebook and Instagram while it works to filter out abuse and manipulation. Twitter will have growth opportunities this year from the 2020 US elections and Olympic Games.

The platform has been seeking to expand its user base beyond celebrities, journalists and politicians. Dorsey has stressed that a priority for Twitter is to "increase healthy public conversation" by rooting out inappropriate content and misinformation. — AFP

## World stock markets suffer worst week since financial crisis

**NEW YORK:** Global stocks slumped again Friday to mark the largest weekly drop since the 2008 global financial crisis over fears the coronavirus could wreak havoc on the world economy. Crude oil prices tumbled as well and analysts said central banks, especially the US Federal Reserve, might have to shift into crisis-resolution mode with urgent interest rate cuts.

Frankfurt headed the losses in Europe, shedding almost 3.9 percent as the market closed.

Leading European stock markets have lost more than 10 percent in just one week, with London's FTSE 100, which fell by 3.4 percent on Friday, dropping 11.3 percent. Wall Street also had another difficult day, with the Dow finishing down 1.4 percent at 25,409.36, which meant a drop of more than 12 percent for the week. But US indices cut their losses after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell released a statement saying the US economy remains "strong" but vowing to "use our tools" to provide support if needed.

The markets in Shanghai, Sydney and Tokyo all closed down 3.0 percent, while Jakarta shed more than four percent. "The panic mode is full on," said Ipek Ozkardeska, senior analyst at Swissquote Bank.

"The coronavirus outbreak has certainly hit businesses, and it might have a longer-than-expected negative impact on company earnings and global growth," she added.

Meanwhile, the Japanese yen continue to benefit from its status as a haven investment in times of economic uncer-

tainty, making solid gains against the dollar. Yields on 10-year US Treasuries hit new all-time lows. Concern that global crude demand will crash meanwhile sent oil prices down again: in London, Brent crude fell 3.2 percent, while the US benchmark WTI crude dropped 4.9 percent.

### Squirming with unease

"Another day, another sell-off," remarked analyst Stephen Bremock at energy consultancy PVM Associates. "Risk assets took a significant step lower... as market players continued to squirm with unease over the growing coronavirus crisis."

In addition to central banks, governments also faced pressure to provide support. French Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said the virus would be considered "a case of force majeure for companies," meaning they would not be penalized if they failed to meet deadlines on public contracts. The virus has now proliferated worldwide, emerging in every continent except Antarctica, and prompting governments and businesses to curb travel and public gatherings.

On Friday, Nigeria reported the first new coronavirus case in sub-Saharan Africa, as the World Health Organization warned against the "fatal mistake" of complacency. Iceland reported its first case too. The Geneva International Motor Show was the latest major event to be canceled after Switzerland banned large gatherings. The virus has killed more than 2,800 people and infected more than 84,000 since late December. — AFP



NEW YORK, NY: Screens tracking share prices are filled with red at the New York Stock Exchange on Friday in New York City. Markets continued their downward plunge Friday as continuing fears of a Coronavirus pandemic prompted a sell-off, making for the worst week on Wall Street since 2008. — AFP

## EXCHANGE RATES

### BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.836
Indian Rupees	4.260
Pakistani Rupees	1.984
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.682
Nepali Rupees	2.661
Singapore Dollar	222.070
Hongkong Dollar	39.319
Bangladesh Taka	3.598
Philippine Peso	6.025
Thai Baht	9.739
Malaysian Ringgit	78.376

GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.775
Qatari Riyal	84.224
UAE Dirham	796.491
Bahraini Dinar	814.270
UAE Dirham	83.490

ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	24.850
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.691
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.231
Tunisian Dinar	114.350
Jordanian Dinar	432.630
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.204
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.601

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	306.450

Euro	341.690
Sterling Pound	397.770
Canadian dollar	231.110
Turkish lira	50.400
Swiss Franc	321.900
US Dollar Buying	299.200

### DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfr	Selling Rate
US Dollar	306.100
Canadian Dollar	231.170
Sterling Pound	397.180
Euro	334.470
Swiss Frank	301.510
Bahrain Dinar	814.035
UAE Dirhams	83.740
Qatari Riyals	84.985
Saudi Riyals	82.520
Jordanian Dinar	433.025
Egyptian Pound	19.730
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.684
Indian Rupees	4.267
Pakistani Rupees	1.985
Bangladesh Taka	3.591
Philippines Pessso	6.003
Cyprus pound	18.205
Japanese Yen	3.770
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.670
Malaysian Ringgit	73.100
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	43.925

Thai Bhat	10.590
Turkish Lira	50.130
Singapore dollars	221.522

### BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
EUROPE		
British Pound	0.387612	0.401512
Czech Korune	0.005320	0.014620
Danish Krone	0.041232	0.046232
Euro	0.331007	0.344707
Georgian Lari	0.11182	0.11182
Hungarian	0.001156	0.001346
Norwegian Krone	0.028586	0.033789
Romanian Leu	0.065785	0.082635
Russian Ruble	0.004697	0.004697
Slovakia	0.009195	0.019195
Swedish Krona	0.027837	0.032837
Swiss Franc	0.311662	0.322662
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.191808	0.203808
New Zealand Dollar	0.186011	0.195511
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.223684	0.232684
US Dollars	0.302350	0.306900
US Dollars Mint	0.302850	0.306900
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002895	0.003696

Chinese Yuan	0.042430	0.045930
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037503	0.040253
Indian Rupee	0.003642	0.004414
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002764	0.002944
Korean Won	0.000242	0.000257
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069675	0.075675
Nepalese Rupee	0.002613	0.002953
Pakistan Rupee	0.001339	0.002109
Philippine Peso	0.005869	0.006169
Singapore Dollar	0.214727	0.224727
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001325	0.001905
Taiwan	0.010195	0.010375
Thai Baht	0.009369	0.009919
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.000013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.806689	0.814797
Egyptian Pound	0.019384	0.022124
Iranian Riyal	0.000085	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000201	0.000261
Jordanian Dinar	0.427331	0.436331
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000105	0.000255
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021234	0.045234
Omani Riyal	0.790826	0.798774
Qatar Riyal	0.083515	0.084355
Saudi Riyal	0.080633	0.081933
Syrian Pound	0.001300	0.001520
Tunisian Dinar	0.103230	0.111230
Turkish Lira	0.043041	0.052886
UAE Dirhams	0.082799	0.083631
Yemeni Riyal	0.000996	0.001076



## Business

# US Fed ready to take action to inoculate economy from virus

## Powell insists US economy remains in a good position

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve stands ready to take action to counter the risks posed by the novel coronavirus crisis, the central bank's chairman Jerome Powell said Friday, while insisting that the US economy remains in a good position.

The rare unscheduled formal statement, released as concerns mount that the virus's worldwide spread could derail global growth, seems to rule out an emergency interest rate cut over the weekend, but is a sign President Donald Trump may soon get what he has been demanding: lower borrowing rates.

Repeating his message of recent weeks, Powell said: "The fundamentals of the US economy remain strong." But faced with plunging stock markets as Wall Street suffers its worst week since the 2008 global financial crisis, he acknowledged that the coronavirus "poses evolving risks to economic activity."

The Fed is "closely monitoring developments and their implications for the economic outlook," Powell said. "We will use our tools and act as appropriate to support the economy." Amid the growing but still uncertain impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on the world's largest economy, markets are betting on as many as two interest rate cuts in 2020; a short while ago, there were none on the horizon. Trump, who is seeking re-election this year and is counting on a strong economy, has regularly attacked the Fed and Powell, demanding lower rates. "I hope they get involved soon," he told reporters, adding: "I'm not a big fan of the Fed. I think they make a lot of mistakes."

### 'Magical thinking'

He has acknowledged the epidemic will likely prevent US growth from reaching three percent in 2020, as he had promised, but on Friday said the stock markets will recover if he is reelected. "You'll see a rise in the stock market like you haven't seen before."

The Fed cut the benchmark lending rate three times

last year, leveling out at a range of 1.5-1.75 percent, and since December had been saying the economy was in a good place and it would take a "material change" to the outlook for the central bank to move again. The outbreak of the new coronavirus, which accelerated this week, could be a game-changer, even though Trump has contradicted experts by saying "the risk to the American people remains very low."

Health officials have confirmed only 15 cases in the United States so far—just three of which are not related to travel—but warned that a wider outbreak is inevitable. More than 84,000 people have been infected with the virus worldwide, and over 2,800 have died, according to data from official sources compiled by AFP.

And St Louis Fed President James Bullard said Friday a rate cut is "a possibility" if the epidemic becomes a pandemic, but "that's not the baseline case." Former Fed board member Kevin Warsh argued for emergency action by major central banks as soon as this weekend, but such a dramatic move appears unlikely. But European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde has downplayed the chances of imminent action, telling the Financial Times the epidemic was not yet at the stage where it would have a lasting economic impact. "But we are certainly not at that point yet," she said.

### Inoculate the economy

Would lower interest rates inoculate the US economy against a downturn?

Central banks including the Fed slashed rates to zero at the start of the 2008 financial crisis, but Warsh said they should have acted more quickly, which is why he is now calling for an immediate emergency rate cut. Economist James Grant said the intense focus on the Fed is a kind of "magical thinking," since the US central bank cannot reopen factories or provide spare parts from China.



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City.

Former Fed chair Janet Yellen agreed an interest rate move is "not a cure-all." A rate cut "would provide a little bit of support to consumer spending and to the US economy and to financial markets," Yellen said this week. But with interest rates already low, the Fed has little

room to maneuver to support growth in the event of an economic slowdown. "The worry I have is that Mr. Powell will panic again and use up the last of his key weapon, lower interest rates," economist Joel Naroff said in an analysis. —AFP

## Trade wars hit BASF as virus looms

FRANKFURT: German chemical giant BASF on Friday said global trade tensions hit 2019 sales, with the auto sector especially affected, and pointed to a "significant impact" ahead from the new coronavirus.

"2019 was a challenging year with strong economic headwinds," including both trade wars and other sources of uncertainty such as Brexit, chief executive Martin Brudermueller said in a statement. BASF sales fell 1.5 percent to 59.3 billion euros (\$65.3 billion), while operating, or underlying profit slumped sharply. But the group's net profit jumped almost 80 percent, to 8.4 billion euros, thanks to a one-off effect related to the merger of its oil and gas business Wintershall with DEA.

Looking ahead to 2020, Brudermueller warned that "the coronavirus has added a new factor that is

considerably hampering growth... especially in China," reducing demand and interrupting production.

"We do not expect the corona effects to be fully offset" in any rebound later in the year, he added.

While most customer industries should grow, "for the automotive industry... we anticipate a continued decline in production," Brudermueller said. Looking to BASF's different segments, profits at its basic chemicals division fell by half, while the slide was even steeper at the materials unit, which makes inputs for client industries slammed by the US-China trade conflict such as carmakers and electronics producers.

More specialised "downstream" areas were able to boost operating income, including its catalysts and coatings business, industrial chemicals, nutrition and pharma and agriculture.

BASF's agriculture business in particular "performed very well", CEO Brudermueller said, after it acquired activities from former rival Bayer which was forced by competition authorities to divest as part of its takeover of US seeds and pesticides maker Monsanto.

The Ludwigshafen-based group said



LUDWIGSHAFEN: The logo of German chemical giant BASF is seen on flags fluttering in front of the company's headquarters in Ludwigshafen, western Germany, on February 28, 2020. —AFP

it was accelerating a job cuts scheme set to reduce its worldwide payroll by 6,000 positions by the end of 2021. After 3,100 departures last year, dropping headcount to 117,600, the goal should now be reached by the end of 2020, BASF said. BASF aims to lift sales this

year to 60-63 billion euros, slightly higher than in 2019, while operating profit not including special items should be between 4.2-4.8 billion, after 4.5 billion last year. The group said it would increase its dividend for 2019 by 10 euro cents, to 3.30 euros. —AFP

## Canada economic growth slows to 0.3% in Q4 2019

OTTAWA: Canadian economic growth slowed to 0.3 percent in the last quarter of 2019, the government reported Friday, but still beat forecasts slightly. Gross domestic product (GDP) had been widely expected to fall to 0.2 percent from the previous quarter.

Added to previous data, the annual growth rate last year fell to 1.6 percent from 2.0 percent in 2018, said Statistics Canada. The government statistical agency blamed several factors for the results, including pipeline shutdowns, poor harvest conditions, and rail trans-

portation strikes in the last three months of 2019. Impacts from a US auto workers strike were also felt by Canada's motor vehicle and parts manufacturers, which rely on a highly integrated continental supply chain.

And many businesses have been touched by "continued global trade tensions and market uncertainty," said Statistics Canada. A strong rise in Canadian spending on services, including on rent, food and drinks, airfare and telecommunications services, helped to stave off a potential shrinking of the economy, the agency said. But outlays on durable goods were flat. At the same time, the housing market softened, business investment fell (notably in aircrafts, trucks and buses), and export volumes fell for a second consecutive quarter while imports were down for a third quarter in a row.

Export volumes, according to Statistics Canada, weakened substantially in farm and fishing products crude oil and bitumen, and passenger cars and light

trucks. Declines in imports including aircraft, passenger cars and light trucks and industrial machinery, meanwhile, outpaced increases in areas such as travel services and commercial services. "The surprise was that there was no surprise in the Q4 GDP report," commented CIBC analyst Avery Shenfeld, adding that it was largely in line "with what the Bank of Canada was looking for."

He warned, however: "Households aren't in a great position to carry the economy on their own, given a still low 3.0 percent savings rate." A bump in December helped by better-than-expected factory and resource sector output would normally be seen as "a good hand-off for Q1," Shenfeld said. "But that goes out the window given the new issues with global growth and yet more rail disruptions in February." As such, he said Canadians should expect the central bank to cut its key lending rate in April—or sooner if markets continue to dive on fears of a novel coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

## China Feb factory activity contracts at record pace

BEIJING: Factory activity in China contracted at the fastest pace ever in February, even worse than during the global financial crisis, highlighting the colossal damage from the coronavirus outbreak on the world's second-largest economy. China's official Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to a record low of 35.7 in February from 50.0 in January, the National Bureau of Statistics said yesterday, well below the 50-point mark that separates monthly growth from contraction.

Analysts polled by Reuters expected the February PMI to come in at 46.0. The somber readings provide the first official snapshot of the Chinese economy's state since the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic which has killed almost 3,000 people in mainland China and infected about 80,000.

The data foreshadows that the eco-

nomie disruption from the virus will likely extend to the whole first quarter of 2020 since the disease outbreak has caused widespread transport curbs and required tough public health measures that have paralyzed economic activity. "We expect year-on-year growth in all activity data to be negative in January-February as China's economy has been severely constrained since 23 January," said analysts at Nomura in a note after the data release, citing the extended Lunar New Year holiday and the slow resumption of businesses.

Nomura now expects first-quarter growth to be 2 percent year-on-year while Capital Economics estimates China's economy would contract outright in year-on-year terms this quarter, the first time since at least the 1990s. A sub-index of manufacturing production nosedived to 27.8 in February from January's 51.3 while a reading of new orders plunged to 29.3, down from 51.4 a month earlier.

New export orders received by Chinese manufacturers also declined at the fastest pace in years, with the NBS warning of mounting pressure on



This photo taken on Friday, shows workers sewing at factory making hazardous material suits to be used in the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, at the Zhejiang Ugly Duck Industry garment factory in Wenzhou. —AFP

exporters from delayed shipments and cancelled orders.

Labour conditions remained tight amid travel restrictions with a sub-reading for employment falling to 31.8

from 47.5. Analysts are warning the spread of the coronavirus to other countries will impact global supply chains and limit the recovery for Chinese manufacturers. —Reuters

## Cooling US consumer spending, inflation put spotlight on Fed

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending slowed in January and could lose further momentum as the fast-spreading coronavirus outbreak, which has sparked a stock market sell-off and revived fears of a recession, causes households to tighten their purse strings. Other data on Friday showed the goods trade deficit contracted sharply last month as both imports and exports declined. While the narrowing goods trade deficit could be a boost to the calculation of gross domestic product, a lot depends on how the coronavirus unfolds in the United States.

The coronavirus epidemic, which has killed nearly 3,000 and infected at least 80,000 people, most of them in China, is viewed by financial markets as the catalyst that could interrupt the longest economic expansion on record, now in its 11th year. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell sought to calm financial markets on Friday saying "the fundamentals of the US economy remain strong." Powell also acknowledged that "the coronavirus poses evolving risks to economic activity," and said the US central bank would "use our tools and act as appropriate to support the economy." The Fed bank cut interest rates three times in 2019. Financial markets have fully priced in a 25 basis points rate cut at the Fed's March 17-18 policy meeting, according to CME Group's FedWatch Tool.

"Consumers shielded the economy from global headwinds for most of 2019 but they won't prove immune to the coronavirus outbreak," said Lydia Boussour, a senior US economist at Oxford Economics in New York. "Persistently low inflation bolsters the case for a Fed rate cut as soon as March given the sharp tightening in financial conditions." —Reuters

## Central banks may mount a rescue

PARIS: Cratering markets are pushing global central banks to the point they all warned against and worried about, of an evolving global economic shock hitting at a time when their capacity to respond in force is in doubt even as investors hound them for action.

Buffeted by a global trade war, monetary policymakers were already spending down their "ammunition" to keep a sluggish world economy from slipping further, only to now face a new and unexpected blow from the rapidly spreading coronavirus that has sowed fear worldwide.

On Friday afternoon, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell issued a statement in which he said that while the US economy remained strong, the virus "posed an evolving risk" and the Fed stood ready to take action if needed. "The Federal Reserve is closely monitoring developments and their implications for the economic outlook. We will use our tools and act as appropriate to support the economy," Powell said.

How much central banks can do remains the central question. The Federal Reserve's interest rates are already at low levels, trimmed three times last year as the Trump administration roiled markets in a trade battle with China. The European Central Bank and the Bank of Japan, with interest rates below zero, may particularly struggle for a response effective against the type of trouble stemming from the coronavirus. —Reuters



## Business

# Al-Nahedh at IIF G20 conference: Agility of banks essential in 4th industrial revolution

## KFH customers perform over 100 million online transactions a year

**KUWAIT:** Group Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Mazin Al-Nahedh said that the entire banking system evolves with the digitization agenda and gains access to new technologies, indicating there is an opportunity for banks to achieve huge business models' transformation. He added that banks need to devise strategic plans to ensure the safety of all their customers' financial data.

Al-Nahedh's statement was made during his participation in the IIF Islamic Finance G20 conference, held in Riyadh as part of the G20 summit meetings under the title "The economic growth perspectives and the future of banking in the Middle East and North Africa".

He continued: "KFH invests in the latest technology developed for the banking and financial sector to advance services provided to customers and make them faster, safer and more cost effective. The increase in productivity improves the quality of services, and ultimately, the Bank's profitability. KFH has made long strides along the digital transformation journey, drawing attention to its services, modern and innovative financial products. For example, KFH customers perform over 100 million online transactions a year."

He also mentioned that KFH is investing heavily in financial technology, having channeled a total of \$40 million into two fintech Investment Programs. One is based in the Region and has a remit to invest in ground-breaking digital ideas across the Middle East. The other fund is in the United States.

Al-Nahedh presented his vision on Fintech, artificial intelligence, and how banks can become more agile in the 4th Industrial Revolution, and the need to enhance the role of innovation in the work of banks. As for data Localization requirements, he explained that local laws are regulations must be revised to enable data globalization, indicating there is no doubt that regional integration is a need for business. It holds so many benefits and opportunities. Local Central Banks and other regulators should take the Regional Integration require-

ments into considerations and alter their data governance laws and regulations to enable this integration.

### Cyber security

Al-Nahedh discussed during the discussion panel that it is vital for countries to enhance cyber security and reduce their vulnerabilities to these attacks. In GCC countries, banks are working to be better equipped to handle the rising threat of cyber-attacks, upgrading their cyber security systems and related technology to global standards. Like banks, some GCC governments have taken several measures to combat cybercrime, including the adoption of the Combating Cybercrime law and the Electronic Transaction law.

Al-Nahedh also addressed the importance of social responsibility, community service, achieving sustainability at various levels, and the transition to a low-carbon economy. He also addressed the obligations and responsibilities to the communities the bank serves.

### Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

During his insight about SMEs, he said that in line with Kuwait Vision 2035 which aims transform the country into a global commercial hub, the government focuses on SME sector as seen critical to promoting long-term economic diversification in country. About KFH role in the SMEs sector, Al-Nahedh said: "KFH enjoys a large market share in financing SMEs as they play a significant role in supporting the youth segment and improving the performance of the entrepreneurs. This contributes in diversifying income resources, creating new jobs while building national expertise in business. Meanwhile, KFH supports over 1000 SMEs, which contribute to boosting the economy and creating new jobs for the youth."

### Artificial intelligence

Al-Nahedh pointed out that KFH applies Artificial Intelligence AI, in accordance with the highest levels of



Mazin Al-Nahedh (third left)

security, quality and professionalism. KFH launched Robotic Process Automation program characterized by its contribution to improving business efficiency and enhancing performance quality. AI can play a crucial role in helping to improve the experience of consumers within the financial services sector. He said that the integrating artificial intelligence in the dynamic industry of banking and finance has several benefits including accuracy, reduction in human error and cost cuts among others.

### Talent acquisition

He underlined the need to continue developing human resource strategies in attracting talent and designing special training programs that meet global needs in the banking industry. He added that KFH is focusing on hiring outstanding graduates whose majors are related to information technology and digital trends

including AI and whatever disruptive innovation requires creditworthy rating and consolidation of the financial industry.

He said "KFH Group's creditworthy rating and Kuwait's stable economic growth and a conservative regulatory environment are impetus to stable liquidity conditions which ensures investor confidence and provides access to foreign currency funding from different counterparties across the globe and its efficient liquidity managements ensures High Quality Liquid Assets (HQLA) local & foreign currency availability in stress situations." Al-Nahedh concluded by saying that the consolidation in GCC banking sectors will help to increase banks' pricing power when competing for deposits. Also, it will help put an end to rising financing costs as well as contributing to improving profitability in the long term.

## AVEVA announces software update for ship design and engineering

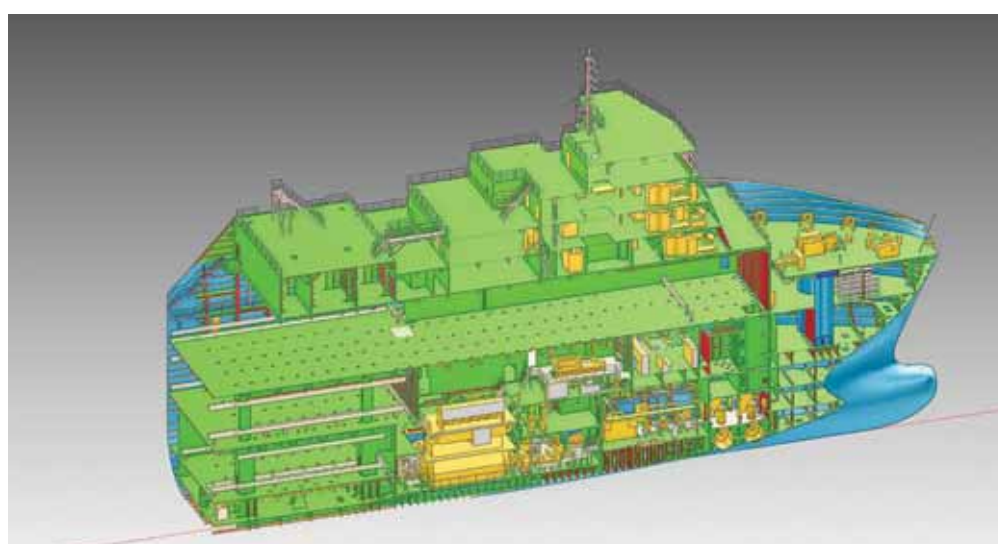
**DUBAI:** AVEVA, global leader in engineering and industrial software, announced an important update to its AVEVA E3D(tm) design software that addresses the specific needs of the marine sector.

Designed with the most up-to-date user interface principles and best practices, intuitive and easy to use AVEVA E3D(tm) Design software combines the latest three-dimensional graphics and user interface technologies with state-of-the-art data management. This software increases shipping vessel design and accelerates retrofits of ships to reduce emissions. The new capabilities demonstrate AVEVA's continued proactive innovation for the International Maritime Organization's new emissions regulations, IMO 2020, providing new tools to anticipate market needs and offering new capabilities and greater efficiency.

### Greater efficiency

Technology for new shipping vessels is rapidly changing as companies consolidate, regulations become ever more rigorous and shipyards globally face challenges from increasing competition.

Shipbuilding excellence is heavily reliant on design-to-production, agility and efficiency across all project streams, effective resource management and design quality



Ravi Gopinath

leading to right-first-time, error-free production. AVEVA's new capabilities tailored to the marine sector will address these requirements and also include the first release of the AVEVA Hull Basic Design Module. This module is used for the preliminary

design of a ship's hull structure, and supports key decisions regarding naval architectural characteristics, space management, outfitting design and drawings. AVEVA's new module represents the most integrated 3D environment for working with as-built and as-designed data in the marine market.

Ravi Gopinath, COO, AVEVA, said: "With this latest software release, AVEVA is

responding to the ever-growing and changing needs of ship owners and shipyards the world over. Meeting sustainability goals, maximizing business agility and improving operational performance calls for integrated design and engineering tools that can streamline the process, improve speed and remove cost and complexity to rapidly address these market imperatives. Using our new software, marine operators will now be able to realize up to 40% gains in engineering efficiency while moving to operating paradigms that will ultimately help protect the environment."

AVEVA is the market leader in three-dimensional design and engineering software and works with the world's top 10 shipyards and vessel owners. This latest software innovation builds on the recent AVEVA Unified Engineering launch which introduced capabilities bringing together design and engineering data with 3D design tools for industrial users.

## USTR to push for trade deals with UK, EU

**WASHINGTON:** The Trump administration on Friday said it would focus on concluding new trade agreements with Britain, the European Union and Kenya over the coming year, while strictly enforcing trade laws and pushing for reforms of the World Trade Organization.

In its annual report to the US Congress, the US Trade Representative's office said members of the global trade body needed to fundamentally rethink what it called "an outdated tariff framework" that no longer reflected economic realities. USTR delivered a scathing indictment of the WTO in the 338-page document, calling it an organization that had "strayed far from its original mission and purpose," while highlighting the Trump administration's push over the past year to confront what it said were China's unfair trade policies and practices.

It said 2019 was "a historic year for American trade" in which the administration reached trade agreements with China and Japan, and secured congressional approval of a new North American trade deal with Mexico and Canada. It also hailed a WTO decision giving Washington the right to impose tariffs on \$7.5 billion of EU goods in a long-running dispute over aircraft subsidies to Airbus.

The US government also initiated action against France over its digital services taxes that Washington says will harm US tech companies such as Facebook, Alphabet Inc's Google, Amazon Inc and Apple, and is monitoring developments in other countries, the report said.

Washington and Paris have agreed to a truce staying off those tariffs through year-end to allow work on broader tax reforms by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

"Going forward, President Trump will continue to rebalance America's relationship with its trading partners, aggressively enforce our trade laws, and take prompt action in response to unfair trade practices by other nations," the report said. In addition to pursuing trade agreements with Britain and the EU, USTR said it would work on trade agreements with new partners, including Kenya, which would be the first US free trade deal in sub-Saharan Africa. USTR said it hoped a recent change in EU leadership and appointment of a new trade commissioner would lead to "more progress in the coming year" than was possible in the past. It said it also planned to conduct further negotiations with Japan and China to reach more comprehensive trade agreements, while continuing to push for reforms at the WTO. "The WTO's failure to keep pace with new developments in the global economy has resulted in significant advantages for non-market economies," USTR wrote in the report, saying China in particular benefited from the WTO's deficiencies. — Reuters

## KFH-Germany opens branch in Munich

**MUNICH:** Kuwait Finance House-Germany KT Bank AG, the first and only bank with an Islam-compliant business model in Germany and in the Euro zone, has officially opened its Munich branch. Now KFH-Germany "KT Bank AG" exists in Frankfurt, Berlin, Mannheim and Cologne, the bank is now also represented in Munich.

With the number of clients doubling in the retail and corporate segment since 2018 and sustainable business growth according to target figures in the deposit and financing business, the opening of the KT Bank branch marks yet another milestone for the successful model of ethical Islamic banking in Germany. Located in the best central location in Bavaria's capital, the new KT Bank branch in Munich offers the complete portfolio of certified Islamic banking products and services for retail, corporate and institutional clients according to ethical banking criteria.

KT Bank offers free current accounts without overdraft, profitable investment opportunities based on the principle of profit-sharing, lucrative savings and fixed-term deposit accounts, real estate as well as business



financing or unique payment solutions such as the automated installment payment card Jetzz Card, and much more. With the new Munich location, KT Bank is now also the principal bank for Muslims and SRI (Socially Responsible Investment) interested customers in Bavaria. KT Bank AG CEO Ahmet Kudsi Arslan: "In addition to the permanent devel-

opment of our digital infrastructure, mobile banking services and FinTech co-operations, we place great value on going forward with the expansion of our branch network in Germany in order to always offer easily accessible and personal customer service. With Munich, we are now opening a location in the South due to increasing demand."

## Regulators move to fine telecoms for selling location data

**WASHINGTON:** US regulators moved to impose fines Friday against the nation's four major wireless carriers for selling location data of customers without their consent.

The Federal Communications Commission proposed fining T-Mobile more than \$91 million; AT&T some \$57 million; Verizon \$48 million, and Sprint \$12 million. The wireless firms were accused of having disclosed mobile network user location data to a third party without authorization from customers, the FCC said.

The FCC began an investigation after a report that a sheriff in Missouri used a "location-finding service" operated by a prison communications services company called Securus to track whereabouts of people including a judge and law enforcement officers. The carriers provided access to customer location data to "aggregators" who then resold information to services such as Securus, according to the regulator.

"American consumers take their wireless phones with them wherever they go," FCC chairman Ajit Pai said in a release. "And information about a wireless customer's location is highly personal and sensitive."

US telecom firms have been on notice for more than a decade that they are required to safeguard location data gathered about users, Pai added.

Sizes of the fines were based on how long carriers continued to sell customer location information without proper safeguards and how many parties had access, the FCC said. The telecom companies will get to provide evidence and arguments to the commission before the fines are finalized. Some privacy activists said the penalties failed to go far enough.

Lisa Hayes of the Center for Democracy & Technology, a digital rights organization, called the fines too little and too late. "This kind of egregious privacy violation and the weak enforcement response by the FCC further demonstrate why the US needs a strong, comprehensive, national privacy law," said Hayes.

"The current lack of a law means that anyone willing to spend a few hundred dollars can buy the location data of another person at any moment in time," Gaurav Laroia of the consumer group Free Press said the FCC action comes more than a year after activists filed complaints on these practices. — AFP



What's On



# stc kicks off campaign in celebration of Kuwait's national days

Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, kicked off its campaign aimed at promoting national pride and patriotism in celebration of Kuwait's national and liberation days.

The Company stated that among its campaign initiatives, it released a TVC that won the admiration of viewers, achieving one million views in only 4 days. The TVC featured a song that was produced to reflect the Kuwaiti citizens' sense of patriotism and love for their country. In addition to that, the TVC included 3 influential figures known in the Kuwaiti community who contributed to the making of this production to commemorate the national celebrations.

stc took this opportunity to thank all the individuals who participated in the making of this national production, specially Abbas Al Yousefi in the role of director, Daffy for writing the lyrics, performing and singing, as well as Bashar Al Jazzaf and Zayouna Al Saffar who did a great job in performing and singing under the supervision and execution of Doors Production.

stc also sponsored the "Dabdoob" festival, which was held at Al Adailiya Park on the 22nd of February. The festival witnessed a large number of attendees who participated in the various entertainment filled competitions. To celebrate the occasion, gifts and prizes were distributed during the event to both the winners and participants as part of the campaign. In addition to that, stc continued the campaign celebrations at the airport

where the Company brought a local Kuwaiti band to welcome arriving travelers to Kuwait, as well as visiting different schools around Kuwait to distribute gifts to students and amplifying in addition to the TVC, stc's campaign celebrations included a local Kuwaiti band at the Kuwait International Airport to welcome the arrival of their nationals.

Danah Al Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc said, "On behalf of stc, we would like to congratulate His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God protect and preserve them, on this national and patriotic occasion. stc will continue to participate and place great emphasis

on giving back to our beloved country in such events that display high levels of national pride and patriotism among the Kuwaiti community."

Al Jasem expressed her sense of joy due to the successful outcome of the campaign, as well as the level of reception and admiration received by the public towards stc's TVC. She added that the production reflects the affiliation and spirit of participation that stc's team has always emphasized and expressed in their various marketing activities. Every year the Company focuses on producing a TVC with an original idea and message to tell a different story that has not been told before. Al Jasem also said that stc strives to express its celebratory activities during such occasions in creative and unique ways to reach and engage its diverse customer base.

## LOYAC partakes in 10th Industry Knights program

In collaboration with Kuwait Industries Union (KIU) and with the aim of developing Kuwait industrial sector and boosting youth awareness about the role it plays in developing local economy, LOYAC recently participated in the 10th Industry Knights Program 2020 with 18 of its students who were later on honored at Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Speaking on the occasion, LOYAC's General Manager, Al-Razi Al-Bedaiwi hailed the program's success noting that LOYAC's partnership with KIU stems from its keenness on providing youth with proper opportunities to explore industrial activities in Kuwait, stimulating their creativity to develop the sector through coming up with innovative solutions to diversify the economy and create more job opportunities. "The program is open for students aging 12-17", Al-Bedaiwi underlined.

On her part, KIU's director, Hoda Al-Baqshi expressed her pride of the partner-



ship with LOYAC noting that the Industry Knights program targets filling school students free time on vacations through exploring various state sectors and acquiring skills that would help preparing them for the labor market.



## Burgan Bank celebrates festive month of February with children of APK



With the aim of building community spirit and engaging in a shared experience during the joyous occasion, Burgan Bank participated in the National and Liberation Days festivities that were organized by the Autism Partnership Kuwait (APK).

Celebrating together with the children, who were dressed in national clothes, and their families, the kids enjoyed a fun-filled program which included decorating of flags and various competitions followed by distribution of gifts.

The celebration was dedicated to spreading happiness through a memorable event and a sense of belonging during one of Kuwait's most impor-

tant months as part of the Bank's objective to promote social inclusion among the children and other segments of the society.

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



For the second consecutive year, Nora Maher Abu Miri, the future figure skating champion, competed in ISI international figure skating competition entitled "Skate Abu Dhabi". This event took

place at Zayed Sports City Ice rink in Abu Dhabi between 6-8 February, where she achieved 3 gold and one bronze medals during her participation as well as being awarded fourth in the speed race.



Health & Science

# Vulnerable continent: Africa and the coronavirus

PARIS: The first detected case of coronavirus in Africa highlights the vulnerability of the world's poorest continent to outbreaks of contagious diseases. Much of Africa struggles with conflicts, poor health infrastructure, crowded cities with inadequate sanitation, rickety governance and porous borders — all of which provide excellent opportunities for the microbe to spread, experts say.

World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has recently pleaded with African Union states "to come together to be more aggressive in attacking" the virus. "Our biggest concern continues to be the potential for COVID-19 to spread in countries with weaker health systems," said Tedros, referring to the virus by its official name. The first case south of the Sahara was announced on Friday in Nigeria's mega-city of Lagos. Two previous cases in Africa were detected in Egypt and Algeria. A 2016 analysis by the Rand Corporation, a US thinktank, found that of the 25 countries in the world that are most vulnerable to infectious outbreaks, 22 are in Africa — the others are Afghanistan, Yemen and Haiti.

Heading its list were Somalia, the Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan, Mauritania and Angola. The report put the finger on a "disease hot spot belt" extending on a line of countries, running across the southern rim of the Sahara through the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, many of which are struggling with conflicts. "Were a communicable disease to emerge within this chain of

countries, it could easily spread across borders in all directions, abetted by high overall vulnerability and a string of weak national health systems along the way," the report warned. "Though we have seen modern diseases rapidly transmitted all over the world through interconnected travel, it is these vulnerable states with porous borders and weak or conflict-affected neighbors that face the greatest risks and potential health challenges."

### Weak health systems

Past epidemics in Africa — from malaria and HIV to drug-resistant TB and Ebola — have already triggered loud warnings about the continent's problems in health care. They range from public awareness and disease screening to lack of doctors, nurses, drugs and hospital beds — and the heightened risks for people already weak from malnourishment or a damaged immune system.

According to the World Bank, per-capita health expenditure in sub-Saharan Africa in 2016 was just \$78 (70 euros), compared to \$1,026 on average in the rest of the world. The highest was \$9,351 in North America, followed by \$3,846 in the European Union.

Trudie Lang, director of the Global Health Network at Oxford University, said a major concern was that the virus, despite its relatively low mortality rate, could "overwhelm health-care provision" in African countries. This would have a cascade effect, affecting care for Africa's many other health problems, she told Britain's Science Media Centre (SMC).



PRETORIA: Travellers wearing masks use their mobile phones at OR Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg, on February 28, 2020 amid fear of Covid-19 epidemic. — AFP

There is "real fear that health systems become swamped and unable to manage their ongoing health care, thereby presenting an even greater threat than the virus," she noted. In a study of anti-coronavirus preparedness in Africa on February 19, The Lancet medical journal said that overall, countries had strengthened their shield. Implemented measures included temperature screening at ports of entry, recommendations to avoid travel to China and improved health information provided to health professionals and the general public. But some countries "remain ill-equipped," notably on surveillance and rapid identification of suspected cases, patient isolation and contact tracing, it said. South of the Sahara,

only South Africa won high marks for preparedness, while Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, Angola, Tanzania, Ghana and Kenya would all need support, it said.

In early February, just South Africa and Senegal among sub-Saharan countries had existing lab facilities to test people for the coronavirus, although the WHO thereafter supplied equipment to some 40 countries. The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), a coordination body set up by the AU, established an anti-coronavirus task force on February 5. Its main task is to provide African countries with training on lab diagnosis, surveillance, screening and safe transportation of suspected cases. — AFP

## Virus to cost world tourism at least \$22bn

MADRID: The deadly coronavirus epidemic will cost world tourism at least \$22 billion owing to a drop in spending by Chinese tourists, the head of the World Travel and Tourism Council said. The COVID-19 epidemic has killed more than 2,760 people, mostly in China — where it first emerged in December — and infected more than 81,000 in over 45 countries.

"It is too soon to know but the WTTC has made a preliminary calculation in collaboration with (research firm) Oxford Economics which estimates that the crisis will cost the sector at least \$22 billion," Gloria Guevara told El Mundo daily.

"This calculation is based on the experience of previous crises, such as SARS or H1N1, and is based on losses deriving from Chinese tourists who have not been travelling in recent weeks," she said. "The Chinese are the tourists who spend most when they travel."

The loss figure, which equates to about 20.2 billion euros, is the most optimistic scenario envisaged by the study which was published on February 11 by Oxford Economics, taking the hypothesis of a 7.0 percent drop in overseas trips by Chinese nationals.

But the losses could more than double, reaching as much as \$49 billion if the crisis lasts as long as the SARS outbreak, which erupted in November 2002 and was brought under control in July 2003. And it could spiral to \$73 billion if it lasted longer than that, Oxford Economics said.

The economies most likely to suffer would be those most dependent on Chinese tourism, such as Hong Kong and Macau, Thailand, Cambodia and the Philippines, researchers found. The WTO has urged countries to avoid taking health measures that would cause "unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade" saying travel restrictions needed to be proportionate to ensure they did not have "negative repercussions on the tourism sector." — AFP

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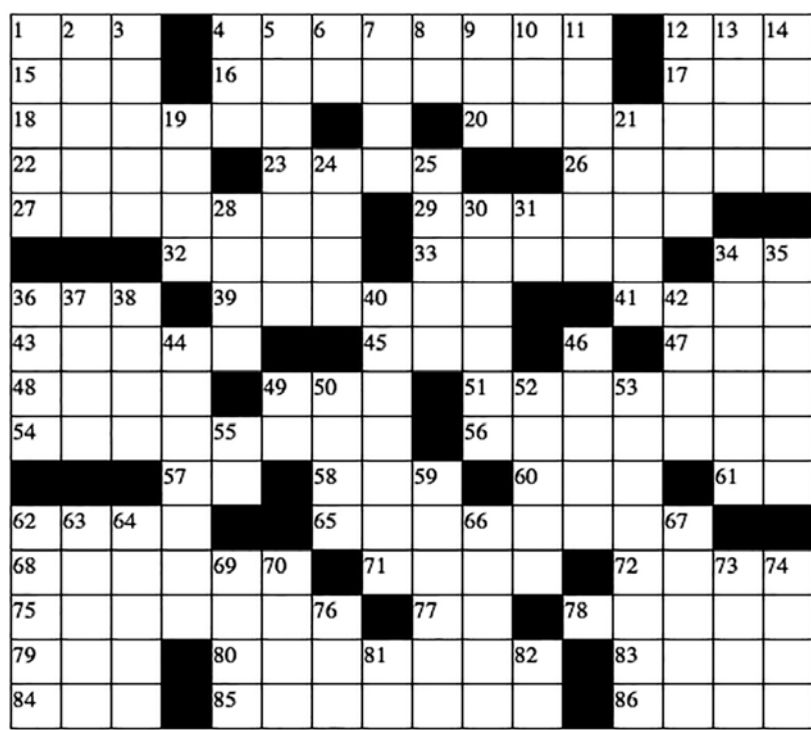
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2446



- ACROSS**
- The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
  - Type genus of the Ustilaginaceae.
  - Leaf or strip from a leaf of the talipot palm used in India for writing paper.
  - An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
  - Low-growing woody shrub or perennial with woody base.
  - Being ten more than one hundred thirty.
  - A deep bow.
  - A rudaceous rock consisting of sharp fragments embedded in clay or sand.
  - (trademark) A tinned luncheon meat made largely from pork.
  - One of the common people.
  - A seat for one person, with a support for the back.
  - State capital and largest city of Georgia.
  - English scholastic philosopher and assumed author of Occam's Razor (1285-1349).
  - A complex red organic pigment containing iron and other atoms to which oxygen binds.
  - An upright tripod for displaying something (usually an artist's canvas).
  - The sign language used in the United States.
  - A unit of apothecary weight equal to an eighth of an ounce or to 60 grains.
  - The basic unit of money in China.
  - An Indian side dish of yogurt and chopped cucumbers and spices.
  - A benevolent aspect of Devi.
  - A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
  - Bulky grayish-brown eagle with a short wedge-shaped white tail.
  - A motorboat resembling a motor scooter.
  - An autonomous province of Georgia on the Black Sea.
  - Having an oblique or slanted direction.
  - Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
  - Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
  - The United Nations agency concerned with the interests of labor.
  - A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.
  - South American armadillo with three bands of bony plates.
  - German chemist (1818-1892).
  - A tributary of the Ohio River.
  - An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
  - Fallow deer.
  - A woman who is engaged to be married.
  - A radioactive element of the actinide series.
  - Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
  - A transuranic element that has not been found in nature.
  - Stout-bodied broad-winged moth with conspicuously striped or spotted wings.
  - An industrial city is southeast Austria.
  - Towards the side away from the wind.
  - Capital and largest city of Iraq.
  - A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- DOWN**
- A genus of Laridae.
  - Make fit for, or change to suit a new purpose.
  - Small evergreen shrub of Pacific coast of North America having edible dark purple grape-size berries.
  - North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in northwest North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
  - An animal such as a mule or burro or horse used to carry loads.
  - A metallic element of the rare earth group.
  - A small island.
  - A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
  - Someone who engages in arbitrage (who purchases securities in one market for immediate resale in another in the hope of profiting from the price differential).
  - A group of Niger-Congo languages spoken primarily in southeastern Mali and northern Ghana.
  - The wood of an African obeche tree.
  - English scholastic philosopher and assumed author of Occam's Razor (1285-1349).
  - Being two more than sixty.
  - (botany) Of or relating to the axil.
  - A woman hired to suckle a child of someone else.
  - A soft whitish calcite.
  - A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
  - German mystic and theosophist who founded modern theosophy.
  - A quantity of no importance.
  - Any of several plants of the genus Camassia.
  - A state in midwestern United States.
  - Pitching dangerously to one side.
  - United States poet and critic (1916-1986).
  - A deep orange-red variety of chalcodony.
  - City in northern Austria on the Danube.
  - Flavored with sour orange peel.
  - A unit of power equal to 1 joule per second.
  - The capital and largest city of Iran.
  - Sluggish tailless Australian arboreal marsupial with gray furry ears and coat.
  - A son who has the same first name as his father.
  - Being on the left side.
  - An upward slope or grade (as in a road).
  - A member of the Iroquoian people formerly living between Lake Chaplain and the Saint Lawrence River.
  - A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
  - Filled with fear or apprehension.
  - American Revolutionary leader and signer of the Declaration of Independence (1731-1814).
  - Lower in esteem.
  - A sheet or band of fibrous connective tissue separating or binding together muscles and organs etc.
  - The basic unit of money in Nigeria.
  - Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
  - Queen of the Olympian gods in ancient Greek mythology.
  - A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
  - An edge tool used to cut and shape wood.
  - A graphical recording of the cardiac cycle produced by an electrocardiograph.
  - The fifth day of the week.
  - A doctor's degree in religion.

Tuesday's Solution

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

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You tend to be your own worst critic, Aries, and today you're more likely to be that way. Recent setbacks on the job might find you harboring doubts about your own capabilities. Be objective about the situation. Whatever happened was probably above and beyond your control, so it isn't fair to doubt yourself because of it. Work hard, continue to do the best you can, and don't let outside events sap your belief in yourself.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today could be a strange day where money is concerned, Taurus. You might not be sure exactly where you stand financially, so it might be a good idea to get all your records together and go over them carefully. This isn't a good day for gambling or making investments of any kind. Instead, get whatever information you can on investments that interest you, study them, and make appropriate decisions later.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Unsafe conditions could exist around the house, Gemini, which may result in accidents if they aren't rectified. Some may not be readily apparent, so warn family members to be careful. This isn't a good day to do any heavy work around the home. If you're planning major repairs, it might be a good idea to postpone them. This is, however, a good day for planning such repairs, as you can be especially methodical right now.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Cancer, one or more of your co-workers could appear to be rather upset or depressed on the job today, and this is likely to affect your own efficiency. Your colleagues in question aren't going to be very much into communicating, so it's best just to turn a blind eye and keep on working in spite of the situation. It's going to be tougher than usual, but it's nothing you can't handle.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Profligate spending in the past may come back to haunt you now with regard to money, Leo. There could be blocks in receiving funds you were expecting or an unexpected but necessary expense could come up. It's going to take all your talent for careful planning to work your way around this situation, but take heart. The situation can turn to a positive one in the blink of an eye, and probably will.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Boredom and restlessness may plague you today, Virgo. You could feel the need to break loose from the ties that bind you to mundane affairs, to run away and seek adventure, although you aren't certain what kind of adventure! The walls may be closing around you at home and on the job. You might want to plan some kind of outing for an upcoming weekend in order to give yourself a needed break.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your concentration should be high today, Libra. You're likely to be more observant than usual. Don't be surprised if you find yourself noticing people and sensing their thoughts and feelings even more than usual. This is a good day to read, study, attend a class, or otherwise acquire new information. You may discover something new about a subject that really interests you, and you might want to spend the day reading about it.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Worries about money could be uppermost in your mind today, Scorpio. You may have suffered some financial setbacks and wonder how you can muster enough funds to get over the hump. However, help is on the way. An outside source could provide funds to tide you over. Whatever other problems you may have will all be straightened out later. Your own ingenuity and a little help from your friends will probably see you through.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Setbacks on the job might have you a little depressed and worried. Don't worry, Sagittarius: all will be well. Think of this as a challenge to overcome. Your natural practicality and efficiency will see you through. Someone isn't being totally honest with you. Encourage people around you to open up and communicate a little. What they say may not be all that agreeable, but at least you'll be better able to assess the situation.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Sudden events that come to you via TV, newspapers, or the Internet, could shake up long-cherished belief systems today, Capricorn. This could have you feeling momentarily disconcerted and a bit disillusioned. At the same time, this information could open up new doors for you. Your natural curiosity will eventually win out, and you're likely to want to read all you can about whatever is on your mind. New discoveries can be fascinating!



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

A task that you've been working on for a long time could come to a standstill today due to circumstances beyond your control. You're likely to feel quite frustrated, Aquarius, as there seems to be nothing you can do to speed things up. Don't agonize over this, however; it will get going again. The best thing you can do is find something else to work on until the blockages have been released.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Be prepared today, Pisces. A longtime dream regarding your career may finally become a reality. At first you might not believe it, fighting the news in order to avoid possible disappointment. Don't fall into this trap; it creates negative energy, which can get in your way. You've worked hard to be where you are, and you aren't likely to stop advancing. Accept your accolades, thank everyone, and then move on.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Nursing Home 2

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 47 letters spell a Benjamin Franklin quotation.

Wordsearch grid for Nursing Home 2. The grid contains various words related to nursing homes and medical care. A list of words to find is provided below the grid.

**ADMISSION ASSISTANT** **DISABILITY DOCTOR** **LOTION LOUNGE** **PHYSICAL THERAPY PILLS** **SOAP SOCIALIZE**

**ASSISTANT** **ELEVATOR** **MEALS** **RECLINER** **SUPPLY**

**BATHROOM** **ENTERTAINMENT** **MEDICINE** **RECREATION ROOM** **STAFF**

**BEDPAN** **EYEGLASSES** **MEMORY** **ROOMMATE** **SUPPOSITORY**

**BEDS** **FOOD TRAY** **MORNING CARE** **SEMI-PRIVATE** **SYRINGE**

**BOARD GAMES** **GERIATRIC** **NURSE** **SEMI-PRIVATE** **THERMOMETER**

**BULLETIN BOARD** **HEALTH** **OSTEOPOROSIS** **SHOWER** **TUBE FEED**

**CARE** **HOLIDAY EVENTS** **OXYGEN** **SHOWER** **VIRUS**

**CASE MEETING** **INSULIN SHOT** **PATIENTS** **SLEEP** **VISITOR**

**CHARTS** **LAXATIVES** **PHARMACIST** **SLEEP** **WANDER ALARM**

**CHARTS** **LOCKDOWN** **PHARMACIST** **SNACK CART** **WASH HANDS**

Tuesday's Solution

Nursing Home 1

Wordsearch grid for Nursing Home 1. The grid contains various words related to nursing homes and medical care. A list of words to find is provided below the grid.

**ACTIVITIES** **COMFORT** **HELP** **OUTINGS** **SING ALONG**

**AIDES** **DENTURES** **INCONTINENCE** **PET THERAPY** **SLEEPING PILL**

**ASPIRIN** **DINING ROOM** **LAUNDRY** **PHYSIOTHERAPIST** **STAFF MEETINGS**

**BATHROOM** **DOCTOR** **LINERS** **PUZZLES** **SUPPER**

**BEDRILL** **DRUGS** **MAGAZINES** **READING** **TABLES**

**BEDS** **EXERCISE** **MEDICAL GLOVES** **RESIDENTS** **TELEVISION**

**BOARD GAMES** **FALLS** **MEMORY LOSS** **ROUNDS** **TRANSFER BELT**

**BULLETIN BOARD** **FLU SHOT** **MOISTURIZER** **SCRABBLE** **URNAL**

**CANE** **FRAIL** **MUSIC** **SCRUBS** **VOLUNTEERS**

**CARE** **GLUCOSE METER** **NEEDLE** **SENIORS** **WANDERING**

**CASE MEETING** **HAIRDRESSER** **SHOWER** **SHOWER** **WHEELCHAIR**

**CHARTS** **HALLWAYS** **NURSES** **SHOWER** **WHEELCHAIR**

The hidden message is:  
WE SHALL NEVER KNOW ALL THE GOOD THAT A SIMPLE SMILE CAN DO

Daily Sudoku

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

Tuesday's Solution

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



# Lifestyle

SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2020



A museum employee poses next to kimonos displayed during the press preview of the 'Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk' exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in central London. — AFP photos



A kimono fashion devotee poses next to a kimono ensemble for US singer Madonna by French fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier (center) displayed during the press preview of the 'Kimono'.



A museum employee poses next to kimonos displayed during the press preview of the 'Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk' exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in central London.



A 'Chee-shie-san' ensemble by British designer John Galiano for French fashion house Christian Dior (left) and a kimono and jacket ensemble by Japanese designer Jotaro Saito are displayed during the press preview.



A kimono for a woman (kosode), probably from Kyoto, 1800-50, is displayed during the press preview of the 'Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk' exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in central London.

## From samurais to Jedi knights, kimono stars in London show

Freddie Mercury, Yves Saint Laurent and George Lucas were all seduced by the charms of the kimono, whose evolution from medieval times in Japan will be on show at a major exhibition in London. The kimono has been worn by Jedi knights in Lucas's "Star Wars" movie saga, and David Bowie in his futuristic alter ego Ziggy Stardust.

"It's very fluidity is, I think, what makes it such an iconic inspiration," said Anna Jackson, curator of the "Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk" exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which opens yesterday. V and A director Tristram Hunt said: "When we think about fashion, the kimono might not be the first item that comes to mind." The exhibition, which runs to June 21, "challenges this perception".

### Elegance and show

A triptych consisting of a garment from 1800, a modern one by Japanese designer Jotaro Saito and a third from 2007 by Britain's John Galiano for Dior "shows how the fashion of the kimono has been translated beyond cultural and geographic boundaries", said Hunt. The kimono influence has even reached space, with the plain robes worn by Alec Guinness as "Star Wars" Jedi master Obi-Wan Kenobi forming part of the exhibition.

More than 100 items show off the contrasting variations on what was once a simple robe. The oldest, dating from around 1660 to 1680, has sober maple leaves embroidered on water motifs. The most recent is a skateboarder-style long, hooded coat made in 2019 by the young designer Milligan Beaumont.

"The very simplicity of (the) kimono's shape means that it can be taken apart and reconstructed in a myriad of ways," Jackson said, explaining the enduring fascination with kimonos across the centuries and continents. "For many people it's the sense of the drape from the shoulders. For others, it's the sash in the middle. For others, it's about the sumptuous surfaces, the amazing patterns and how they're combined in unusual ways."

### 'Genderless garment'

The kimono, worn by both men and women, began to appear in Europe thanks to the Dutch East India Company, which was allowed to trade with Japan despite the isolationist policy of its Edo period (1615-1868) that restricted contact with foreigners. In the 19th century, Japan began making kimonos with French silk, and Europe began making kimonos from Japanese fabrics. Since then, it has not stopped influencing international fashion.

Over time, the traditional embroidery depicting reeds, cherry trees, water lilies, birds or dragons became sophisticated geometric or even psychedelic patterns. French designer Jean Paul Gaultier shortened the robes to Bermuda shorts length in a fiery red 1998 creation for pop star Madonna. Alexander McQueen widened the neck and shortened the sleeves in 1997 for Bjork - a look as experimental and avant-garde as the Icelandic singer herself. In 1958, Saint Laurent transformed it into a cocktail dress with a voluminous skirt and a bolero jacket.

And in 2005 Yohji Yamamoto reinterpreted it in silk crepe to capture the garment's gender ambiguity, as Queen frontman Mercury did in the 1970s, wearing kimonos on stage during the British rock band's tours of Japan. "It is a genderless garment. Fundamentally, that shape doesn't change whether you are a man or a woman," said Jackson. "It seems very elegant and has that sense of performance. All fashion is performance in some way, but somehow, in a kimono, it's very easy to do it elegantly." — AFP

## 'Dispatches From Elsewhere': A crazy real-life game comes to TV

Is it a giant game for adults organized by a secretive company, or something far bigger? That is the premise of "Dispatches From Elsewhere," a new series from US cable network AMC that is inspired by a true story. Once a classic movie channel, AMC thrived when it shifted its focus to original programming—it is the home of "Mad Men," "Breaking Bad" and "The Walking Dead."

Now, it wants to make sure that it remains relevant in a scripted content landscape that has expanded exponentially in recent years. Like others in the field, AMC is taking a risk on a once-unlikely TV project that will require viewers to invest time and energy to decipher it. So far, "Dispatches," which debuts on Sunday, is 10 episodes long.

"The whole landscape changed," says Mark Friedman, the showrunner for "Dispatches," which stars Oscar winner Sally Field, Oscar nominee Richard E Grant and Andre Benjamin (Andre 3000 from the hip-hop duo Outkast). "You couldn't have done a show like this 10 years ago, but now there are places where this sort of interesting, weird storytelling can find a home." As fantastical and surreal as the script seems, the show is based on an actual story.

From 2008 to 2011, in San Francisco, several thousand people took part in an "experience"—as creator Jeff Hull calls it—during which they interacted with a fake company, the Jejun Institute. While the vibe and the language suggests some kind of cult, Hull was actually staging an elaborate game/art installation, with challenges and tests built in, that was the subject of 2013 documentary "The Institute."

### 'Create something hopeful'

Also starring in the show is its creator Jason Segel, who is best known for his stint on popular sitcom "How I Met Your Mother." After seeing the documentary, he bought the rights and developed a TV adaptation. "It felt like a high-wire act that could go horribly wrong, or go really great," says Friedman. Segel mixed elements of Hull's social experiment with the wacky sensibilities of screenwriters like Charlie Kaufman ("Being John Malkovich"), Michel Gondry ("Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind") and Jean-Pierre Jeunet ("Amelie").

It was a fairly significant challenge—those writers are modern-day poets whose work can be hard to grasp. Indeed, reviews have been mixed for "Dispatches," even if critics have lauded the effort to take on daring subject mat-

ter. "I think we're true to the spirit of the original game, and of the documentary," Friedman said, adding that the show's creators had Hull's blessing. "You can just watch it as an enjoyable TV show without the background," he added.

"Dispatches" follows four people who would seemingly never have crossed paths, but they

end up in the same game organized by the Jejun Institute in Philadelphia-taking the place of San Francisco. "We're dealing with four people who are kind of coming to each other from very different walks of life with very different points of view, and very different histories," explained actress Eve Lindley, who plays Simone.

"I think that's a huge part of what makes it so human and so relatable," Lindley, who is a trans woman, is playing a trans woman character; she says the show's creators took that on in a "kind of revolutionary" way by not making it central to the story. "She's just human. She's just a girl. And that was something that really excited me about the role. It felt so real," Lindley said.

For Friedman, the show is a breath of fresh air in "very contentious times." "We're divided into tribes, and on sides. So it's sort of wanting to create something hopeful in a sense that people from different backgrounds can come together and accomplish something together," he said. For Lindley, who describes the show as a "weird 'Wizard of Oz' story," the key ingredient is the focus on human connection. "Even though... it is something seemingly extraordinary, it is kind of just an ordinary story about ordinary people connecting with each other," she said.— AFP



(Left-right) Jason Segel, Eve Lindley, Karen Dougherty Buchholz, Josh Reader and Glossblack attend the 'Dispatches From Elsewhere' mural unveiling at the Comcast Technology Center on February 28, 2020 in Philadelphia. — AFP



## Berlin film fest sheds light on global inequality

From the Disneyland dreams of a poor Mexican family in the US to the fate of Bangladeshi guest workers in Singapore, films at this week's Berlinale have launched searing criticisms of capitalism and global inequality. In "Los Lobos", a young, recently widowed Mexican nurse sets off for the US, promising her children the very pinnacle of the American dream - a trip to Disneyland. Yet as penniless protagonist Lucia takes on work in a laundry, her two sons are left alone in the family's dingy bed-sit, dreaming up an imaginary world in order to escape the misery of daily life.

"The migrants who do the hard work are the invisible ones," said lead actress Martha Reyes Arias. Mexican director Samuel Kishi Lopo shows the importance of cheap, immigrant workers for the economic production of wealthy countries. "Immigration will not be stopped by a wall," said Lopo. "We need more opportunities in our countries, a better social system." "The big question is about neoliberalism. Capitalism is like a big monster."

### Broken dreams

The immigration issue is also picked up by Lei Yuan Bin in his documentary "I Dream of Singapore". The film highlights the fate of the thousands of Bangladeshi workers who head to Singapore in search of work and better

judicial security in the prosperous Southeast Asian city-state. Yet reality does not live up to expectations, as many are employed by firms who shirk their responsibilities at the slightest problem, leaving immigrant dreams of a better life in tatters. Exploitation of the workforce, however, is an issue which also affects people in their home country.

In his comedy "Eeb Allay Ooo!", Indian director Prateek Vats tells the story of Anjani, a young man from a New Delhi slum who earns little money and even less respect for his job hunting the monkeys which are a neighborhood nuisance. "As per statistics, 92 percent of the labor force in India works in the informal sector of the economy," said Vats. "People are desperate due to the lack of dignified work, and are ready to do anything to keep their current jobs." "My film is the product of a world which is hard to make sense of, one where being a monkey is more liberating than being a human."

Making the unseen people visible is also the aim of Nigerian twins Arie and Chuko Esiri in their first film "Eyimofe", about a factory technician who works without protective gloves. "He is a victim of the country of which he is a citizen," explained the directors, adding that their protagonist also has no chance to emigrate. "These people really have everything to lose by leaving Nigeria - their families, their culture, their loves and



French actor Omar Sy and French-Belgian actress Virginie Efira pose on the red carpet upon arrival for the premiere of the film 'Police' (Night Shift) screened in the Berlinale Special Gala section at the 70th Berlinale film festival in Berlin.



(Right to left) Iranian director of photography Bardia Yadegari, actor Kaveh Ahangar, Iranian actresses Baran Rasoulof and Jila Shahi pose during a photocall for the film 'Sheytan Vojud Nadaradi' (There is no Evil) screened in competition at the 70th Berlinale film festival in Berlin on February 28, 2020. — AFP photos

even their lives, if you think about certain journeys."

### 'Exploitation'

Finally, in "One of these Days", German director Bastian Guenther paints a vitriolic portrait of American society, in which economic desperation becomes a spectator sport.

Based on real events, the film depicts an endurance contest in which participants attempt to win a pick-up truck by keeping their hand on it for the longest time.

"When I first heard about this endurance contest it felt to me like an exploitation of the poor," said Guenther, while also warning of the risks of a drift towards populism. "What (US

President Donald) Trump is doing right now using these current frustrations for his own agenda. "And what's ironic about it is that people, in their desperation, will choose to follow somebody who embodies this system of inequality more than anybody else." — AFP



A feminist activist holds a sign reading "I accuse Polanski and the Cesar awards" during a demonstration outside the Salle Pleyel in Paris as guests arrive for the 45th edition of the Cesar Film Awards ceremony. — AFP

## 'French Oscars' marked by anger and protest as Polanski boycotts ceremony

The "French Oscars" the Cesars ceremony began late Friday in a poisonous atmosphere with Roman Polanski - whose new film has the highest number of nominations - staying away because he feared a "public lynching". Protesters chanting "Lock up Polanski!" tried to storm the Paris theatre at which the ceremony was being held only to be pushed back by police. Hours earlier France's Culture Minister Franck Riester said giving Polanski the best director prize for "An Officer and a Spy" would be "symbolically bad given the stance we must take against sexual and sexist violence".

With the French film industry at war with itself over honoring the controversial director - wanted in the United States for the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl in 1977 - Hollywood star Brad Pitt also snubbed the event having reportedly been offered an honorary Cesar. French star Adele Haenel, who is nominated for best actress for "Portrait of a Lady on Fire", set the tone by lambasting the Cesar academy earlier this week for showering so many nominations on Polanski's drama about the anti-Semitic Dreyfus affair at the turn of the 20th century.

"Distinguishing Polanski is spitting in the face of all victims," said the actress, who shook the industry last year by accusing the director of her first film, Christophe Ruggia, of sexually harassing her when she was only 12. "It means raping women isn't that bad," she added. In the furor that followed

Polanski's 12 nominations, the entire board of the Cesars was forced to resign.

### 'Blind hate'

Polanski told AFP that he would stay away because "what place can there be in such deplorable conditions for a film about the defense of truth, the fight for justice, blind hate and anti-Semitism?" His producer Alain Goldman said Friday that the film's entire team including its Oscar-winning star Jean Dujardin would also be boycotting the ceremony to show their outrage at the way Polanski had been "condemned in advance".

To make matters worse, on the eve of the awards, 30 cinema figures from minority backgrounds lashed the lip service they claimed the industry plays to inclusion in an open letter, saying black, North African and Asian-origin performers are mostly confined to stereotypical bit parts in French films.

The French press had called the ceremony as the most dramatic and divisive ever, with Le Figaro daily dubbed it "The Cesars of Anguish" and Le Parisien mocking up a movie poster for Hitchcock's "Vertigo". And it lived up to its billing, with one of the signatories of the letter, actress Aïssa Maïga, delivering a scathing critique of casual racism in the industry as she presented the prize for best newcomer, including skewering presenter Florence Foresti for once donning blackface.—AFP

## Netflix premieres debut 'Made-in-Africa' show

Online streaming giant Netflix's first made-in-Africa production, Queen Sono, a spy thriller starring South Africa's leading actress Pearl Thusi, launches on Friday. The new series, one of its first investments on the continent, premiered in Johannesburg on Thursday night.

Created and directed by leading local satirist and actor Kagiso Lediga, Queen Sono is part of Netflix's broader "Made in Africa, Seen by the World" strategy. Shot at more than 37 locations including in Kenya, Zanzibar, Nigeria and South Africa - Queen Sono is the first original script-to-screen series from Africa. Netflix's Africa manager Dorothy Ghetuba describes the movie as "a gripping action pact thriller (that) ... follows the life of Queen Sono, a highly trained secret spy who works for South Africans".

"I have always been the face of a strong African woman: it's not new to me but I'm now representing a character on screen who is, I think reflecting all the women in

Africa that are strong, black African women," said Thusi, who is also a star of US FBI thriller series "Quantico". The production shows "exactly what we wish to do which is telling stories about Africa by Africans," said Ted Sarandos, chief content officer at Netflix.

For creator and director Lediga "there are so many stories, there are so many great film makers on the continent, I can't wait to see what comes up after this". After attending the premier Lufuno Muthewiwa, 48, who works at a retail store, said it was time Africa tells its own story. "It shows that we as Africans we can do things by ourselves, we don't need Europeans or Asians or anyone to tell our own stories. We understand ourselves and we can actually tell our story better than anybody else". —AFP

## Minorities attack 'stereotypical' bit parts in French films

Some of France's top stars of color have slammed the French film industry, accusing it of confining black, North African and Asian-origin performers to stereotypical bit parts. In an open letter on the eve of the Cesars - the French Oscars - they lambasted the "invisibility" of minorities both in front of the camera and behind it.

The 30 signatories slammed the hypocrisy of an industry which this year invited the black American director Spike Lee to head the jury at the Cannes film festival while pushing black creators to the margins at home. The letter, which was also signed by "La Haine" director Mathieu Kassovitz and arthouse favorite Olivier Assayas, said minority "actors, directors and producers were almost invisible" in France. Those that did land parts were often relegated to minor roles playing stereotypical characters, it said.

"Actors of color are given insignificant parts which would never justify them getting a Cesar," the letter complained. The call echoes the #OscarsSoWhite movement in the US which began in 2015 and has spread noisily through social media. Eriq Ebouaney, the star of the historical drama "Lumumba", said that other than "a few exceptions like Omar Sy... when French actors of color get a role it is in a film about the housing estates" in the country's poor and restive suburbs.

### 'Open the doors'

Sy - best known for "The Intouchables" - was conspicuously absent from the list of signatories, although he had earlier demanded "profound reform" of the Cesars. The French Oscars has been rocking from a series of crises since it garlanded the controversial director Roman Polanski with the highest number of nominations for his film "An Officer and a Spy". "Urgent measures on inclusion have to happen," the let-

## 'Opera King' Placido Domingo dethroned by sex harassment scandal

One of the world's most celebrated and prolific opera singers, Placido Domingo enjoyed a glittering six-decade career until a sexual harassment scandal brought down the curtain on his runaway success. Dubbed "the king of opera", Domingo first rose to worldwide fame as one of the Three Tenors, his sonorous voice and commanding physical presence enchanting audiences across the globe. The Spanish megastar also made a name for himself conducting and directing, taking on the



In this file photo, Spanish tenor Placido Domingo performs during his concert in the newly inaugurated sports and culture centre "St Gellert Forum" in Szeged, southern Hungary, on August 28, 2019. — AFP



Photo shows the poster of the last movie "J'accuse" of French movie director Roman Polanski displayed on a cinema in Paris. — AFP

ter warned, if the industry wants to avoid positive discrimination being forced on it. "It is time to open the doors and the windows of French cinema," it added. "Because talent, like emotion, has no color."

The letter also pointed to the success of Mali-born Ladj Ly's Oscar-nominated movie, "Les Misérables", as proof of the appeal of films that properly reflect the minority experience in France. The film, set in a troubled housing estate, has 11 Cesar nominations, just one behind Polanski's historical drama about the Dreyfus affair, when a Jewish officer was wrongly persecuted by the French army at the turn of the 20th century. The film faced calls for a boycott from

top artistic positions at some of the world's most prestigious concert venues.

And this almost unrivalled position of power in the operatic world was, according to many of his accusers, what allowed him to pressure them into unwanted sexual relationships. The allegations first surfaced in August last year and since then at least 20 women have come forward about incidents going back to the 1980s, with one saying Domingo put his hand down her skirt while others said he forcibly kissed them. Although he brushed off the accounts as "inaccurate", insisting his interactions were "always welcomed and consensual", the damage was done.

Within two months, the charismatic tenor-turned-baritone stepped down from the Los Angeles Opera and withdrew from New York's Metropolitan Opera, effectively ending his US career. And this week, the storm reached Europe when the 79-year-old apologized for "the hurt" caused to his accusers, saying he accepted "full responsibility" for his actions, his mea culpa triggering a backlash in Spain and

feminists when it opened last year, with many branding the veteran a "sex criminal and rapist".

Polanski, 87, is still wanted in the United States for the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl in 1977. Just before his new movie opened in France, a French photographer claimed that he had also raped her in 1975 - an accusation that he strongly denies. The director told AFP Thursday that he would not be attending the ceremony for fear of a "public lynching" by feminists. The entire board of the Cesars was forced to resign earlier this month in the wake of the controversy over Polanski's nominations. — AFP

raising questions over future appearances in Europe. On Thursday he attempted to row back on his apology, saying his words had been misunderstood.

### Musical family

Born in Madrid on January 21, 1941, Domingo's parents were both performers of traditional Spanish operetta, known as "zarzuela". When he was eight, the family moved to Mexico where he studied music - piano, conducting and eventually singing. Starting out as a baritone, his teachers later advised him to move to the tenor range, but he would later return to his baritone beginnings in later years, his dramatic tones leaving listeners spellbound.

At 16, he ran away and married a fellow student, angering his parents who were "furious, but even more sad," he told the New York Times. Although the relationship was short-lived, the couple had a son, Jose. After intense training to hit the higher notes, Domingo took his first part at the age of 18 in the Mexico National Opera. And two years later, he made his debut in a leading operatic role as Alfredo in Verdi's "La Traviata" in Monterrey, Mexico. In 1962, Domingo married Marta, his current wife with whom he had two more sons, Placido and Alvaro.

His international career took off in 1965 under conductors such as the Berlin Philharmonic's Herbert von Karajan and Italian great Claudio Abbado. In 1972, Domingo picked up the baton himself to conduct "La Traviata" at the New York City Opera. He would go on to distinguish himself as a conductor across the world, and later moved to the United States to serve as director of the Washington National Opera from 1996 to 2001 before moving to the LA Opera.—AFP





Models present creations for Balmain during the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris.

Models present creations for Balmain at the end of the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris.



Models present creations for Balmain at the end of the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris.



A model presents a creation for Balmain during the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris.

## Balmain puts the bling into bourgeois in Paris fashion show

Paris fashion week fell back in love late Thursday, with Balmain rolling the clock back to 1980s in a glitzy show that could have been called "Pretty Woman goes to the Polo Club". With Celine's Hedi Slimane already committed to reviving the bourgeois pearls and twin-set look, Balmain's artistic director Olivier Rousteing said he wanted to democratize the clothes of the ruling classes.

"Growing up in Bordeaux, perhaps the most bourgeois city in all of France, I learned from an early age that certain classes, clubs and cliques were closed off to someone who looked like me," said Rousteing, the first black designer to head a major Paris fashion house. "I spent countless hours dreaming and scheming about how I could cross over, open doors and be accepted," he added. Balmain's plan was to storm the bourgeois bastions in thigh-high latex boots, with a battalion of crack models led by battle-hardened older supermodels Helena Christensen and Esther Canadas.

"Out of my way buster, or I will batter you with my Balmain shoulder pad," quipped the New York Times critic Vanessa Friedman of the collection in a tweet from her front row seat. Rousteing sent his diverse runway army out in glammed up versions of equestrian and upper-class classics, from blazers to a stunning pencil argyle dress and his take on gaucho ponchos. Country set silk scarf prints ran through the collection, with their motifs picked up in puff ball woollens enlivened with swathes of sequins.

### Severed head handbag

The 33-year-old creator, who described himself as an orphan who did not know his origins, was in reflective mood, with a film about his search for his roots, "Wonder Boy", in the running for best documentary at the French Oscars, the Cesars, late Friday. "This collection adapts those symbols of upper-class exclusion and

twists them to... open doors and open minds," Rousteing said.

"I realise that my search for answers about my past has helped me make it clear how happy I am to be living in this present, in this Paris of new possibilities, of fewer boundaries and more inclusion." Family also ran

Gwendoline Christie sitting next to her on the front row, it set tongues wagging wondering whether Brieenne of Tarth had lopped off the American designer's head backstage.

Vogue called it "fashion's cheekiest It bag", and was particularly impressed when Lamy produced her



through Virgil Abloh's Off-White show late Thursday, with the black American designer sending out supermodels Bella and Gigi Hadid as well as their mother Yolanda.

As with Kardashians, it is hard to know with the Hadids who is the more famous, with 56-year-old Yolanda a bestselling author as well as a former star of the reality television show, "Real Housewives of Beverly Hills". But the biggest surprise came at the Rick Owens show, where his flamboyant French wife Michele Lamy sported a bag modeled from Owens' own head. With "Game of Thrones" actress

iPhone from a flap in the back of her beloved's skull. Even for Owens, one of fashion's true radicals, this was quite something. Meanwhile, the French designer Agnes b—who has a huge following in Asia—cancelled her Paris fashion week show that was due to the held on Monday because of the coronavirus and "the current global sanitary context". It is the third Paris show to be cancelled because of the virus. — AFP

French fashion designer for Balmain Olivier Rousteing acknowledges the audience at the end of the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos



Models present creations for Balmain during the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris.



## Lifestyle | Features

## Meal delivery startup DoorDash plans stock offering

DoorDash has begun the process of going public with a US stock offering that could value the popular restaurant meal delivery service at more than \$10 billion. San Francisco-based DoorDash said it confidentially registered with market regulators at the Securities and Exchange Commission for an initial public offering of shares, allowing the company to begin work on the listing without disclosing its finances.

The price and number of shares had yet

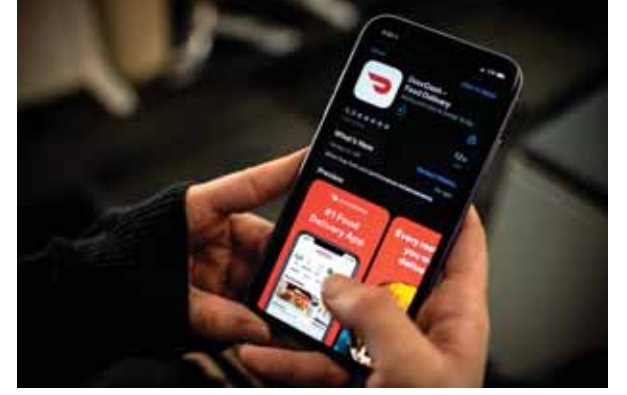
to be determined. DoorDash backers including Japanese financial titan SoftBank have pumped more than \$2 billion into the startup, which last year was given a valuation of nearly \$13 billion. DoorDash, founded in 2013 by Tony Xu and two other Stanford University students, serves some 4,000 cities in the United States and Canada and reaches some 80 percent of US households.

The startup has expanded to Australia and Canada. DoorDash late last year

revealed that a breach of its system exposed data of nearly five million customers, eateries and "Dashers." DoorDash assured users in an online post that it immediately blocked the intruder's cyber access and enhanced system security. DoorDash last year acquired cross-town rival Caviar in a deal valued at \$410 million.

DoorDash said it made the cash-and-stock deal with Square, the digital payments firm led by Twitter founder Jack

Dorsey, which acquired Caviar in 2014. While both firms offer on-demand delivery from restaurants online and using smartphone apps, they have different geographic "footprints" and restaurant partnerships. DoorDash was in the news last year over a tipping policy that allowed the company to use consumer tips to make up base pay for its delivery contractors, a policy that was later modified. — AFP



An AFP journalist checks the DoorDash food delivery application on her smartphone in Washington, DC. — AFP



(From left) Sudanese chef Ahamed Mohamed, Moroccan chef assistant Souhaib Chabchaoui, Syrian chef Hala Doudieh, Spanish Elena Suarez, founding partner of the Refusion restaurant, Venezuelan chef Yolanda Medina and Venezuelan chef assistant Daniel Colmenares, pose outside the Refusion restaurant, staffed by refugees and migrants chefs from Syria, Sudan and Venezuela in Madrid. — AFP

## Refugee restaurant seeks to win Spanish hearts

Hala and Alex learned to cook with their mothers, Yoli learnt while preparing meals for her large family. The trio, who were forced to flee Syria, Sudan and Venezuela respectively, are now the chefs at a unique Madrid restaurant that aims to change the lives of refugees and alter how people see them, at a time when the arrival of large numbers of migrants fleeing poverty and prosecution stokes tensions across Europe.

Gathered in the kitchen wearing black aprons bearing the name of the restaurant, "Refusion", in large orange letters, the three prepare typical dishes from their native countries: moussaka from Syria, kofta from Sudan and tequeños from Venezuela. Each came to Spain for different reasons - Hala Doudieh, 29, because of the war in Syria, Alex Medina, 24, to live freely as a transsexual and Yoli Medina, 52, because of the economic crisis in Venezuela - and the eatery provides them with stable work which has improved their lives in their new home.

"I am a black trans refugee woman, it's hard to find work, I made food, sold falafels on the street to survive," Alex, who sports long black hair in braids and was named Ahmed Mohamed at birth, told AFP. Alex, who learned to cook with her mother in Khartoum, fled Sudan three years ago because she feared for her life due to her identity. She said she was "happy and comfortable" at the restaurant in the northeastern Madrid neighborhood of Valdeacederas which has a high immigrant population. "I can work and dress however I want and prepare food with love and affection," she added.

## 'Stable work'

Refusion was set up by "people who want to offer stable work to people who are not stable economically, sociologically or socially, people who want to give an opportunity to refugees who like working in the kitchen," said Doudieh, who arrived in Spain with her family from war-torn Damascus in 2013. She was referring to the five founding members of the restaurant, which opened its doors last year with the aim of expanding to employ more refugees.

The founding partners are all volunteers at the charity "Madrid for Refugees", which helps recent arrivals integrate in Spain. It organizes evening courses where a refugee teaches people how to make food from their country. The three chefs from Refusion have all given these classes. "That is the project, to try to provide stable work to people who have had very complicated histories and allow them to integrate because our state gives them refugee status but then doesn't help them, or does little, to integrate them," said one of the Spanish founders of the charity, Elena Suarez.

She said the goal is to "use food to change a bit the negative discourse we have about refugees" in Spain, which receives the most asylum requests in the European Union after Germany and France according to the bloc's statistics agency Eurostat. "We won't be intimidated by what is happening and by new parties," she added in a reference to far-right anti-immigrant party Vox which became the third-biggest party in Spain's parliament in a November 2019 general election. — AFP

time, it certainly can't hurt," they said. There's fun to be had even by those in obligatory isolation in red zones, with only their social media feeds for company. Virus jokes have gone viral, and as per tradition they target Italy's famous flaws, from its public transport to its mafia.

## 'Transparent gold'

One gag shows a city mayor boasting that the metro's delays are actually helping keep his citizens safe, because "the waiting time is longer than the (14-day) incubation period!" Another has a drug dealer offering hashish or cocaine, but his client demands "Amuchina" - the most famous hand sanitizer gel in Italy. The mafia's reputation for latching on to new trends is also a target for the online jokers. One mock-up video shows a Naples mobster proposing to a fellow gangster that they switch from cocaine smuggling to Amuchina.

"Demand is skyrocketing for Amuchina, it's been nicknamed 'transparent gold', and colleagues in Honduras are transforming their labs to produce Amuchina," he says. The jump in the gel's price on some internet marketplaces since the virus hit Italy prompted several joke adverts, with one offering to swap "five litres of Amuchina for a 2019 Audi RS5", a vehicle costing some 100,000 euros. — AFP

## Virus cake anyone? Italians fight fear with silliness

Crack that prosecco, it's aperivrus time. And why not accompany your bubbly with a slice of virus ice-cream cake, fresh from the area of Italy worst hit by the disease? Italy has the most coronavirus cases in Europe and highest death toll but rather than succumb to fear, wisecracking Italians have opted to laugh in the face of danger with a slew of parodies, jokes and general silliness.

In the economic capital Milan, just 60 kilometers down the road from the main outbreak, bars have transformed "happy hour" into "aperitiviruses", where aperitifs and snacks can be bought at a discount. At the Gelateria Infinito shop on the outskirts of Cremona - another area of the Lombardy region reporting many cases - customers can get a "Corona Cake", which features the typical crown-like spikes of the COVID-19 virus.

"We know that this is a serious issue, but problems can't be solved with sadness and fear," owners Andrea Schirali and his wife Daniela told the Repubblica daily. "The important thing is to follow instructions and stay calm. If we eat a good ice cream in the mean-

## 'Play, Dagmar, play': Violinist recalls tumor op performance

Emerging from the depths of slumber, Dagmar Turner had barely a chance to notice the hushed intensity of the operating theatre when someone thrust her violin into her hands. It was time to play the performance of her life. As surgeons behind her removed a tumor from her brain, Turner took up her bow and played George Gershwin's aria "Summertime", ensuring she can still perform with her beloved violin after recovery. "The last thing that comes to your mind is 'I would really like to play my violin now'," she said about her virtuoso performance on the operating table.

The British-based violinist agreed to the unconventional concert to help avoid damage to her brain during surgery. The 53-year-old German, who plays with the Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra in southern England, was diagnosed in 2013 with a slow-growing tumor after suffering a seizure during a concert. Turner told AFP how it felt to be woken from anaesthetic as surgeons operated on her brain. "It was like being woken up from a really deep sleep," she said, adding that she was then handed her instrument.

"It started fine and the first thing I really remembered was when they put this violin in my face, like, 'now play, Dagmar, play'. "I was like, 'let me sleep'. It's just horrible." The amateur musician described being able to feel "somebody standing up behind my head... telling me 'Dagmar, we have just removed 95 percent of your tumor'. "I was utterly in shock and speechless. You know the day before you have an inoperable tumor and then the next day they tell you 95 percent of that has been taken out," she explained.

## 'Music is a healer'

Turner hit on the plan to play her violin to protect vital cells located in the right frontal lobe of her brain, and professor Keyoumars Ashkan, consultant neurosurgeon at King's College Hospital in south London, agreed. "I was absolutely horrified when my new oncologist said that he would think this operation would dampen my ability to play," she said. "I'm like, 'I don't like that'.

initially considered playing "a bit of Bach, a bit of Beethoven, a bit of the Tchaikovsky violin concerto." But in the end, she stuck with Gershwin, because she could remember it by heart. "As a child when you learn, you have to play a lot of pieces by heart, but not when you are an old bird like me, you forget about it."

Stunning video footage of the procedure was released by the hospital, showing Turner fiddling while



A still image shows musician Dagmar Turner playing the violin during brain surgery at King's College Hospital in London. — AFP

That's when I suggested if I can play the violin. "Music is a healer and music is a connector with people." The surgery area was close to the part of the brain that controls the micro-movements of the left hand required to regulate a violin's pitch and timbre.

The medical team proposed that Turner be woken up midway through the procedure so she could play and be monitored to make sure her coordination was not being affected. For the concert of her life, Turner had

surgeons behind her operated inside her skull. "It's very strange because you can't feel anything what they are doing in your head because there is no sensation," she explained. Turner, who has a 13-year-old son and has played the violin since the age of 10, underwent the procedure last month. She left the hospital three days after the surgery. — AFP



Visitors row boats past cherry blossoms in the Japanese capital Tokyo. — AFP

## JAPAN CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVALS CANCELLED AS VIRUS FEARS GROW

Major cherry blossom festivals in Japan have been cancelled due to the deadly new coronavirus, the latest in a growing list of events quashed as the epidemic spreads globally. The traditional spring celebrations in Tokyo and Osaka, which attract millions of people wanting to see the white and pink flowers, will not go ahead as planned in April. "We are sincerely sorry for those who were looking forward to the viewing... but please give us your understanding," the Japan Mint in Osaka said Friday.

Other cherry blossom events - feverishly anticipated by locals and tourists - are likely to follow suit, according to local media. Organizers of Tokyo's Nakameguro Cherry Blossom Festival said people could still enjoy the blooming trees that grow along public roads. Trees

in Tokyo will soon be in full bloom, with friends, families and colleagues typically flocking to parks for sometimes raucous, alcohol-fueled celebrations.

The cancellations come as authorities step up efforts to tackle the outbreak in Japan, which has reported more than 230 infections and five deaths. Schools are closed and the government is urging people to work from home or commute during off-peak hours and avoid large gatherings. The operator of Tokyo's two Disney resorts - Disneyland and DisneySea - said Friday the parks would be closed for around two weeks due to the virus. Universal Studios Japan in Osaka has also shuttered for a fortnight. — AFP



Pedestrians admire cherry blossoms in the Japanese capital Tokyo. — AFP photos



# Classifieds

Sunday, March 1, 2020

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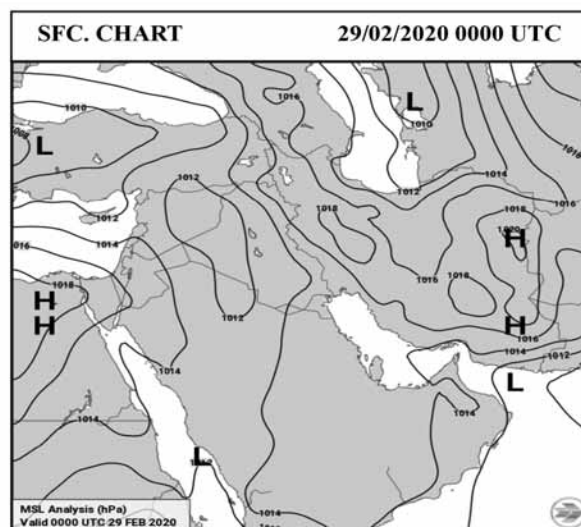
## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Warm with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 08 - 32 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

**BY NIGHT:** Cold with light to moderate south easterly wind to southerly 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	25 °C	15 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	26 °C	09 °C
ABDALY	27 °C	09 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	26 °C	11 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	24 °C	14 °C
SALMIYAH	24 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	21 °C	15 °C
NUWAISIB	24 °C	10 °C
WAFRA	27 °C	08 °C
SALMY	24 °C	09 °C



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	03/01	Relatively hot	30 °C	09 °C	S-NW	12 - 35 km/h
Monday	03/02	Warm	24 °C	10 °C	NW	15 - 38 km/h
Tuesday	03/03	Warm	24 °C	09 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h
Wednesday	03/04	Warm	25 °C	09 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:56
Sunrise	06:14
Zuhr	12:01
Asr	15:19
Sunset	17:46
Isha	19:03

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	24 °C
MIN. Temp.	09 °C
MAX. RH	88 %
MIN. RH	29 %
MAX. Wind	N 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

## Hospitals

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

## Clinics

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

## Required

**ICU Qualified Nurse**  
**99723777**  
 (Surname - Mohammed Shafiullah, Given name - Mohammed Raqeeb) Mohammed Shafiullah (father). (C 5646) 24-2-2020

## Airlines

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

## Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page ([www.kuwait-airport.com.kw](http://www.kuwait-airport.com.kw))

### Flight Schedule

Arrival Flights on Sunday 1/3/2020				Departure Flights on Sunday 1/3/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
JZR	130	Dubai	00:05	AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	JZR	215	Jeddah	00:05
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	MEA	407	Beirut	00:20
FEQ	241	Alexandria	00:30	QTR	1093	Doha	00:25
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
NIA	561	Asyut	00:45	OMS	226	Muscat	00:40
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	RJA	5643	Amman	00:40
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	BBC	044	Dhaka	00:45
KAC	504	Beirut	00:55	UAE	2554	Dubai	00:45
KAC	102	London	00:55	AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
THY	3962	Istanbul	01:00	FEQ	342	Sohag	01:30
UAE	2555	Dubai	01:20	NIA	364	Alexandria	01:40
JZR	002	LGW	01:25	JZR	111	Doha	01:55
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
ETH	3424	Addis Ababa/Bahrain	01:30	THY	3963	Istanbul	02:00
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	363	Colombo	02:00
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	KAC	677	Dubai	02:10
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	THY	773	Istanbul	02:20
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	417	Manila	02:30
RBG	551	Alexandria	02:25	UAE	2556	Dubai	02:50
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	ETH	3425	Addis Ababa	02:55
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
THY	3964	Istanbul	02:55	RBG	552	Alexandria	03:05
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
RJA	648	Amman	03:05	KAC	621	Doha	03:50
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	THY	3965	Istanbul	03:55
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	QTR	1087	Istanbul	04:00
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	JZR	707	Luxor	04:40
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	KAC	103	London	05:00
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
KAC	382	Delhi	05:00	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	THY	771	Istanbul	06:25
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	JZR	001D	LGW	06:45
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	RJA	649	Amman	06:55
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	JZR	601	Baku	07:10
QTR	8511	Doha	05:45	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	UAE	874	Dubai	07:15
UAE	873	Dubai	05:50	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:55	QTR	8512	Doha	07:45
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	165	Rome	08:15
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	KAC	161	Geneva	08:20
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
BAW	157	London	07:10	KAC	545	Cairo	08:50
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15	BAW	156	London	09:00
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00
KAC	622	Doha	08:00	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	691	Muscat	09:20
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	QTR	1085	Doha	09:30
KAC	334	Trivandrum	09:00	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	KAC	101	London	09:45
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	561	Amman	09:45
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	KAC	791	Madinah	10:00
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	KAC	117	New York	10:00
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
JZR	708	Luxor	10:55	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
MSR	610	Cairo	12:00	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
SYR	341	Damascus	12:00	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	JZR	611	Tbilisi	10:45
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
JZR	602	Baku	12:50	SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
				JZR	305	Istanbul	11:10
				KAC	741	Dammam	11:20



# 'No fear': Pilgrims in Saudi defying risks of coronavirus

**MAKKAH:** Cleaners scrub and sterilize the floors of Makkah's Grand Mosque after fears of coronavirus led Saudi Arabia to suspend pilgrim visas, but worshippers appear unfazed - confident of God's protection. Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's holiest sites, on Thursday suspended entry by foreigners for the year-round umrah pilgrimage, an unprecedented move that has left tens of thousands in limbo. It has also sparked uncertainty over the annual hajj pilgrimage scheduled for July.

But Nadia Bettam, a 50-year-old Algerian donning a veil to perform umrah for the first time, counted herself fortunate as she arrived in Makkah five days before Riyadh's abrupt decision. "I have no fear. We are in the hands of God," said Bettam, 50, wearing a face mask and accompanied by her sister Fatima. "What matters for us is worship, but we are taking precautions."

Saudi Arabia has so far reported no coronavirus cases but there are mounting concerns over a spike in infections across the Middle East. On Friday it specifically barred citizens from the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council from entering Makkah and Madinah amid fears over the new coronavirus, the foreign ministry said. The GCC states are comprised of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar. GCC citizens can normally enter the kingdom with their national identity document, whereas citizens of other countries require a visa.

The Grand Mosque was packed with worshippers like Bettam on Friday, underscoring how faith often trumps health concerns and the challenge of disease control.

Floors of the Grand Mosque are washed four times a day and 13,500 carpets in areas designated for prayer are regularly cleaned, according to the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA). Grand Mosque official Jaber Wadani said the "best cleaning and sterilization methods" were in use, with all carpets scrubbed and perfumed daily. AFP saw cleaning crews wearing green face masks sterilizing doors with disinfectants including chlorine.

Facemasks are useful in guarding against infections, said Robina Mahmoud, leading a group of 105 pilgrims from the Netherlands. Her group was also taking precautions such as regularly washing their hands. "This will definitely protect us, but the rest is in God's hands," she said.

Inside the mosque, the area surrounding the Kaaba - cube structure that is the focal point of Islam - was packed with tens of thousands of worshippers, most of them wearing masks. Muslims around the world pray in the direction of the Kaaba, which is draped in a gold-embroidered black cloth. Three pharmacies around the Grand Mosque said they had run out of masks. "The demand for masks in the last two days is unprecedented," a Syrian doctor told AFP. "I have sold 200 boxes in three days, which used to be our monthly stock."

But other traders reported losses following the decision to suspend umrah visas. "Whole groups (of pilgrims) have cancelled their (hotel) reservations," said Mahfouz, an Egyptian who works as an independent travel agent. "I am still counting my losses." The pilgrimage forms a crucial source of revenue for the government, which hopes to



**MAKKAH:** Muslim worshippers wearing protective facemasks walk in the courtyard surrounding the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine, at the Grand Mosque complex on Feb 27, 2020. — AFP

welcome 30 million religious visitors annually to the kingdom by 2030.

Alongside Thursday's pilgrimage curb, it has also temporarily suspended electronic tourist visas for people arriving from seven countries, including China, Italy, Japan, South Korea and Kazakhstan, according to the SPA. It added that tourist visa holders

will be allowed to visit Makkah and Madinah. Authorities insist the suspensions are temporary, but it was unclear when they will be lifted.

"We receive hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every month from different countries around the world," a Saudi official told AFP. "If (coronavirus) arrives here and

spreads, it will be a global epidemic. The safety of people is more important than performing umrah." But many pilgrims appeared defiant. "How can we be afraid if we are in the house of God?" said 21-year-old Turkish student Hossam Aldin. "Even if I got the infection, it would be good to die as a martyr here." — AFP

## Luxembourg becomes first...

Continued from Page 1

It will be some years before the network links to the northern airport, for instance. "There's been an enormous delay to the development of public transport," said Blanche Weber, head of the Luxembourg Ecological Movement pressing for better links on environmental grounds.

## US, Taliban sign historic deal...

Continued from Page 1

and the Soviets," he said as he and other jubilant Taliban members took part in a march in Qatar, in a video shared by Taliban sources.

The Doha accord was drafted over a tempestuous year of dialogue marked by the abrupt cancellation of the effort by Trump in September. But the position of the Afghan government, which has been excluded from direct US-Taliban talks, remains unclear and the country is gripped by a fresh political crisis amid contested election results. The signing comes after a week-long, partial truce that has mostly held across Afghanistan, aimed at building confidence between the warring parties and showing the Taliban can control their forces.

The US, which currently has between 12,000 and 13,000 troops in Afghanistan, will draw that number down to 8,600 within months of the agreement being signed. If the Taliban abide by the terms of the accord, the US and its partners "will complete withdrawal of all remaining forces from Afghanistan" within 14 months. The two sides also agreed to swap thousands of prisoners in a "confidence building measure". And the unprecedented direct negotiations between the Taliban and Afghanistan's government will begin by March

"Systematic and continuous investment is a sine qua non (essential) condition for promoting the attractiveness of public transport," admitted transport minister Francois Bausch.

Sales of tickets on the domestic network - which cost two euros per journey - previously covered just eight percent of the 500-million-euro cost of running the transport system. That shortfall will now be met from the treasury. Ticket machines are to be gradually removed from stations, but offices selling tickets for international train trips and for first-class seating in Luxembourg - which continues to be a paying service - will remain. — AFP

10, likely in Oslo, senior US officials said.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg heralded the agreement as a "first step to lasting peace". "The way to peace is long and hard. We have to be prepared for setbacks, spoilers, there is no easy way to peace but this is an important first step," the Norwegian former prime minister told reporters in Kabul. The insurgents said they had halted all hostilities yesterday in honor of the agreement. "Since the deal is being signed today, and our people are happy and celebrating it, we have halted all our military operations across the country," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP.

Any insurgent pledge to guarantee Afghanistan is never again used by militant movements such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group to plot attacks abroad will be key to the deal's viability. The Taliban's sheltering of Al-Qaeda was the main reason for the US invasion following the 9/11 attacks. The group, which had risen to power in the 1990s in the chaos of civil war, suffered a swift defeat at the hands of the US and its allies. They retreated before re-emerging to lead a deadly insurgency against the new government in Kabul.

After the NATO combat mission ended in Dec 2014, the bulk of Western forces withdrew from the country, leaving it in an increasingly precarious position. While Afghans are eager to see an end to the violence, experts say any prospective peace will depend on the outcome of the intra-Afghan talks. But with President Ashraf Ghani and rival Abdullah Abdullah at loggerheads over contested election results, few expect the pair to present a united front, unlike the Taliban. — AFP

due to emergence of a host of new developments of paramount significance, thus an alternative session will be held at the parliament bureau, a date of which will be declared later after coordination with the government, he said in a statement. MPs had requested the special session to discuss government measures against the virus. Ghanem explained that there have been several developments at this level, namely completion of a government evacuation plan, preoccupation of the health personnel with anti-coronavirus precautions and accommodating Kuwaitis coming back home.

Meanwhile, Qatar has confirmed its first case of coronavirus, state media reported yesterday, after a 36-year-old Qatari man who was evacuated to Doha from Iran tested positive. Qatar on Thursday repatriated a number of its citizens from Iran - which is battling the worst outbreak outside China - and confined them to a 14-day period of quarantine, the government said. The health ministry said the infected patient had been admitted to hospital. "This had been expected because of the virus' spread across the region and other countries, alongside the exponential increase in the number of cases," the health ministry said according to the Qatar News Agency.

Iran yesterday reported nine new deaths from the novel coronavirus and 205 fresh cases in the past 24 hours, bringing its overall toll to 43 dead and 593 infected, but it dismissed as "rumors" a report the real death toll was much higher. The Gulf tally stands at 45 cases of coronavirus in Kuwait, 38 in Bahrain, six in Oman and two more in the United Arab Emirates for a total of 21. Yesterday, the UAE also announced it was suspending nursery school classes, and limiting activities at other schools. Authorities said that two planes will also be sent to Iran to collect Emiratis and other Gulf citizens trapped there after air routes were closed.

Cyclists taking part in the UAE Tour are awaiting the results of coronavirus tests from their hotel lockdown, after the event was abandoned Thursday when two staff from an Italian team tested positive. The race organizers said in a tweet yesterday that 167 of those quarantined had received negative results on coronavirus tests, but it did not say whether they were cyclists or staff members,

## Erdogan asks Putin to step...

Continued from Page 1

call to stand aside and let Turkey "do what is necessary" with the Syrian government. He said Turkey does not intend to leave Syria right now. "We did not go there because we were invited by (Syrian President Bashar al-Assad). We went there because we were invited by the people of Syria. We don't intend to leave before the people of Syria say, 'Okay, this is done.'" Erdogan added.

As tensions rose, Russia and Turkey have held three rounds of talks, the first two of which did not yield a ceasefire. Russia's Foreign Ministry said yesterday that the two sides agreed in this week's talks to reduce tensions on the ground in Idlib while continuing military action there. But Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters in Doha that the Idlib issue can only be settled in a meeting between Erdogan and Putin, which he said would take place on March 5 or March 6.

After 33 of its soldiers were killed on Thursday, Turkey said it would allow migrants it hosts to freely pass to Europe. One more Turkish soldier was killed on Friday, raising this month's toll to 55. Turkey hosts some 3.7 million Syrian refugees, in addition to Afghans, Iranians, and Moroccans among others. It has warned that it cannot take another refugee wave from Idlib.

Violence in the northwestern Syrian province has displaced one million civilians since December inside the country near the Turkish border in desperate winter conditions, in what is perhaps the worst humanitarian crisis of the conflict. Erdogan said that 18,000 migrants has crossed the border to Europe from Turkey since the gates were opened, without providing evidence, and added that the number could rise to 25,000-30,000 yesterday.

Greece and Bulgaria, both European Union member states neighboring Turkey, vowed not to admit the

nor how many others were awaiting results.

Saudi Arabia on Friday barred citizens from the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council from entering two of Islam's holiest cities amid fears over the new coronavirus, the foreign ministry said. The decision to halt access to Makkah and Madinah comes a day after the kingdom suspended visas for the year-round umrah pilgrimage, an unprecedented move that has left tens of thousands of Muslim pilgrims around the world in limbo.

The foreign ministry announced in a statement "the temporary suspension of entry of (GCC) citizens to the cities of Makkah and Madinah". The ministry statement did not specify whether this suspension extended to Saudi citizens. But it said the decision excludes "GCC citizens who have been in the kingdom for 14 consecutive days and did not show signs of coronavirus infection". GCC citizens are allowed to enter the kingdom with their national identity document. But on Thursday, the government said they could only enter using their passports and not IDs.

Since it announced its first deaths from COVID-19, Iran has scrambled to bring the outbreak under control, shutting schools, suspending cultural and sporting events and halting meetings of the cabinet and parliament. The health ministry yesterday reported nine new deaths and a 53 percent jump in infections over the previous 24 hours, taking the overall totals to 43 deaths among 593 cases.

That was the highest number of new cases for a single day since Feb 19, when Iran announced its first two deaths in Qom, a center for Islamic studies and pilgrimages, including from abroad. Citing unnamed sources in Iran's health system, the BBC's Persian-language service said on Friday that at least 210 people had died in the COVID-19 outbreak. Most of the dead were in Qom or Tehran, the London-based broadcaster said.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour accused foreign media of spreading misinformation about the outbreak. "Given the rumors and false and contradictory content that may be published from satellite networks or media which are not well-intentioned towards Iranian people, I must say that what we publish as definitive statistics is based on the latest definitive

migrants. Greek police fired teargas toward migrants who were gathered on its border with Turkey and demanding entry yesterday. Criticizing Greece's reaction, Cavusoglu tweeted: "Look who's lecturing us on international law! They're shamelessly throwing tear gas bombs on thousands of innocents piled at their gates. We don't have an obligation to stop people leaving our country but #Greece has the duty to treat them as human beings!"

"We will not close these doors in the coming period and this will continue. Why? The European Union needs to keep its promises. We don't have to take care of this many refugees, to feed them," Erdogan said. He said funds transferred to Turkey from the EU to support refugees were arriving too slowly and that he had asked German Chancellor Angela Merkel to send them directly to the Turkish government.

Turkey's borders to Europe were closed to migrants under an accord between Turkey and the EU that halted the 2015-16 migration crisis when more than a million people crossed into Europe by foot. Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said he was planning to host a high-level meeting in Bulgaria to seek long-lasting solutions for Syria and migrants and would meet Erdogan tomorrow to discuss it.

He said there was currently no migration pressure on the Balkan country's border with Turkey. "We have to do everything possible next week, very quickly, until Wednesday, Thursday at the latest, to provide Turkey with the necessary means so that it can take the migrants back and take care of them," he told reporters.

"A situation like the one in 2015 must not be repeated," Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said on Twitter. "Our aim must be to adequately protect the EU's external borders, to stop illegal migrants there." In Athens, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held an emergency meeting to discuss the border. "We averted more than 4,000 attempts of illegal entrance to our land borders," government spokesman Stelios Petsas said after the emergency meeting. A Greek police source said migrants had set fires and opened holes in border fences. — Agencies

findings of laboratory tests," he said.

Fear of the virus is palpable on the streets of Tehran, which have been less crowded than usual as people apparently stayed at home. Traffic was flowing more freely than normal in the capital yesterday morning, when it usually chokes the streets at the start of the working week. The office of Tehran's governor announced a reduction in working hours in a bid to reduce the chances of the virus spreading, state television reported.

Shops and pharmacies have been struggling to meet demand as people stock up on bleach, disinfectant wipes, face masks and other sanitary products, as well as non-perishable food. "Business... has hit rock bottom because of the coronavirus," said Hadian, owner of one of Tehran's now empty restaurants. "If the government had informed us earlier we would have tried to buy less. Now we have to throw away a lot of food every day and lose money," he told AFP. "With this loss we have to pay the workers and rent too, and this is very difficult for us."

Large posters have gone up on advertising billboards in the capital urging people to follow hygiene guidelines such as washing hands and not touching handrails and other objects in public places. In Bandar Abbas, on Iran's Gulf coast, residents reportedly set alight a clinic rumored to be treating people infected with coronavirus on Friday night. "The unsubstantiated rumor that several coronavirus patients were being held at the clinic... provoked some residents to set fire to it," Fars news agency said, adding the facility denied it had any such patients. Police and firefighters arrived and calm was restored before the blaze was extinguished, Fars reported.

Iran's coronavirus death toll is the highest for any country other than China, where COVID-19 first emerged. One of Iran's seven vice presidents, Massoumeh Ebtekar, and Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi are among several senior officials who have been infected. Jahanpour said yesterday that 205 cases had been detected in the previous 24 hours, increasing the total of confirmed infections to 593. Among the latest infections were a new outbreak of 22 cases in Golestan, a northeastern province on the Caspian Sea coast. — Agencies

## Kuwait calls on citizens to avoid...

Continued from Page 1

same protocol used with citizens. She urged all citizens and expatriates to follow preventative measures to halt the spread of the virus, stressing that the ministry is following up on all cases. Kuwait Catholic Church yesterday issued a statement announcing that in compliance with health ministry instructions to avoid gatherings, all churches will be closed in the period of March 1 to 14.

Director of the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO EMRO) Dr Ahmad Al-Mandhari commended yesterday Kuwait's concerned authorities for containing the outbreak of COVID-19.

At a press conference held by the ministry of health on the sidelines of the WHO delegation's visit to follow up the ministry's actions, Mandhari acclaimed efforts made by the country's government in implementing the organization's recommendations regarding the spread of the coronavirus.

Procedures by Kuwait's authorities include enhancing effective monitoring at all country outlets, hospitals, health centers and screening upon entry of all travelers coming from infected countries. Measures taken by Kuwaiti authorities are to train health workers on the frontlines, deal with contacts and put them in quarantine, isolate confirmed cases and spread public awareness, as well as other measures, Mandhari pointed out. He thanked Kuwait's government for its tireless work in response to the outbreak, as it is one of the signatories of the 2005 International Health Regulations and is working to fulfill its obligations including responding to early detection of public health happenings quickly.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday that a special session of the parliament and Cabinet that was set for tomorrow to discuss the coronavirus will not be held. The session will not be held



## Sports

# Knights keep rolling in Lehner's debut with a 4-2 win over Sabres

## Ducks deal Penguins their fifth straight loss

**LAS VEGAS:** Robin Lehner made 32 saves in his Vegas debut, and Reilly Smith scored two goals as the Golden Knights tied a franchise record with their eighth consecutive victory with a 4-2 win over the Buffalo Sabres on Friday night in Las Vegas. William Karlsson and Nicolas Roy also scored goals for Vegas, which won its seventh straight home game. The Golden Knights, who increased their Pacific Division lead to six points, matched their record eight-game win streak set from Dec. 14, 2017 to Jan. 2, 2018. Lehner, obtained at the trade deadline on Monday from Chicago, allowed a goal on the first shot he faced before stopping the next 30 in a row against the team he played for from 2015-18. Dominik Kahn and Jeff Skinner scored goals, and Carter Hutton finished with 24 saves for the Sabres.

### FLYERS 5, RANGERS 2

Claude Giroux scored two goals to lift host Philadelphia past previously surging New York. Sean Couturier had one goal and one assist, while James van Riemsdyk and Kevin Hayes also scored for the Flyers, who won their fifth in a row. Jakub Voracek compiled four assists, and Scott Laughton had two assists for Philadelphia, which improved to 23-5-4 at home. Jesper Fast and Brett Howden scored for the Rangers, who had their five-game winning streak and franchise-best nine-game road win streak snapped.

### AVALANCHE 3, HURRICANES 2

Samuel Girard scored the winning goal late in the third period after teammate Tyson Jost posted two earlier goals, and Colorado defeated host Carolina.

Colorado won its fifth game in a row and extended its points streak to six games. Goalie Pavel Francouz made 45 saves for the Avalanche, who have won seven straight on the road. Teuvo Teravainen scored twice in the third period to rally Carolina, with Sebastian Aho assisting on both goals.

### DUCKS 3, PENGUINS 2

Ryan Getzlaf scored a key goal midway through the second period as Anaheim defeated visiting Pittsburgh. Danton Heinen and Brendan Guhle also scored for the Ducks, who won consecutive games for the first time since Feb. 1-4. Goaltender John Gibson made 28 saves. Jason Zucker scored both goals, and Marcus Pettersson assisted on each for the Penguins, who suffered their season-high fifth consecutive defeat, during which they've been outscored 19-8. Matt Murray stopped 18 of 21 shots.

### WILD 5, BLUE JACKETS 0

Kevin Fiala and Zach Parise each had a goal with an assist as surging Minnesota won its third straight, and second in four nights over host Columbus. Alex Stalock needed just 24 saves for his fourth shutout of the season. Minnesota's netminder won his fourth start in a row as the Wild recorded their fifth straight road victory. Back from a torn meniscus, Columbus' Joonas Korpi made his first start since Dec. 29, but was pulled after allowing his fourth goal on 15 shots with 7:30 left. Joel Eriksson Ek and Jared Spurgeon scored 34 seconds apart in the first period, and Ryan Hartman had a goal in his second straight contest for the Wild. — Reuters



**LAS VEGAS:** Colin Miller #33 of the Buffalo Sabres skates with the puck against Max Pacioretty #67 of the Vegas Golden Knights in the second period of their game at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Golden Knights defeated the Sabres 4-2. — AFP

## Japan's Kajihara claims omnium world gold

**BERLIN:** Japan's Yumi Kajihara claimed a dramatic victory in the women's omnium at the track cycling world championships in Berlin on Friday to take gold, just five months before the Tokyo Olympics. The 22-year-old, who also won the omnium Asian Games title in 2018 in Jakarta, did enough in the points race to hold off Italian Letizia Paternoster.

Kajihara finished with 121 points overall, winning by 12 points, despite suffering a fall during the elimination race. She led from the start after winning the opening scratch race, which saw Britain's four-time Olympic champion Laura Kenny crash out of contention.

The 27-year-old Kenny, wife of six-time Olympic gold medalist Jason Kenny, reportedly needed stitches around her right eye after being hit by two riders. Reigning world omnium champion Kirsten Wild, who won scratch gold just two days before, was relegated to last place, from second, for causing the crash.

Kajihara strengthened her lead by finishing second in the tempo race, before recovering despite falling during the elimination race to take third, securing an overall lead to take into the closing points race. She saw off the challenge of Paternoster, while Poland's Daria Pikulik enjoyed a strong final event to snatch bronze from Portuguese rider Maria Martins.

### GANNA BREAKS WORLD RECORD

Italian Filippo Ganna beat his own men's individual pursuit world record with a time of four minutes and 19.34 seconds before clinching his fourth world title in the event. The 23-year-old, who rides on the road for Team Ineos, was close to breaking the symbolic four-minute mark in his qualifying run.

Ganna had previously set the record with 4min 26.47sec in November. He claimed his fourth individual title, having also taken gold in 2016, 2018 and 2019, by cruising to victory in the final against American Ashton Lambie.

But Ganna, who also claimed individual silver in



**BERLIN:** Japan's Yumi Kajihara celebrates winning the women's omnium elimination race and points race at the UCI track cycling World Championship at the velodrome in Berlin. — AFP

2017, did not threaten his earlier record, winning in 4min 3.875sec. Frenchman Corentin Ermenault beat Italian teenager Jonathan Milan to take the bronze.

Germans' Emma Hinze beat Russian Anastasia Voinova in two runs to take the women's sprint gold. It was the home favourite's second title of the championships, having also been part of the winning team sprint outfit.

Hinze had knocked out three-time world champion Lee Wai Sze of Hong Kong in the semi-finals. "I can't believe it," she said after winning two years since the last world title of compatriot Kristina Vogel, who was left paraplegic following a serious accident.

"I had never cried after a victory before. It's so special, I didn't expect it." Lee had to settle for bronze, defeating Canadian Kelsey Mitchell in the small final. Elsewhere, 19-year-old New Zealander Corbin Strong

claimed gold in the men's points race in an event which has been scrapped from the programme for this year's Tokyo Olympics.

Spain's Sebastian Mora Vedri finished second with the Netherlands' Roy Eefting in third, as title holder Jan-Willem van Schip decided against competing to focus on the omnium and the madison later in the championships.

Dutch racer Sam Ligtlee clinched victory in the men's one kilometre time trial in a time of 59.495 seconds, beating last year's winner Quentin Lafargue into second. Ligtlee, 22, whose sister Elis is the Olympic keirin champion, won bronze at the European Championships in the same race two years ago.

Lafargue's compatriot Michael D'Almeida was third in a discipline which last featured at the Olympics in 2008. — AFP

## WADA cancels symposium over coronavirus concerns

**MONTREAL:** The World Anti-Doping Agency has cancelled its annual symposium and related athlete session in Switzerland over concerns about the coronavirus epidemic. In a statement issued on Friday, Montreal-based WADA said it took the decision based on the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health's announcement banning large-scale gatherings of more than 1,000 people in Switzerland until March 15.

The symposium and athlete meeting had been scheduled for March 17-19 at the SwissTech Convention Center in Lausanne. "WADA is disappointed to announce the cancellation of its Annual Symposium, which has become the annual event for anti-doping practitioners," WADA president Witold Banka said. "It was a difficult decision as the event attracts almost 1,000 participants from around the world every year. "However, it was necessary to ensure the health and safety of the Agency's staff and stakeholder community. The Agency commits to ensuring that most of the elements of the Symposium program are delivered via alternative means over the coming weeks and months."

WADA said it would reach out separately to scheduled attendees and other stakeholders impacted by the cancellation. "As it relates to the



Witold Banka

Coronavirus, WADA will continue monitoring the situation based on expert information from the World Health Organization and will put other measures in place as needed related to staff and stakeholder travel connected to the Agency's mission," WADA said.

On Friday, the World Health Organization raised its global risk assessment of the new coronavirus to its highest level after the epidemic spread to sub-Saharan Africa and markets slumped.

It has killed more than 2,800 people and infected more than 84,000 worldwide — the majority in China — since it emerged apparently from an animal market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late December. The virus has wreaked havoc on the Asian sporting calendar and led to a temporary suspension of testing by the China Anti-Doping Agency, which was scheduled to resume testing in China this week on a phased basis. — AFP

## MLB deal will boost talent for Olympic baseball hopefuls

**NEW YORK:** A new deal revealed Friday between Major League Baseball, its players union and the World Baseball Softball Confederation will boost the United States in its bid to reach the Tokyo Olympics.

The agreement, described on the MLB website, would allow players on 40-man rosters for North America's major league clubs to represent their home-lands at the Tokyo Olympics and two last qualifying events for the showdown in Japan.

It's the best availability of talent for the US squad and many of its rivals without shutting down the MLB season, something team owners and league officials have been steadfastly against.

Top developmental league players and even some veteran major leaguers assigned to the lesser level would be eligible to play for national teams in the eight-team Americas qualifying tournament for Tokyo set for March 22-26 in Arizona, an April qualifier for the last Tokyo berth in Taiwan and the Olympics themselves.

MLB clubs would not be obligated to make players available for any national team, but in many cases would allow the unique opportunity. Japan, South Korea, Mexico and Israel have already booked Tokyo Olympic berths. Leagues in South Korea and Japan will shut down so top players can compete for Olympic gold. — AFP

## Cyclists await results after coronavirus hits UAE Tour

**ABU DHABI:** Cyclists including Britain's Chris Froome awaited the results of coronavirus tests from their hotel lockdown Friday, after the UAE Tour was abandoned when two Italian staff members tested positive.

"The decision has been taken to ensure protection of all the race's participants," the UAE Tour organising committee said in a statement. It said the United Arab Emirates health ministry would screen all the race's participants, administrative staff and organisers, and adopt measures "including quarantine" to prevent the spread of the disease.

"It's a shame that the #UAETour has been cancelled but public health must come first," tweeted Froome, a four-time winner of the Tour de France. "We are all awaiting testing and will remain at the hotel until further notice. I hope those affected make a speedy recovery and there aren't any further cases #coronavirus."

A total of 24 Italian cyclists started the race in the UAE. Italy is the hardest-hit country in Europe, with 650 people infected and 17 deaths. Italy's Vini Zabu-KTM team said its riders had been tested already.

"Tomorrow morning we will know the results. It's gonna be a long night and we hope that everyone will come back home without any trouble," it said in a statement on Twitter. The UCI, the sport's governing body, released a statement saying the last stages were "cancelled late yesterday evening after two cases of coronavirus were suspected among two staff members of one of the participating teams".

"While waiting for the results of tests and their communication, the United Arab Emirates authorities, the event's organising committee and the UCI, by mutual agreement, took the decision to interrupt this event in the interests of the health of riders and their staff, and to avoid the virus spreading."

Britain's Adam Yates, who had led the overall race after Thursday's fifth stage, was declared the winner of the event after the final two stages fell victim to the new coronavirus outbreak. Second was Tadej Pogacar of Slovenia with Kazak Alexey Lutsenko third.

"The final two days of racing are cancelled due to concerns around Coronavirus," Yates's Mitchelton team tweeted on Thursday. "Riders and staff remain in the hotel and will be tested shortly, with their health taking priority. We hope anyone affected makes a fast recovery."

### UNPRECEDENTED MOVE

Meanwhile, Danish cyclist Michael Morkov of the Deceuninck-Quick-Step team, who took part in the first four stages of the UAE race, has been placed in isolation in his hotel room after arriving in Berlin to take part in the world track championships. "The UCI and the organising committee (in Berlin) have been closely monitoring the situation in Abu Dhabi and its potential impact on the championships in Berlin," said a spokesman, confirming the isolation of Morkov as "a preventative measure".

The cancellation of the UAE Tour came just a day after Italian golfers Edoardo Molinari and Lorenzo Gagli were quarantined in neighbouring Oman over coronavirus fears before being cleared to play in the country's European Tour event.

Gagli had suffered flu-like symptoms and as Molinari, the older brother of former British Open winner Francesco, was his roommate, both were forced to withdraw from the tournament and placed in isolation as a precautionary measure. — AFP



## Sports

# Five-wicket haul for Jamieson as New Zealand take charge

## Prithvi, Pujara and Vihari all collected half centuries for India

CHRISTCHURCH: Kyle Jamieson continued his eye-catching introduction to Test cricket with a five-wicket haul yesterday as New Zealand took the honours on day one of the second Test against India in Christchurch.

New Zealand, who won the crucial toss with an inviting green pitch on offer, were 63 without loss at stumps after rolling India for 242. Tom Blundell was on 29 with Tom Latham on 27.

Jamieson, who has his sights on becoming established as an all-rounder, grabbed the headlines on debut with four wickets and a sparkling 44 runs in New Zealand's 10-wicket first Test victory in Wellington.

He backed that up in Christchurch with five for 45 to blunt a promising start by India in the second Test. "I guess it has fallen my way in the first couple of Tests," Jamieson said, but added the Hagley Oval wicket required more precision than Wellington's Basin Reserve.

"Your margin for where you try and land the ball becomes a little bit smaller and when we overpitched they put it away, if we missed wide they put that away.

So it was a matter of hanging in there and as a collective we managed to do that and have a good day."

Prithvi Shaw, Cheteshwar Pujara and Hanuma Vihari all collected half centuries for India to show that the green wicket was not as threatening as expected, and Vihari believed the side were at least 60 runs short.

"I think 300 plus would have been an ideal total on this wicket, but we showed more intent that we did in Wellington and that's a positive," he said. "But he (Jamieson) gets much more bounce than other bowlers and that extra bounce is a big factor. "The front foot ball becomes more dangerous than the short ball ... and deservedly he got the five."

### KOHLI DISAPPOINTMENT

Shaw was in sparkling form at the top of the innings with 54 off 64 deliveries while Pujara and Vihari played more patient roles. Pujara faced 140 balls for his 54 while Vihari's 55 took 70 deliveries but with most of his runs coming in a late flurry of boundaries.

Captain Virat Kohli again fell cheaply and there was little life in the tail. The last six wickets produced only



CHRISTCHURCH: India's Hanuma Vihari hits a shot on day one of the second Test cricket match between New Zealand and India at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday. — AFP

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on day one of the second Test between New Zealand and India in Christchurch yesterday:

India 1st innings	
M. Agarwal lbw boult	7
P. Shaw c Latham b Jamieson	54
C. Pujara c Watling b Jamieson	54
V. Kohli lbw Southee	3
A. Rahane c Taylor b Southee	7
H. Vihari c Watling b Wagner	55
R. Pant b Jamieson	12
R. Jadeja c Boult b Jamieson	9
U. Yadav c Watling b Jamieson	0
M. Shami b Boult	16
J. Bumrah not out	10
Extras: (b4, lb6, w5)	15
Total: (all out: 63 overs)	242
Fall of wickets: 1-30 (Agarwal), 2-80 (Shaw), 3-85 (Kohli), 4-113	

(Rahane), 5-194 (Vihari), 6-197 (Pujara), 7-207 (Pant), 8-207 (Yadav), 9-216 (Jadeja), 10-242 (Shami)	
Bowling: Southee 13-5-38-2, Boult 17-2-89-2, de Grandhomme 9-2-31-0, Jamieson 14-3-45-5 (5w), Wagner 10-2-29-1	

New Zealand 1st innings	
T. Latham not out	27
T. Blundell not out	29
Extras: (b4, lb3)	7
Total: (no wickets: 23 overs)	63
To bat: Kane Williamson, Ross Taylor, Henry Nicholls, BJ Watling, Colin de Grandhomme, Kyle Jamieson, Tim Southee, Neil Wagner, Trent Boult	
Bowling: Bumrah 7-1-19-0, Yadav 8-1-20-0, Shami 7-1-17-0, Jadeja 1-1-0-0	

48 runs with 26 of them from Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah for the final wicket.

After Mayank Agarwal fell early, Shaw and Pujara put on 50 for the second wicket before the 2.03-metre (6ft 8in) Jamieson struck for the first time when he found the edge of Shaw's bat and a leaping Latham snared the catch at second slip.

Enter Kohli and a chance for the master batsman to play a captain's knock as India battle to square the two-Test series. Instead his disappointing tour continued and he was out for three when a Tim Southee

outswinger seamed back and smacked into the pads.

Southee followed with the wicket of Ajinkya Rahane for seven before Pujara and Vihari stabilised the innings in an 81-run stand for the fifth wicket.

Wagner bagged Vihari with the last ball before tea and Jamieson took Pujara soon after the resumption before racing through the lower order to remove Rishabh Pant (12), Ravindra Jadeja (nine) and Umesh Yadav (nought). Trent Boult ended Shami's 16-run cameo to finish off the innings leaving New Zealand 23 overs to bat before stumps. — AFP

## NZ salvage win, India unbeaten at women's T20 WCup

MELBOURNE: New Zealand salvaged an unlikely victory against Bangladesh yesterday to set up a crunch clash against Australia for a place in the women's T20 World Cup semi-finals, as impressive India kept their unbeaten record intact.

Coming off a narrow loss to India, the White Ferns won the toss and opted to bat on a slow Junction Oval pitch in Melbourne. But after reaching 66 for two they collapsed to 91 all out, as Ritu Moni grabbed a tournament-



MELBOURNE: India's Radha Yadav (second left) celebrates with teammates after taking a Sri Lankan wicket during their Twenty20 women's World Cup cricket match in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

best 4-18 with back-up from fine fielding.

A first World Cup victory for Bangladesh since 2014 was within reach, but they blew the chance with sloppy batting and poor running between the wicket seeing them bundled out for 74.

"Obviously nowhere near what we wanted to post today, but Bangladesh were fantastic, they put us under pressure on a really difficult wicket," said New Zealand captain Sophie Devine. "We learned from what Bangladesh did, bowling straight and making the batters make mistakes and then we know what our spinners can do."

India had already qualified for the semi-finals and a decisive seven wicket win over Sri Lanka in Melbourne ensured they com-

pleted their Group A games unbeaten. New Zealand and defending champions Australia both have two wins from three, making their tomorrow clash in Melbourne a quarter-final. Bangladesh are eliminated after losing three from three.

Good line and length from Bangladesh's bowlers restricted openers Devine and Rachel Priest to just 23 from the first five overs. The runs started flowing but Devine fell to spinner Salma Khatun on 12 while trying to force the pace. Priest soon followed, lbw for 25, to leave them at 40 for two in the ninth over. Experienced campaigner Suzie Bates' departure for 15 sparked a collapse, with the rest of the wickets falling for just 25 runs. — AFP

## Hurricanes blow away Sunwolves as Sharks sink Reds

WELLINGTON: Kobus van Wyk bagged a hat-trick in a sensational debut for the Wellington Hurricanes who thrashed the hapless Sunwolves 62-15 yesterday, while his old team the Coastal Sharks kept their strong start to the season going.

The bonus-point win in Napier lifted the Hurricanes to second equal with the Waikato Chiefs in the New Zealand conference, a point behind the Canterbury Crusaders with both the Chiefs and Crusaders on a bye week.

It was the second game in a row that the Japanese side leaked 10 tries after their thrashing by the Queensland Reds last weekend. "We've got some pretty freakish athletes out there," Hurricanes captain TJ Perenara said. "You see Ngani, Vince, (Ben) Lam, Vaea. When those boys get going it's quite hard to stop."

"The more we can get those boys in space and open it up for the rest of us the better it is." In Brisbane, the Durban-based Sharks proved too dangerous for the Reds, winning 33-23 for their third victory from four on their overseas tour.

Van Wyk joined the Hurricanes from the Sharks at the start of the season but had been sidelined by injury until this week. When he did take the field, he scored twice in the first half and again in the second.

The Sunwolves started strongly and wrong-footed the Hurricanes to have Australian-born lock Michael Stolberg

score in the fourth minute. But it didn't take the Hurricanes long to strike back and by half-time they were up 28-10 before adding a further 32 points in the second stanza.

It was another disappointment for the Sunwolves, who opened the season with an unexpected win over the Melbourne Rebels, but have seen their farewell year in Super Rugby go downhill since. The loss added to a week of bad luck, with the side told Friday their matches against the ACT Brumbies in Osaka next week and against the Crusaders in Tokyo a week later have been moved to Australia due to fears over the deadly coronavirus.

Despite the setbacks, they rattled the Hurricanes early on in a short-lived show of promise before van Wyk touched down for his opening try. After a Jumpei Ogura penalty regained the lead for the Sunwolves, the Hurricanes stepped up a gear, producing back-to-back tries to fullback Chase Taitia with van Wyk chiming in with his second for the team to turn with a healthy 28-10 lead.

Ben Lam, TJ Perenara, Gareth Evans, Van Dyke, Laumape and Vince Aso all scored for the Hurricanes in the second half while Siosaia Fifita touched down for the Sunwolves' second try.

### TRAVEL WELL

In Brisbane, the Sharks dominated the breakdown for a battling four tries to three win. "It was a great win, a great effort from the boys. Credit to the forwards. They put us on the front foot," said captain Lukhanyo Am.

"We're really happy with the results, the Sharks are a team that travels well." Both sides booted penalties within the opening six minutes in a bruising encounter before hooker Kerron van Vuuren pounced with the first try of the game for the Sharks. — AFP

## Sun Yang lawyer blasts 'lies' after 8-year drug ban

HONG KONG: Three-time Olympic champion swimmer Sun Yang came out swinging yesterday against his eight-year drugs ban, threatening legal action of his own as he attempts to salvage his broken career.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) hit the Chinese freestyler with the lengthy ban on Friday for refusing to give a doping sample in September 2018. It is the 28-year-old's second ban for doping, having served three months in 2014, and he said in the immediate aftermath that he would appeal at the Swiss federal court.

A lawyer for Sun, a hugely popular figure in China, issued a fiery statement on Saturday reiterating that he will appeal, based on "a series of procedural errors". "February 28, 2020 was a dark day. It shows the scene where evil defeats justice and power replaces self-evident truths," Beijing lawyer Zhang Qihuai said in a statement.

"On this day, CAS listened to prejudice,

turned a blind eye to rules and procedures, turned a blind eye to facts and evidence, and accepted all lies and false evidence." The statement reasserted Sun's defence that doping officials who came to his home were not qualified or authorised, and it was they who decided not to pursue testing.

Sun will sue a doping inspector who gave "false evidence", said the lawyer, also accusing the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) of "distorting facts and abuse of power".

### 'NOTHING PERSONAL'

With the Tokyo Olympics just five months away, the reigning 1500m freestyle world record-holder is fighting to save his career and reputation. A vial of Sun's blood was smashed with a hammer during the contentious testing session in 2018, but he was acquitted by world swimming body FINA of anti-doping violations, agreeing that testers failed to produce adequate identification.

But WADA took the matter to CAS, demanding a ban of between two and eight years for missing the out-of-competition test. In its bombshell judgment, CAS said its panel "unanimously determined" that Sun, whose career has been overshadowed by numerous controversies, had tampered with his doping control. The severity of the ban reflected the fact that it was his second doping violation.



Sun Yang

He served three months in 2014 for taking a banned substance. Sun's downfall will be celebrated by clean athletes, but his arch-critic and rival Mack Horton said their bitter feud was never personal.

The Australian refused to shake hands with Sun after a medal ceremony at last year's acrimonious world championships in South Korea, after which Horton received death threats on social media. It reignited a row from the 2016 Rio Olympics, where Horton labelled Sun a "drug cheat". — AFP

## Nadal strolls into Acapulco final

LOS ANGELES: Rafael Nadal used a steady stream of blistering forehand winners and a heavy dose of precision serves to book his spot in the ATP Mexico Open final with a convincing 6-3, 6-2 win over Grigor Dimitrov.

The two-time tournament champion will be the favorite to claim his third Acapulco title when he faces unseeded Taylor Fritz in the final. It has been 15 years since world No. 2 Nadal won for the first time here. He also won in 2013 and improved to 18-2 at this event overall.

"I'm very happy. A great victory against one of the best players in the world and a good friend," Nadal said after his one-sided victory on Friday night. "I think I've increased my level during the match, so it's positive for me."

The top seed clinched the victory on his first match point. He fell behind 0-30

in the final game but rallied to win the next four points. On match point, seventh seed Dimitrov hit a backhand that clipped the top of the net and bounced in. But it hung in the air just long enough for Nadal to race forward and blast a cross-court forehand that the Bulgarian had no chance on.

Nadal continued his dominance of Dimitrov, improving to 13-1 lifetime. Nadal has only lost 20 games in his first four matches this week and is yet to lose a set. The unseeded Fritz defeated fellow American John Isner in the other semi-final 2-6, 7-5, 6-3.

"He's playing well. He has a great serve, fantastic shots from the baseline. It's going to be a tough one," Nadal said of Fritz. "I know I'm going to have to be at my best and I hope to be ready for it."

This will be the first meeting between Nadal and 22-year-old Fritz. The second set progressed nearly identically to the first set, with Dimitrov breaking early for a 2-0 lead before Nadal stormed back.

Nadal finished out the night by going on a six-game run. His final forehand winner ended play after one hour and 41 minutes. — AFP



Sports

# Lewis' fine finish sinks Leicester to boost Norwich survival bid

## Foxes boss Rodgers furious with the VAR ruling

**NORWICH:** Brendan Rodgers admitted he was "bitterly disappointed" to see Kelechi Iheanacho's goal disallowed before Jamal Lewis fired bottom club Norwich to a 1-0 win over Leicester on Friday. Daniel Farke's side ended a four-game winless run as they took three points for just the second time in 15 league matches.

Norwich were in danger of being cast adrift in the relegation battle but, aided by the VAR decision to chalk off Iheanacho's goal for handball, they have renewed hope of avoiding the drop thanks to Lewis's fine finish in the second half at Carrow Road.

The Canaries are now four points behind fourth-bottom Aston Villa after scoring their first league goal from open play since New Year's Day, ending a barren run lasting almost 700 minutes. Leicester remain third but have won just one of their last seven league games, failing to score in three successive matches as their bid to qualify for the Champions League hits a rocky patch.

Foxes boss Rodgers was furious with the VAR ruling and said: "We think it's very, very harsh. I'm not sure exactly what the ruling is, but obviously it hits their player's arms first. We're bitterly disappointed not to get it, because we were the better team in the game."

"I've watched a lot of games this week in the Champions League and Europa League and they seem to get to the decisions much quicker than they do in the Premier League," Farke insisted handball was the correct call, saying: "I realised during the game it was more or less handball but the speed of the game makes it hard to judge so it is perfect for the VAR."

"I think it is quite normal it was disallowed. We are playing in the best league in the world against one of the best teams in the league. It is an amazing result." In the

midst of his worst drought for three years, there was bad news for Jamie Vardy as the Leicester striker missed the trip to Norfolk with a calf injury.

Iheanacho started up front in his absence, but Norwich threatened first when Ondrej Duda's cross found Ben Godfrey for a header that was too close to Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel. Harvey Barnes opened up the Norwich defence with a nimble run and pass to Dennis Praet, but goalkeeper Tim Krul was equal to the midfielder's strike from the edge of the area.

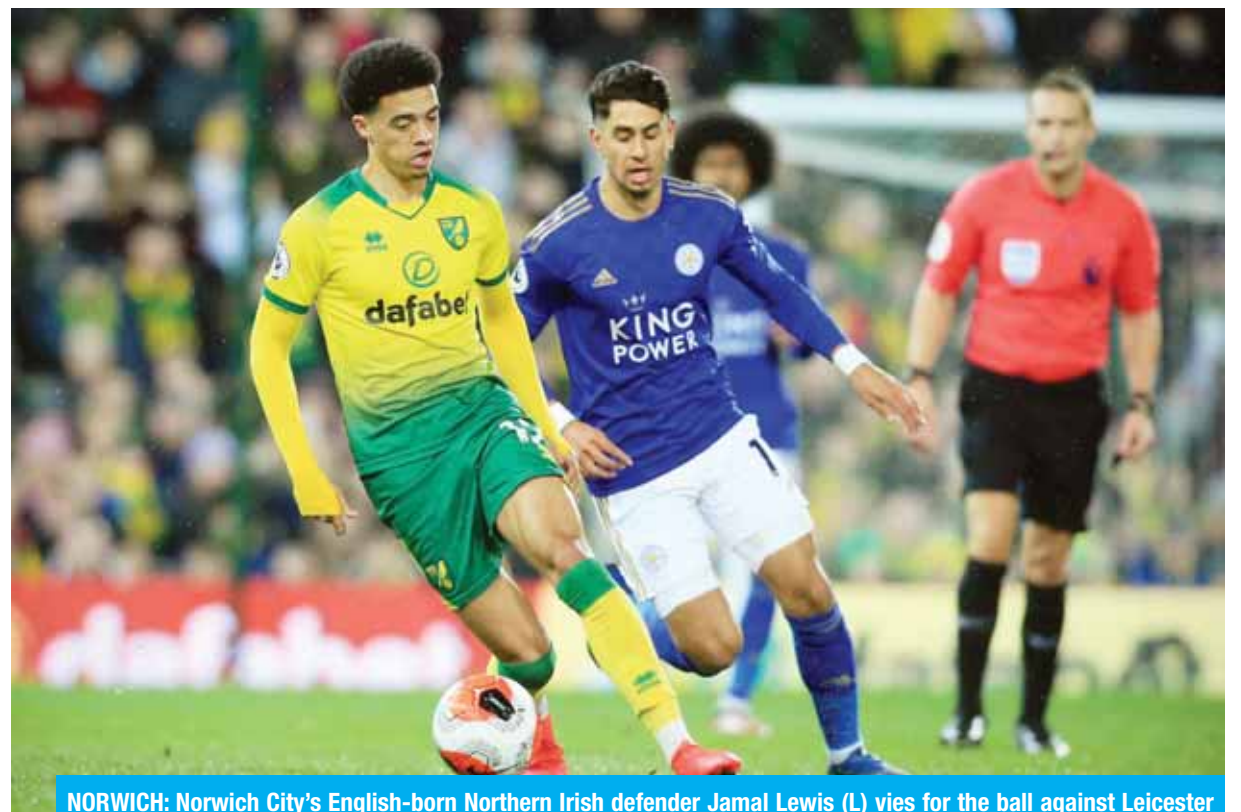
Praet went closer in the 25th minute when he met Ricardo Pereira's cross with a near-post volley that bounced off the woodwork. Iheanacho was guilty of a poor miss when he controlled Ayoze Perez's cross and blazed over from no more than six yards.

The Nigerian thought he had made amends for that howler four minutes into the second half when his curling shot beat Krul from the edge of the area. But the ball had bounced onto Iheanacho's arm as he competed for possession with Godfrey and VAR intervened to rule it out.

Norwich responded with a thunderous 25-yard drive from Duda that Schmeichel tipped over at full stretch. Schmeichel won another duel with Duda moments later, palming away a powerful effort when the midfielder should really have scored.

Farke's team were rewarded for their enterprising spell in the 70th minute when Max Aarons' cross reached Lewis wide on the left edge of the Leicester area and he drilled a superb strike past Schmeichel into the far corner.

The defender's first Premier League goal sparked wild celebrations, but Leicester should have been level seconds later when substitute Wilfred Ndidi headed over from close range. — AFP



**NORWICH:** Norwich City's English-born Northern Irish defender Jamal Lewis (L) vies for the ball against Leicester City's Spanish striker Ayoze Perez (C) during the English Premier League football match between Norwich City and Leicester City at Carrow Road in Norwich. — AFP

## Thunder's streak ends in blowout loss to Bucks

**MILWAUKEE:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 32 points to lead the Milwaukee Bucks to a 133-86 home blowout of the Oklahoma City Thunder on Friday night. It was the Bucks' third win of 40 or more points, tying the NBA record for most such games in a season. The margin narrowly missed being the largest in the NBA this season. The Los Angeles Clippers beat Atlanta by 49 earlier this season. The Bucks, who won their fifth straight game coming out of the All-Star break, hit 21 3-pointers, their most of the season. Both Wesley Matthews and Pat Connaughton hit four from behind the arc. They each finished with 14 points, as did Bucks teammate George Hill. Oklahoma City was without second-leading scorer Danilo Gallinari, who hasn't played in the second night of a back-to-back since November. Chris Paul scored 18 points, and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander added 11 for the Thunder, who had a five-game winning streak snapped.

**LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS 132 - DENVER NUGGETS 103**  
Paul George scored a game-high 24 points, and Los Angeles hammered visiting Denver. George, who struggled offensively in the previous two games with 11 and seven points, connected on 6 of 8 3-pointers and 9 of 15 overall from the floor, as the Clippers won their third straight game. Kawhi Leonard contributed 19 points, Montrezl Harrell had 18 points and 10 rebounds, and Lou Williams finished with 17 points for Los Angeles, which had seven players score in double figures. Williams hit 5 of 7 shots from behind the arc.

**NEW ORLEANS PELICANS 116 - CLEVELAND CAVALIERS 104**  
Rookie Zion Williamson scored 24 points for his 10th consecutive game with at least 20, and host New Orleans routed Cleveland for its third win in four games since the All-Star break. Brandon Ingram scored 29, Jrue Holiday added 22 and E'Twaun Moore and Nicolo Melli had 10 each for the Pelicans, who were playing their first home game in 15 days and started a three-game homestand over five days. Collin Sexton tied his career-high with 31 points to lead the Cavaliers, who are just 17-42 but entered the game with a 3-1 record under coach J.B. Bickerstaff, who took over when John Beilein resigned during the All-Star break.

**MIAMI HEAT 126 - DALLAS MAVERICKS 118**  
Jimmy Butler scored 26 points, and Duncan Robinson added 24 to lead host Miami past Dallas and run its home record to 24-4. Dallas guard Seth Curry had a career-high 37 points. The younger brother of Warriors star Stephen Curry, he made 13 of 15 attempts from the floor, including 8 of 9 on 3-pointers, with the eight makes marking a career high. Miami got 16 points each from Goran Dragic



**MILWAUKEE:** Abdel Nader #11 of the Oklahoma City Thunder shoots the ball against the Milwaukee Bucks at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

and Kendrick Nunn, and Heat center Bam Adebayo had 14 points and 11 rebounds for his 35th double-double of the season. Kristaps Porzingis had 24 points and 13 rebounds for Dallas.

**ORLANDO MAGIC 136 - MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES 125**  
Terrence Ross scored 19 of his season-high 33 points in the fourth quarter as host Orlando handed Minnesota its 19th loss in 21 games. Ross made seven 3-pointers and Nikola Vucevic recorded his team-best 31st double-double (27 points, 10 assists) this season for the Magic, who have won five of six after losing eight of their previous nine. Aaron Gordon added his first career triple-double with 17 points, a career-high 12 assists and 11 rebounds. D'Angelo Russell scored 12 of his team-high 28 points in the first quarter, and Juan Hernangomez added 18 points and 13 rebounds for the Timberwolves.

**SACRAMENTO KINGS 104 - MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 101**  
De'Aaron Fox returned from a one-game absence to score a team-high 25 points, and Sacramento survived a frantic finish to record a win over host Memphis. Playing the second night of a back-to-back, the Kings rallied from an early 12-point deficit to dominate a majority of the final three quarters to earn a second win in three tries against Memphis this season, clinching the season series. Despite getting a season-high 32 points from Dillon Brooks and a career-high 25 rebounds from Jonas Valanciunas, the injury-riddled Grizzlies lost their fifth straight.

**UTAH JAZZ 129 - WASHINGTON WIZARDS 119**  
Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points, and host Utah held off Bradley Beal and Washington to end a four-game losing streak. Beal led all scorers with 42 points on 17-of-33 shooting and added 10 assists for Washington, which has lost four of five since the All-Star break. He notched his 10th 40-point game of the season and his 17th consecutive game with 25 or more points, tying the franchise record set by Walt Bellamy in 1961-62. Bojan Bogdanovic scored 21 points for Utah, and Jordan Clarkson added 20. — Reuters

## Kane could return for Spurs: Mourinho

**LONDON:** Tottenham striker Harry Kane is ahead of schedule in his recovery from hamstring surgery, with boss Jose Mourinho banking on him being fit to take part in the club's push for a Champions League spot.

Kane went under the knife in January after rupturing his tendon against Southampton on New Year's Day and Mourinho initially feared he might not play again this season. But the England captain is a notoriously quick healer and is making good progress, having begun on-field rehabilitation this week.

Mourinho has said that he may now get five games out of his talisman at the end of the season, with the north London derby against Arsenal at the end of April looking a possibility.

It is a big boost for Tottenham, who have no fit strikers, and England boss Gareth Southgate ahead of Euro 2020. "I would say a little bit ahead, it gives me a hope of, instead of one or two matches, (it will be) three, four or five. I don't know," Mourinho said on Friday.

"Just speculating a little bit but the feelings are good. He's doing what he can do at this stage but always with a good feeling," Kane has recovered quickly from a string of injuries in recent seasons.

While insisting that he would not be rushed back, Mourinho said Kane was a player who "doesn't accept protocols". "Let's see with Harry," he said. "He's obviously a great professional and a fighter and he wants to be back as soon as possible. What's 'as soon as possible?' I don't know."

Kane's absence was compounded by an injury to forward Son Heung-min, who returned to South Korea last week to have surgery on a fractured arm. Mourinho appeared to rule him out for the rest of the season but has now said there is hope he will be fit sooner than originally thought.

"That's another hope but of course we're far from it," Mourinho said. "He's coming back to England very soon. Then of course he'll have to follow some safety protocols because he flies from Seoul. "When his recovery starts, we'll try all the possibilities to have him back for some matches. "I cannot imagine when. But there's a good possibility that before the end of the season, we have Harry and Sonny playing together."

Son is due to fly back to Britain this weekend, when he will follow government advice on the coronavirus and stay indoors in self-isolation for 14 days. Mourinho has refused to comment on whether Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli will contest his Football Association charge over a social media post appearing to mock the coronavirus. — AFP

Live		Matches on TV	
		(Local Timings)	
<b>ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP</b>			
Aston Villa v Manchester City	19:30	beIN Sports HD 2	
<b>ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE</b>			
Manchester City v Arsenal FC	15:00	beIN Sports	
Everton FC v Manchester United	17:00	beIN Sports	
Tottenham v Wolverhampton FC	17:00	beIN Sports	
<b>SPANISH LEAGUE</b>			
Sevilla FC v Osasuna	14:00	beIN Sports	
Athletic de Bilbao v Villarreal CF	16:00	beIN Sports	
RCD Espanyol v Atletico de Madrid	18:00	beIN Sports	
Real Mallorca v Getafe CF	20:30	beIN Sports	
Real Madrid CF v FC Barcelona	23:00	beIN Sports HD 3	
<b>ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE</b>			
AC Milan v Genoa CFC	14:30	beIN Sports	
US Lecce v Atalanta	17:00	beIN Sports	
Parma Calcio 1913 v spal	17:00	beIN Sports	
US Sassuolo Calcio v Brescia	17:00	beIN Sports	
Cagliari Calcio v AS Roma	20:00	beIN Sports	
Juventus FC v Internazionale Milano	22:45	beIN Sports	
<b>GERMAN BUNDESLIGA</b>			
FC Union Berlin v VfL Wolfsburg	15:30	beIN Sports	
RB Leipzig v Bayer 04 Leverkusen	17:30	beIN Sports HD 5	
SV Werder Bremen v Eintracht Frankfurt	20:00	beIN Sports	
<b>FRENCH LEAGUE</b>			
FC Nantes v LOSC Lille	17:00	beIN Sports	
FC Girondins de Bordeaux v OGC Nice	19:00	beIN Sports	
Olympique Lyonnais v Saint Etienne	23:00	beIN Sports	

## Valencia get back to winning ways

**MADRID:** Valencia stopped the rot by securing their first win in six matches yesterday as Kevin Gameiro and Dani Parejo scored in a 2-1 victory over Real Betis. Gameiro's curling shot flew in off the post at Mestalla before Parejo added a late second to give Valencia a much-needed boost in their pursuit of La Liga's top four. Loren Moron fired in a consolation for Betis deep in injury-time. Valencia had also been disrupted by the spread of coronavirus after a sports journalist covering the team was confirmed last week to have contracted the illness, prompting the club to cancel all press activity before and after the game.

The result lifts Albert Celades' side to seventh in La Liga while Betis drop to 13th, their own sticky patch extended to seven matches without a win.

After being thrashed 4-1 by Atalanta to leave them on the brink of being knocked out of the Champions League last 16, Valencia were beaten 3-0 by fellow top-four hopefuls Real Sociedad last weekend.

Celades will hope a determined performance against Betis can kickstart a recovery with winnable games up next in the league against Alaves and Levante, with the second leg at home to Atalanta coming in between.

Betis might have taken the lead had the lively Nabil Fekir taken advantage of Parejo giving the ball away early in his own box. Valencia's Jose Gaya then hit the crossbar with an effort from distance that almost dropped in. All three goals came after half-time. Fekir skimmed the bar after meeting a cut-back from Joaquin and then Valencia took the lead. Gameiro pushing the ball into space on the edge of the area before curling in off the far post.

They gave themselves some breathing space when Parejo was allowed to take a touch and steer in a second, which was needed, as Moron banged home for Betis from close range in the 93rd minute. — AFP

## Leeds' Casilla handed eight game ban

**LONDON:** Leeds United goalkeeper Kiko Casilla was banned for eight matches and fined 60,000 pounds (\$77,964.00) on Friday after being found guilty of racist abuse in a Championship match against Charlton Athletic last September.

The FA said the 33-year-old Spaniard, who joined Leeds from Real Madrid last year, must also attend face-to-face education after the breach of rule E3 (2) which covers discriminatory abuse.

Casilla had denied using racially abusive or insulting words. Media reports said the incident involved Charlton forward Jonathan Leko, who was born in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo but has represented England at various age group levels.

The Spaniard said in a statement on social media that he was "sad and devastated" at being accused and believed firmly that racism should not be tolerated in any walk of life. "I do not feel at all that the guilty verdict is a clear reflection of the incident," he said. "I am sure that my family, friends, colleagues and the different technical teams who I have been working with for all these years in my professional career know I would never use my words with a racist meaning," he added.

"My respectful behaviour towards my opponents since I started my career has been honest and with the maximum sense of fairplay." Leeds acknowledged the decision in a statement <https://www.leedsunited.com/news/team-news/26318/kiko-casilla> but observed that the FA panel "have based their decision on the balance of probability rather than proving Kiko to be guilty beyond reasonable doubt." — Reuters



**25** Japan's Kajihara claims omnium world gold



**26** Five-wicket haul for Jamieson as New Zealand take charge



**27** Lewis' fine finish sinks Leicester to boost Norwich survival bid



## Chelsea stumble again at Bournemouth

West Ham ease relegation fears



**BOURNEMOUTH:** Chelsea's Spanish defender Marcos Alonso (28) misses a chance at goal during the English Premier League football match between Bournemouth and Chelsea at the Vitality Stadium in Bournemouth, southern England yesterday. — AFP

**LONDON:** Chelsea needed a double from Marcos Alonso to salvage a 2-2 draw at struggling Bournemouth as West Ham boosted their chances of survival with a 3-1 win over Southampton yesterday.

After a 3-0 thrashing on home soil by Bayern Munich in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday, Frank Lampard was hoping for a response after what he called a "reality check" for the Blues. Instead, Bournemouth were minutes away from securing just their third league win since they also beat Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in December.

Philip Billing missed two big early chances for the Cherries and Eddie Howe's men were punished as

Alonso's calm finish after Olivier Giroud hit the bar gave Chelsea a half-time lead.

Two goals in three minutes from Jefferson Lerma and Josh King turned the game around and inflicted another blow to Chelsea's chances of holding onto their place in the top four.

Alonso's predatory header after Aaron Ramsdale parried Pedro Rodriguez's shot at least ensured the visitors left the Vitality Stadium with a point.

However, Lampard's men have now won just five of their last 16 league games and could see their lead over fifth-placed Manchester United cut to just a point if the Red Devils win at Everton today.

At the other end of the table, Aston Villa dropped into the bottom three ahead of taking on Manchester City in the League Cup final on Sunday courtesy of a much-needed win for West Ham.

David Moyes handed Jarrod Bowen his first start since a £20 million move from Hull on deadline day in January and he made a huge impact with a fine finish to open the scoring.

The hosts' lead did not last long as Michael Obafemi quickly levelled for Southampton.

But the Hammers responded well to that blow as Sebastian Haller restored their lead five minutes before half-time and Michail Antonio added a third early in the

second half to secure a first league win for Moyes since the first game of his second spell in charge on New Year's Day.

Newcastle remain without a goal in four games, but edged seven points clear of the drop zone with a 0-0 draw at home to Burnley.

Brighton remain the only side in England without a league win in 2020 as Jordan Ayew scored the only goal in a 1-0 win for Crystal Palace at the Amex.

Graham Potter's men again paid a heavy price for failing to take their chances. At the other end, Ayew was clinical as he slotted under Mat Ryan to move the Eagles up to 12th. — AFP

## Djokovic wins fifth Dubai Championship

**DUBAI:** Novak Djokovic captured his 79th career title yesterday when he won the Dubai Championships for the fifth time, defeating Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-3, 6-4 in the final. The world number one is now on an 18-0 winning run this season, and 21-0 overall since late 2019, as he ended an eight-match win streak for his Greek opponent, champion last weekend in Marseille.

Djokovic claimed his third trophy of 2020 after helping Serbia to the ATP Cup and winning an eighth Australian Open. It is also the seventh time that the 32-year-old has won more than 20 matches on the trot.

Tsitsipas lost his second straight final in Dubai after going down to Roger Federer a year ago. "It was close in both sets," Djokovic said. "A few points decided it. I've had a great week. I'm most proud of my consistency this week, especially on shots from the baseline."

The top seed produced a straightforward win in 79 minutes after a close-call semi-final where he saved three match points against Gael Monfils. "I was just a point from going out, I might not have been here," the winner said. "But it shows how quickly things can turn."

"I appreciate the moment, I've really played well in my matches this week. There were some ups and downs, but that's normal." Djokovic broke for 5-3 in the

opening set and served it out moments later.

The second set was slightly tighter, with the Serbian losing a break as Tsitsipas levelled at 3-3. But Djokovic came through again with a break for 5-4 as his opponent hit the net. A game later, Djokovic was lifting another trophy as he found the corner with a winner. "Tsitsipas is a player for now, much more than for the future," Djokovic said of his sixth-ranked opponent. "He's already been very successful. He's more than just a great player, he's very charismatic and brings a lot to the game."

Djokovic added: "I've had a great start to the season. I love playing on hard courts. They've been my most successful surface so far." Djokovic will stay number one on the ATP rankings on Monday to start a 280th week atop the table.

He was playing the final in Dubai for a sixth time in 11 appearances. It was, however, his first final at the tournament since 2015 when he lost to Federer. Coming into the championship match, the 21-year-old Greek had lost just one set this week.

Djokovic was also awarded a 'golden visa' by the Dubai government and has agreed to return to defend his title in 2021.

Meanwhile, Aryna Sabalenka won her sixth career title yesterday when she swept past former two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova 6-3, 6-3 in the Qatar Open final. The Belarusian ninth seed's win over the eighth-seeded Czech, who was Qatar champion in 2018, will see her rise to 11 in the world rankings on Monday. — AFP



**DUBAI:** Novak Djokovic of Serbia poses with the victor's trophy after winning the final of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship in the Gulf emirate of Dubai yesterday. — AFP