

6 Migrants, Greek police clash after Turkey opens floodgates



7 Netanyahu pledges 'immediate' annexation steps if re-elected



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Kuwait bans visas as another coronavirus case confirmed

Masks, gloves must for cafe workers • Iran deaths hit 54 • Saudi prepares 25 hospitals

Kuwait, Gulf bourses dive as virus hits oil

KUWAIT: Stock markets in Kuwait and other oil-rich Gulf states plunged yesterday over fears about the impact of the coronavirus which also battered global bourses last week. The crisis threatens to undercut Gulf economies, which are already battling a downturn and struggling to wean themselves from their decades-old addiction to energy revenues. The region's slide was led by Bursa Kuwait, where the All-Share Index fell 10 percent, triggering its automatic closure. Kuwait's bourse was closed for most of last week for national holidays.

The Saudi bourse, the region's largest and one of the world's top 10 equity markets, closed down 3.7 percent to its lowest level in 18 months. Energy giant Saudi Aramco, the world's biggest listed firm, dropped 2.1 percent to 32.65 riyals (\$8.70), its worst performance since listing to much fanfare on December 11 in a record-breaking IPO. The other five markets operating yesterday in the region, which were closed the previous two days for the weekend, were also hit badly as oil prices sagged below \$50 a barrel.

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KUWAIT: Kuwaiti traders wearing protective masks follow the market at Bursa Kuwait yesterday. Bursa Kuwait had decided to close the main trading hall due to the COVID-19 coronavirus. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Although only four new coronavirus cases have been discovered over the past three days, Kuwait yesterday stepped up measures to prevent the spread of the deadly disease, including a total ban on all types of visas for visitors. The National Assembly cancelled a scheduled emergency meeting yesterday in a bid to contain "sectarian exchanges" on social media, and Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said it was premature to decide if the ordinary session on March 10 will also be cancelled. The public food authority has instructed all restaurants and cafes that all waiters must wear face-masks and gloves and that restaurants must provide sanitizers to clients.

The ministry of health said yesterday a new case tested positive in one of the people who returned from Iran and was at the quarantine set up by the ministry, raising the total number of cases to 46, placing Kuwait at the top of Gulf countries in the number of infections. Only new four cases were discovered in the past three days, but MIP Adnan Abdulsamad said that a new group of Kuwaitis who were repatriated yesterday have not yet been tested by health ministry staff, raising the prospect of more cases.

The interior ministry yesterday slapped a total ban on all types of visas for all nationalities, only allowing entry to foreigners who hold legal residencies in the country, except those who visited infected countries. Kuwait had cut all transport links to Iran and several other countries as GCC citizens no longer can use their

Continued on Page 24

Electricity minister quits over verdict

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Recently-appointed Minister of Electricity and Water Mohammad Bushehri yesterday submitted his resignation to the prime minister. The move comes after the court of cassation, whose rulings are final, last week convicted Bushehri in a case that has been in courts for years. The minister was convicted for leaking a confidential report when he was a senior employee at the electricity ministry.



Mohammad Bushehri

Turkey strikes Syrian planes and airports

ISTANBUL/BEIRUT: Turkey shot down two Syrian warplanes over Idlib yesterday and struck a military airport well beyond its frontlines in a sharp escalation of its military operations following the death of dozens of Turkish soldiers last week. Ankara has ramped up its attacks, including drone strikes, against the Russian-backed Syrian forces since Thursday, when 33 Turkish soldiers were killed in an air strike by Damascus.

It has already deployed thousands of troops and military vehicles in northwest Syria's Idlib province in the

last month to stem advances by Syrian government forces which have displaced 1 million people close to Turkey's southern border. Already hosting 3.6 million Syrian refugees, Ankara is determined to prevent any further influx from Syria. It has also let migrants cross its borders into the European Union, in an apparent effort to press for EU support in tackling the Syria crisis.

Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said in the last four days Turkish forces destroyed eight helicopters, 103 tanks, 72 howitzers, rocket launchers, a drone and six air defense systems. He dubbed Turkey's operation, its fourth incursion in Syria in four years, "Operation Spring Shield". In response, Syria's army said it shot down three Turkish drones and warned it would take down any aircraft breaching the air space over the northwest, which has been controlled for years by

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's main ally Russia.

Despite the warning, Turkish warplanes downed two Syrian warplanes, while Turkey's state-owned Anadolu agency said the Turkish military had targeted and rendered unusable Nayrab airport, west of Aleppo city. Turkey-backed opposition commanders also said Kuweires airport, east of Nayrab, had been bombed since midnight. Both airports are well inside Syrian government controlled territory, marking a significant expansion of Ankara's targets.

The fighting has risked drawing Russia and Turkey, who cooperated for years to contain the fighting despite backing rival sides in Syria's nine-year war, into direct conflict. "We have neither the intention nor the notion to face Russia."

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Big Biden win puts him back in 2020 race

COLUMBIA, South Carolina: A resounding victory in South Carolina has thrust Joe Biden back into the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, but that could all change in two days when voters go to the polls in 14 "Super Tuesday" states. With 48 percent of the vote in South Carolina, the former vice president more than dou-

bled the 20 percent won by national frontrunner Bernie Sanders, reviving Biden's campaign and positioning him as the senator's leading rival.

"This is a big boost for us," Biden said yesterday on CNN, but "we have a long way to go." Sanders continues to hold poll leads in many of the Super Tuesday states - including the biggest prize, California - and he had double-digit leads in two nationwide surveys released Friday. "I think we've got a great chance to win in California, in Texas, in Massachusetts and a number of states," Sanders said yesterday on CBS.

But into an already turbulent

Democratic race - which has gradually winnowed down a record-large field - Biden's victory Saturday injected a note of uncertainty. "The biggest question is whether this will slingshot Joe Biden into victory in some Super Tuesday states," said Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia. The victory there, powered by support from black voters, was Biden's first in the race, but came at a crucial time, helping dispel some earlier doubts about the 77-year-old's energy level and broad appeal.

South Carolina added another bit of clarity: Billionaire businessman

Continued on Page 24



COLUMBIA, South Carolina: 2020 Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden delivers remarks at his primary night election event on Saturday. — AFP

MoE sets e-learning rules, limits teachers' workday to 5 hours

KUWAIT: In view of the two-week school suspension due to the spread of the new coronavirus and in a bid to provide students with alternatives to make up for lost time, the private education department of the education ministry issued a circular yesterday for owners of private schools wishing to activate e-learning platforms to give students access to classes without attending school. They should follow the following regulations:

1. Teaching staff members at schools wishing to use e-learning will be allowed to attend school from Sunday, March 1.
2. All staff members showing up to work in this period will work a maximum of five hours daily, taking all precautionary measures.
3. The concerned school administrations will provide all the necessary equipment and material including

Continued on Page 24

New PM sworn in as Mahathir vows to fight on

KUALA LUMPUR: A staunch Muslim nationalist backed by a scandal-mired party was sworn in as Malaysia's premier yesterday after a reformist government's collapse, but ex-leader Mahathir Mohamad, 94, slammed the move as illegal. The Southeast Asian nation was plunged into turmoil after Mahathir's "Pact

of Hope" alliance, which stormed to a historic victory in 2018, collapsed amid bitter infighting. Mahathir, who was the world's oldest leader, initially quit as premier but then sought to return.

He lost in a power struggle however to little-known Muhyiddin Yassin, who heads a coalition dominated by the multi-ethnic country's Muslim majority and has faced criticism for controversial remarks about race. The king's decision Saturday to pick Muhyiddin as premier was greeted with shock as Mahathir's allies claimed to have enough support, and it sparked widespread anger that the democratically elected government had been ejected.

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin signs documents after taking the oath as the country's new leader at the National Palace yesterday. — AFP

Local

Coronavirus fears slow down several businesses in Kuwait

Up to 70 percent drop in sales recorded in some markets during holidays



KUWAIT: Several photos showing unusual lack of customers at some markets in Kuwait City. — Photos by Ben Garcia

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The hospitality industry and other business sectors recorded a drastic fall in sales due to the recent coronavirus outbreak all over the world. In Kuwait, several activities planned for the National and Liberation Days were scrapped, hotel bookings were canceled and reservations for parties and speaking engagements were put on hold. This was also the case with restaurant reservations and many other community events and sporting activities.

People in Kuwait are scared of roaming around, and this has greatly affected sales at several retail shops and companies. "Just today I received a cancellation for a three-day seminar to be held in one of our ballrooms in our hotel on March 5, 6 and 7. We understand their predicament. Some reservations have been put on hold, and those who haven't reserved have told us they will call after March 14. So for the next 15 days, we have almost zero reservations in our

ballrooms," a hotel public relations officer told Kuwait Times. "Several big activities, weddings and community gatherings were put on hold too," he added.

Restaurants are also affected as many reservations have been cancelled. Very few people are dining at restaurants, as many prefer to order food or cook at home instead. "My average sales are KD 500 during weekdays, and on Friday, when I normally offer an 'all you can eat' promo, sales reach KD 1,000. But sales have been down more than 50 percent, so it's really very alarming, and I hope it will not continue for long as we have to pay our workers regularly," a restaurant owner said.

In Kuwait City, gold shops and some retail stores recorded a 60 to 70 percent drop in sales during the holidays. "We were expecting good sales during the five-day holiday, but sad to say sales dropped around 60-70 percent. This never happened even during wars," said a gold shop attendant.

In Salmiya, some money exchange and remittance companies also recorded a drop in sales. "People are scared - we were supposed to have better sales in the past five days, but business was very slow. Regular customers are holding their money and will send it later, since they are not being permitted by their employers to go out because they are afraid they might get the virus and bring it along with them when they return home," said a supervisor of a remittance company in the old souq (market).

But some items are selling briskly these days, according to some supermarkets in Kuwait City and Salmiya - hygiene-related products. "Apart from facemasks, the fast-moving items are rubbing alcohol and sanitizers. Last Thursday, our store was penalized because we were unable to provide the rubbing alcohol needed by a Kuwaiti customer. He wanted me to give him old products scheduled for return to a supplier, as they were substandard. The Kuwaiti



thought we were hoarding the items, but in fact they were set to be returned. I ended up explaining this at the ministry with my

boss, but we were penalized because we ran out of stock," said a supervisor of a supermarket in Kuwait City.

After facemasks, Kuwait markets out of hand sanitizers

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: After the facemask hysteria that spread in Kuwait following the announcement of the first coronavirus cases that led to all pharmacies running out of stock due to high demand, hand sanitizers have become a new craze. Awareness campaigns have encouraged people to take increased care of hygiene through systematically washing their hands or using sanitizers, which is easier when on the go. The campaigns also

advise people regarding facemasks - that they should be mostly used by sick people or people in contact with sick people - focusing instead on keeping hands clean all the time.

So people got obsessed with cleaning hands and rushed to buy sanitizers, which led to the disappearance of these products from the local market. Kuwait Times visited numerous pharmacies, co-ops and supermarkets in various areas to check the availability of sanitizers, after many people complained of not being able to find them anywhere.

As of yesterday, sanitizers were not available in Salwa, Salmiya, Hawally, Faiha, Khaldiya, Adailiya and Sabah Al-Salem co-ops. Also, six pharmacies in Salmiya and one in Salwa were all out of stock. Kuwait Times also couldn't find any sanitizers at a popular supermarket in Salmiya and another in Salwa. Both the co-ops and pharmacies put the blame on supplying companies for not providing any new stocks. They denied hoarding

stocks to sell in the future at higher prices, as they know this is illegal. They also said they expect new stocks to come to the market in the next few days.

"The supplying companies said they will provide us with new stocks of sanitizers on Sunday (yesterday), but unfortunately they said that they don't have any available as the ministry of health took all of it. So the supplying companies are waiting for new stocks from outside Kuwait. It's possible that sanitizers and facemasks will be given with subsidized products to citizens from the co-op," said the supermarket director of Khaldiya Co-op.

Inspectors of the ministry of commerce are inspecting various pharmacies to check for any increase in prices of goods, especially those related to the novel coronavirus, including facemasks and sanitizers. Many pharmacies have been shuttered for such violations. Some reopened after a few days, but their case is in court and they will be fined.

KEPS urges public to follow official COVID-19 instructions

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: For the sake of ensuring their own and their families' safety, Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) urged all citizens and residents to fully abide by the instructions on the need to check with official bodies, namely medical ones, in case of suffering from any infection or exposure to COVID-19. KEPS also expressed readiness to take part in any guidance, awareness or information role.

In this regard, KEPS chairperson and member of the regional advisory committee for limiting crises in MENA and West Asia Dr Wejdan Al-Khateeb said COVID-19 is just another disease that can easily be controlled by recognizing its origin, how it spreads and boosting public awareness concerning precautionary measures citizens and travelers around the world should follow to protect themselves and measures infected individuals should follow to prevent spreading the disease to others. "The number of infected people is now stable in Kuwait and can only spike through travelling to or returning from infected countries," she underlined.

Khateeb said that people should know that COVID-19 is transmitted by a virus similar to those that had caused SARS and MERS in previous years, infecting the respira-

tory system with symptoms similar to those of common cold and flu, which can sometimes develop into severe pneumonia that might be fatal. Khateeb added that the most common means of contacting this virus are elevator buttons, door and window knobs, tables, seatbacks and shopping trolleys and surfaces, advising everybody to wear gloves and wash hands before touching the face.

MoCI hotline

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) announced receiving 163 complaints through its hotline number 135 concerning hoarding or overpriced goods. A statement MoCI issued yesterday explained that the ministry's emergency teams had inspected 89 stores and pharmacies, filed five citations, closed a pharmacy, closed eight vegetable outlets at Sulaibiya vegetable market and six in Andalus for unjustifiably increasing onion prices by 50 percent.

Umrah for expats

As part of its charity activities and in collaboration with Al-Othman, the Awqaf secretariat general supported and funded a six-day umrah trip for 250 Muslim expats, mainly including low-paid laborers who cannot afford it yet long to visiting the holy land.

Some private schools 'forcing' teachers to work

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Coronavirus cases in Kuwait have risen to 46, and as a precaution, Kuwait has affirmed that all necessary measures and precautions have been taken against COVID-19 in coordination with the ministry of health. One of the precautions was suspending classes in all government and private schools and colleges for two weeks, starting from March 1, but Kuwait Times discovered that many private schools are forcing teachers to come to school and work, although there are no students. Contacting several hotlines of the ministry of education, officials said the decision is only obligatory for the public sector and they do not have the authority to prevent private schools from making their own decisions.

During its extraordinary meeting held on February 26, 2020 under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace, the Cabinet has taken a decision to face the novel coronavirus by suspending all government and private schools, colleges, universities and military colleges, and Awqaf and Islamic Affairs educational centers as of March 1, 2020 until March 12, 2020.

Industry authority forms team to meet demand on masks

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Industry announced forming an emergency team tasked with meeting the markets' demand on medical masks and sanitizers to fight the coronavirus. The authority is cooperating with factories to provide Kuwaitis and expats with their needs of masks and other means of preventing the spread of the virus, said the authority's Director General Abdulkareem Taqi in a press statement yesterday, after an urgent meeting with Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan. The meeting discussed boosting work at factories to meet the growing demand on masks and sanitizers, he noted.

Deputy President of Kuwait Chamber of Industry and Commerce Mohammad Al-Sagr announced meanwhile forming a joint team with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce for following up on necessary precautionary steps against the coronavirus. The chamber said in a statement that the board hosted yesterday Minister Roudhan for coordination at this level. The minister briefed his hosts during the meeting about all efforts at the government level to contain the virus spread. He has assured the private sector that all necessary measures have been taken, noting Kuwait's status among the top countries with respect of safeguarding the citizens and residents. —KUNA

Medical societies support measures against virus

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Various medical societies yesterday issued a statement expressing full support to the measures taken by the Ministry of Health (MoH) to contain the coronavirus outbreak, adding that the measures fully matched related international recommendations and exceeded them in some cases. The statement also warned against using the current crisis for political and media gains against the state's greater good and public interests. "Any statements contesting the current measures are miscalculated, do not serve the society and are against the country's public interests," the statement warned.

Separately, Jahra Salayil Hotel yesterday denied plans to use it as a quarantine site for people infected with COVID-19. "Social media stories about turning the hotel into a quarantine are untrue," said the Copthorne Al-Jahra Hotel and Resort (Salayil) sales and marketing department, reassuring hotel customers that their bookings are valid and many of them are currently enjoying their stay at the hotel. In the meantime, Minister of Education Saud Al-Harbi recommended rescheduling the second term final exams to start after Eid Al-Fitr for all stages and cancel the interval days due to the tight schedule.

And in view of the current situation and the measures taken to fight COVID-19, the Municipal Council yesterday suspended all its committee meetings in March. Meanwhile, Kuwait Municipality's acting PR manager Mohammed Al-Mutairi said various municipal teams operating during the national holidays removed 5,292 truckloads of waste, 163 abandoned vehicles and mobile grocers and 20 ATVs, filed 306 citations, removed 158 ads, stopped five promotional offers, confiscated six truckloads of balloons, 120 water guns, 24 water bottle boxes, four facemasks, 7,565 water-filled balloons, 136 flags, and 20 truckloads of fruits, vegetables and used clothes.



KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guard tested all personnel, including officers, noncommissioned officers and contracted employees before entering camps and the headquarters building to make sure they are not infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).



Local

Kuwait's Amir congratulates Afghan president on peace deal

Sheikh Sabah receives top Kuwaiti officials at Bayan Palace



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable yesterday to Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani congratulating him on a troop withdrawal agreement signed between the Taliban and the US. In his cable, His Highness the Amir applauded this "landmark" deal that could potentially pave the way for a complete withdrawal of foreign soldiers from Afghanistan, saying it is a step towards ending the 18-year war in the country. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Afghan president.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of condolences to Indian President Ram Nath Kovind over victims of a bus fall in a river in western India, an accident that claimed many lives. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to the Indian president. Also yesterday, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of condolences to Pakistani President Arif Alvi over the victims of the train-bus crash in southern Pakistan. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to President Alvi.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan

Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir then received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Premier Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, before receiving Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council, the Cassation Court and President of the Constitutional Court, Justice Youssef Al-Mutawaa.

His Highness the Crown Prince also received Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled at Bayan Palace

yesterday. Furthermore, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf received Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Dr Abdullah Al-Matouq, President of Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO), special advisor to the UN secretary general and consultant at the Amiri Diwan. The latter handed over to His Highness the Crown Prince a report about the initiative of feeding one billion hungry people worldwide. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah.

Speaker hosts GCC chief



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets with GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf. — KUNA

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem received yesterday GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf on the occasion of assuming the post. The

speaker congratulated Dr Hajraf on "earning confidence for assuming the post of the secretariat general," wishing him success in service of joint GCC action. —KUNA

Diwan minister conveys Amir's condolences over Mubarak's death



KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah offers condolences over the demise of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. — Amiri Diwan photo

KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah yesterday visited the Egyptian embassy in Kuwait, as he conveyed condolences of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah over the demise of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. He also delivered condolences of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime

Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. In a press statement after offering condolences, Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah mentioned the Amir's high initiative to name "one of the important monuments in Kuwait" after the late president Mubarak, stressing that it is the least that can be presented to show appreciation of his positions and key role in liberating Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1991. — KUNA



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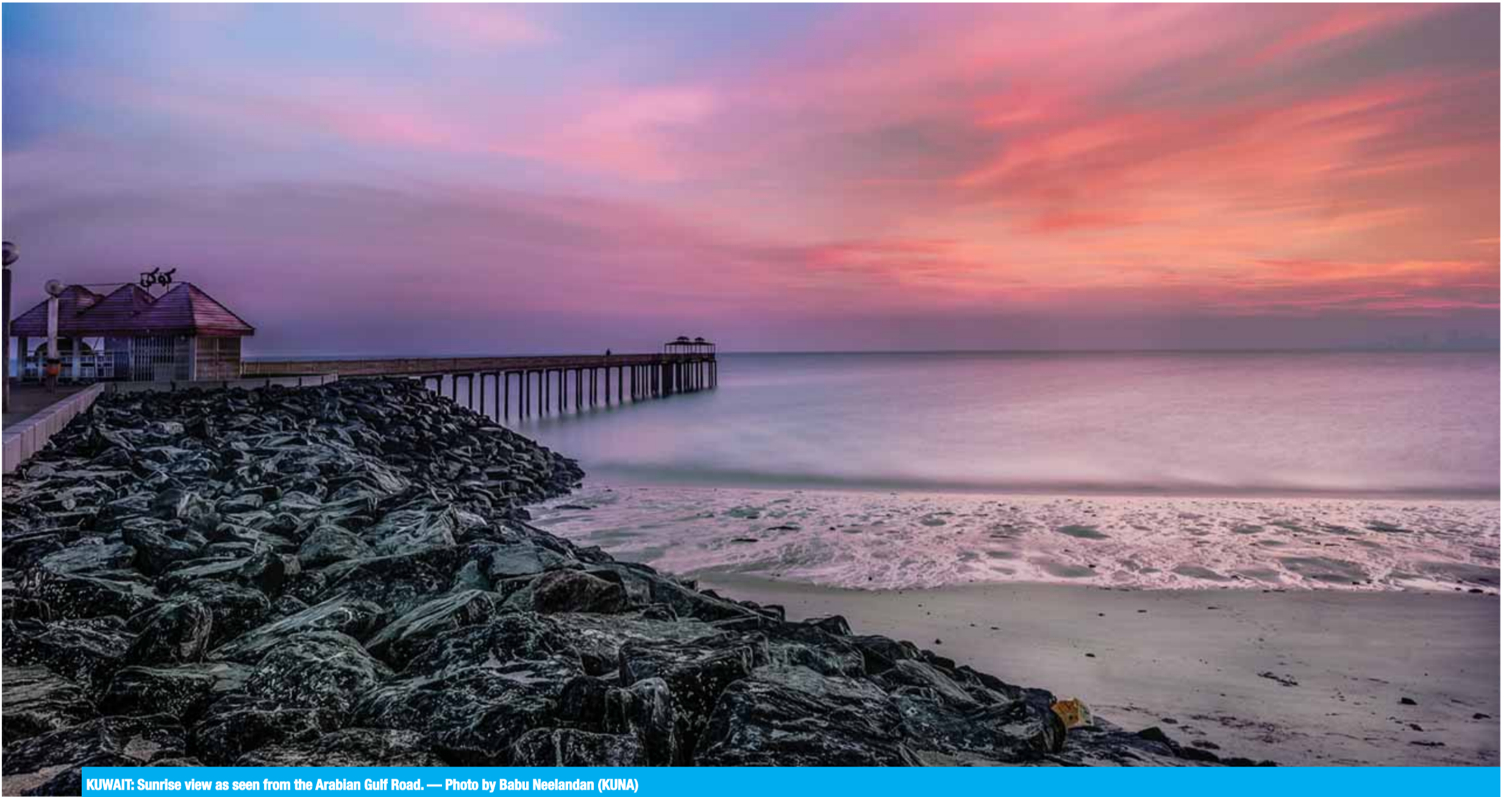
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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Sunrise view as seen from the Arabian Gulf Road. — Photo by Babu Neelandan (KUNA)

Tunisian President welcomes Kuwaiti minister to pan-Arab talks

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TUNIS: Tunisia's President Kais Saied yesterday received Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh, on the sidelines of talks involving interior chiefs from across the wider Arab region. The meeting is highly significant since it revolves around matters dealing with the region's security and stability, said the Tunisian leader amid the encounter, extending his warmest greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. As they discussed current happenings around the world, the Kuwaiti minister reciprocated the greetings, wishing the North African nation continued prosperity.

Mounting hazards

Participants in the 37th session of Arab interior ministers yesterday warned against mounting hazards emanating from terrorism and cybercrimes in the Arab region. They called for boosting cooperation among Arab security apparatuses and updating the "Arab black list for culprits, masterminds and financiers of terrorist acts."

"Terrorism remains most eminent factor on the scale of criminal challenges facing the Arab region and the whole world," said Dr Mohammad Koman, Secretary General of Arab Interior Council in a statement, inaugurating the session. He lauded the council's significant step, working out the "black list," indicating that the council would consider forming a team of experts for early detection of terrorist threats. The ministers during the session will ponder a proposed strategy for facing and forming a coordination committee for fighting cybercrimes, he said, calling for greater cooperation with Europe for facing joint criminal challenges



TUNIS: Tunisia's President Kais Saied welcomes Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh. — KUNA photos

such as illegal immigration, narcotics, cybercrime and other organized crimes. Meanwhile, the council honorary president and Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia Prince Abdulaziz bin Nayef Al-Saud said facing terrorism warrants unifying Arab states' efforts and cementing bonds among their security apparatuses as well as bolstering joint security actions, information and expertise swaps.

Meanwhile, Tunisian Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh said the 37th session is held amid critical circumstances marked with increasing threats from terrorism, organized crime, cybercrime and illegal immigration, urging Arab states to coordinate further to counter these hazards. He stressed on necessity of updating mechanisms and networks of the Arab security apparatuses, boosting swap of expertise and information in the face of the security challenges. The Arab interior council session kicked off earlier

yesterday to address a host of issues such as criteria of listing or omitting on the black list, forming a special team for anticipating terrorist threats and instant analysis of terrorist acts.

Saleh meets Palestine PM

On Saturday, minister Saleh met with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, on the sideline of the 37th Arab Interior Ministers meetings. During the meeting, Saleh reassured Kuwait's firm stance and support for the Palestinian case. Shtayyeh praised Kuwait's stances and support, especially when Kuwait was appointed to the position of non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, expressing hopes further strengthen security cooperation between the two sides. Saleh also met with Lebanon's Minister of Interior Mohammad Fahmi where they discussed a number of issues of common concern. — KUNA



Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh meets with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.

KISR develops techniques for mass production of seeds and desert plants

Desertification remains one of the foremost environmental issues in Kuwait

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) continues to conduct necessary studies and research to meet the challenges in the field of greening in order to expand the green area in Kuwait and preserve natural resources.

Kuwait Times spoke with two expert researchers in the project of the development of techniques for mass production of seeds and desert plants. During our exclusive interview, scientific researchers Laila Al-Mulla and Dr Narayana Bhat explained the future of this project and how it will be utilized as part of the Kuwait Vision 2035.

According to Dr Bhat, the project started in 2012 and is scheduled to finish in March 2020. "The main purpose of this project is to establish the facilities and techniques required for mass production of native seeds and plants for different uses," he said.

He added that desertification is one of the foremost environmental issues in Kuwait, where the situation remains to be a major concern due to continuing loss of native vegetative cover, excessive soil erosion caused by wind and water and the salinization of irrigated lands. "[This is] besides natural events and human activities that have greatly accelerated this process," he said. "The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and subsequent military activities have adversely impacted the terrestrial ecosystems further, resulting in the disruption of natural plant succession process and recovery of vegetation cover."

Dr Bhat noted that the rehabilitation of degraded lands is considered an effective way to combat desertification and restore ecosystem functioning. "Since native plants are well adapted to their local environment, utilizing them for restoration purposes is highly sustainable," he indicated. "It also provides low-cost feed for livestock grazing and sources of seed and valuable gene pool for research, as well as a source of medicine and organic matter to the soil. Native vegetation cover reduces soil erosion and captures mobile sand and organic matter, while it also improves the percolation of water through the soil profile."

He continued by saying that Kuwait's native plants are of enormous scientific value because they represent a transition between semi-desert and desert vegetation as well as serve a valuable gene pool for heat, drought, and salt-tolerance research. As for the Kuwait Vision 2035, Dr Bhat said that the project is in line with the ambitious development plan also known as 'New Kuwait' "which targets sustainable economic development by using natural resources." He further noted that the plan seeks to develop the technology and methodology to help the private sector push their quality of work to a new level.

Technological package

Mulla said that the main goal of establishing the infrastructure and intensive production of fungal plant seeds is to develop a technological package through which the user can produce the intensive for fungal plants that Kuwait lacks, and which the private sector also needs



Dr Narayana Bhat



Laila Al-Mulla

"because by doing this, we create investment opportunities for the agricultural companies to produce huge quantities." "This is a sustainable method that helps stimulate and increase green areas in Kuwait and greening projects and restore the affected areas," she added.

She said that the project has many outcomes and benefits for Kuwait's developmental plan. "The main benefit is that the project will develop a technology package based on KISR's prior experience on mass production of native plants and seeds that can be licensed," she indicated. "It also help produce and store native seeds, and establish nucleus test plots to meet the needs of future research and development projects. The

outcome of this project will serve as resources for undertaking long-term research on native plants and ecosystem restoration and storing the superior ecotypes of native species, as renewable natural resources would provide valuable genetic material for future research and sustainable implementation. Also, semi-commercial seed storage facilities established in the project will be available for biodiversity conservation, which is a national priority." Mulla added that this project will create world-class research facilities that will be of great benefit to the scientific community in Kuwait, the region and globally, as well as to local producers and consumers.

Kuwait approved as regional customs training center

CAIRO: World Customs Organization (WCO) and Kuwait signed a memorandum of understanding on establishing the organization's Regional Training Center in Kuwait, as a certified customs training body. The memorandum was signed by WCO Secretary General Dr Kunio Mikuriya and Director General of Kuwait General Administration of Customs Advisor Jamal Jalawi, after the 51st meeting of the Directors General of Customs for North of Africa, Near and Middle East (MENA) regions, held at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo. Mikuriya hailed the efforts of Kuwait customs in supporting the work of WCO. WCO's deputy director general Sheikh Ahmad Al-Khalifa said he was pleased with attending the memorandum's signing, adding that the training center is an addition to the organization's presence in the region. Meanwhile, Jalawi congratulated 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 Kuwaiti people on choosing Kuwait as a regional training center.

In the meantime, Khalifa yesterday underlined necessity of commitment of authorities in the sector to combat coronavirus that has mushroomed on a wide scale worldwide. The Regional Representative for North of Africa, Near and Middle East (MENA) region and Vice President of the World Customs Organization Sheikh Ahmad Al-Khalifa stressed commitment to make all efforts to fight novel coronavirus (COVID-19), expressing hope that "the crisis will pass in peace." This came in a statement on the sidelines of presiding over the 51st meeting of the general managers of customs for North Africa, the Near and Middle East.



CAIRO: WCO Secretary General Dr Kunio Mikuriya and Director General of Kuwait General Administration of Customs Advisor Jamal Jalawi shake hands after signing the deal. — KUNA

Khalifa, who is President of Bahrain Customs department, said customs officials are "in front lines .. in cooperation with representatives of ministries of health and passports and other concerned agencies to deal with passenger movement." Precautionary measures have also been taken to protect "our countries from this virus," he added. Plans were exchanged to confront coronavirus between member countries of the World Customs Organization through diplomatic channels, as work teams were formed in the customs ports to establish inspection areas for travelers in addition to isolation areas for positive cases, he said.

Meanwhile, Assistant Secretary-General, Head of the Economic Affairs Sector of the Arab League, Ambassador Kamal Ali, said there are massive and "exceptional political and economic developments in the region," as the meeting constituted an opportunity to formulate Arab

and regional positions towards these issues. The Arab League has prepared an agreement for customs' cooperation among Arab countries and signed by four Arab countries so far. Three more countries were expected to ink it, he said.

The meeting addresses ways to develop customs' tasks in North Africa region, Far and Near East and work to build capacities for customs' workers, as well as building risk departments through the security dimension as well as exchanging information, setting up electronic systems and linking information between customs and taxes. Secretary General of the World Customs Organization Kunio Mikuriya and Director of the Department of Economic Integration at the Arab League Dr Bahjat Abu Al-Nasr took part in the meeting. Kuwait participated in the session with a delegation headed by Director-General of Kuwait General Administration of Customs Jamal Al-Jalawi. —KUNA

FM reviews preparations against coronavirus

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah and Foreign Minister's assistants reviewed and discussed Saturday procedures taken by the ministry's diplomatic missions over repercussions of the coronavirus. The meeting highlighted and tackled the steps taken by the ministry to ensure safety of all working abroad in the diplomatic missions, technical staff, including the safety of Kuwaiti citizens until they return back home safely. Separately, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad received a phone call yesterday from his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu, discussing bilateral ties and current happenings around the world. Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad also discussed in a phone call on Saturday with his Indonesian counterpart Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi bilateral relations between the two countries. The two ministers also tackled the recent development in the region and international arena. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs a meeting to review procedures taken by the ministry's diplomatic missions over repercussions of the coronavirus. — KUNA

Firemen tackle Shuwaikh truck blaze

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen battled a blaze that burned four heavy duty vehicles behind a supermarket in Shuwaikh yesterday. No injuries were reported in the incident. Industrial Shuwaikh, back up and Shuhada fire stations responded to the scene in response to an emergency call and extinguished the fire. Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said in a statement.



NBK sponsors 'Kuwait Calling' show by JACC

KUWAIT: As part of the bank's continuous efforts to maintain the social and cultural institutions' initiatives in Kuwait, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) collaborates with Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Center (JACC) by sponsoring the center's most phenomenal show of the season, Kuwait Calling. NBK's participation in Kuwait Calling reflects the bank's distinguished legacy economically and socially. Kuwait Calling will run from March 11 until March 14, 2020.

NBK's Public Relations and Communications Assistant General Manager, Manal Al-Mattar, said that NBK's sponsorship of Kuwait Calling is a gesture of recognition of the important and pivotal role that this leading cultural institution plays in promoting Kuwait's culture and shedding light on its arts and rich heritage. "Our CSR strategy focuses on supporting cultural activities that aim at building bridges between generations and different backgrounds," she added. "We trust that cultural and historical related events will attract a large segment of the society. It is our duty as a leading institution to spread cultural activities as doing so engages the youth with Kuwait's multi-faceted history in a completely new and innovative manner."

Over the past six and a half decades, NBK has committed itself to supporting social and cultural ceremonies in Kuwait as part of its social responsibility. As a leading and prestigious institution, NBK has a track record of serving and supporting the Kuwaiti society. Its partnership with JACC supports promoting the richness of Kuwait's history as it is expressed through dance, music and technological innovations such as projection mapping and motion capture suits that together will tell the story of Kuwait.

With its inspiration firmly rooted in innovative music derived from



Manal Al-Mattar

Kuwait's rich past and modern dance, 'Kuwait Calling' will transport audiences on a time-travelling journey. Starting from the desert origins of Kuwaiti culture to the sea and back to the city and current-day civilization, the show will create a story that is both historical and fantastical through three different phases: Emergence in the desert, opportunity at sea and finally arriving at civilization, Kuwait's people.

Everyone attending Kuwait Calling will be seated outdoors, facing the glimmering walls of JACC's jeweled buildings. While the story is about Kuwait, the merging of motion capture technology, projection mapping, music, dance and the architecture of the Centre's buildings make Kuwait Calling a show that cannot be missed that is for all ages, backgrounds and nationalities.

JACC is a multidisciplinary public space that strives to entertain, educate, engage and enlighten everyone in Kuwait. It offers a range of events in music, theater, film, workshops and spoken word for every generation. JACC provides a space for dialogue to share and showcase skills and knowledge and it also demonstrates the cultural aspirations of Kuwait by hosting, producing and presenting various types of local, regional and international artistic and cultural events. JACC is a direct reflection of the rich cultural heritage of the State of Kuwait, which has always been open to the international community, extending its reach to world cultures and arts.



Vatican opens archives on controversial pope

Gatherings banned, travel restricted as coronavirus cases grow worldwide

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EDIRNE: Migrants take boats near Edirne while other migrants wait at Greece side, as they attempt to enter Greece by crossing the Maritsa River yesterday. —AFP

Turkey opens 'migrant floodgates'

Greece blocks migrant swell at Turkey border

PAZARKULE: Greece said yesterday it has blocked nearly 10,000 migrants at its border with Turkey, which opened its gates to Europe as tensions mount over its deepening conflict in Syria. Migrant numbers have swelled along the rugged frontier after Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said it "opened the doors" to Europe in a bid to pressure EU governments over the conflict. Tensions have soared between Russia and Turkey—who back opposing forces in the Syrian war—after an airstrike killed dozens of Turkish soldiers in Idlib last week. Some 13,000 migrants have amassed at the Turkey-Greece border, including families with young children who spent the night in the cold, the International Organization for Migration said. An estimated additional 2,000 migrants arrived at the Pazarkule border gate yesterday, including Afghans, Syrians and Iraqis, according to an AFP reporter. But as the crowds rushed to enter Europe, Greek police and soldiers blocked 9,972 "illegal entrances" from entering the northeastern Evros region in the past 24 hours, a Greek government source said.

Greek's deputy defense minister said the country would not stand down. "We are protecting the borders of Greece and Europe with a firm hand", Alkiviadis Stefanis said in an interview in Skai TV yesterday. Migrants pressed on with efforts to enter Greece. Some attempted to swim across rivers or duck under fences, while

others dragged suitcases as they marched toward the border where large crowds of migrants waited, some wrapped in blankets or sleeping on dirt mounds. Despite Greece's efforts to repel the crowds, several boats full of migrants arrived on the Greek island of Lesbos yesterday, AFP journalists said. Clashes erupted between police and migrants on Saturday on the Greece-Turkey border, with police firing teargas at refugees who responded by lobbing rocks. Greek authorities said at least 139 migrants have been arrested since Friday.

'High alert'

The EU's border protection agency Frontex said yesterday it was on "high alert" at Turkey's borders with Europe and that it has "taken steps to redeploy to Greece technical equipment and additional officers." It had received request for support from Greece. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen on Saturday said the EU was watching "with concern" and stood ready to deploy its Frontex border guard agency. The developments recalled events in 2015 when over a million migrants fled to Europe, mainly via Greece in what became the continent's worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. The EU's commissioner for migration, Margaritis Schinas, tweeted yesterday that he had requested an extraordinary meeting of EU interior ministers to discuss the situation.

'Doors open'

Erdogan said Saturday that Turkey, home to some 3.6 million refugees, had opened its borders to Europe and did not plan to close them because "the (EU) should keep its promises". He was referring to the 2016 deal with Brussels to stop the flow of refugees in exchange for billions of euros. The latest migrant influx swelled after an escalation of violence in Syria's northern Idlib province, where an airstrike on Thursday left 34 Turkish soldiers dead.

Turkey said yesterday it was "successfully" continuing its military operation against the Russian-backed Syrian regime in Idlib but insisted it did not wish to clash with Moscow. Turkish forces targeted Syrian regime positions over the weekend after Erdogan warned Damascus would "pay a price" for its aggression.

Erdogan urged Russia to move out of the way and "leave us face to face" with Damascus. Turkey said its forces destroyed a chemical warfare facility south of Aleppo, although Syria's state media denied the attack and the facility's existence. Turkish drone strikes also killed 26 Syrian soldiers on Saturday, the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The latest escalation has raised tensions between Ankara and



EDIRNE: Migrants pray near Edirne, Turkey, before taking a boat to attempt to cross the Maritsa river to enter Greece yesterday. —AFP

Damascus-ally Moscow.

The Kremlin said Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin could meet on March 5 or 6, which the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu confirmed on Saturday. Forces of Syrian President Bashar

al-Assad pressed an assault on the last rebel-held bastion of Idlib backed by Moscow air power, which has killed hundreds of civilians. Nearly a million people have also been forced to flee their homes in the region in the latest offensive. —AFP

Johnson baby power: British PM, girlfriend expecting first child

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his girlfriend Carrie Symonds announced on Saturday they are expecting their first child together and are engaged to be married. The couple has been living together in Downing Street since Johnson became prime minister in July, with Symonds the first unmarried partner to live openly with a British leader in recent history.

"The prime minister and Miss Symonds are very pleased to announce their engagement and that they are expecting a baby in the early summer," the couple said in a statement. The 55-year-old Johnson took office in July and led his Conservative Party to a decisive election victory in December. The announcement means he will become the first British prime minister to marry in office for 250 years.

The couple's relationship was the subject of scrutiny during his bid to take over from Theresa May as prime minister last summer after police were called to Symonds' home by a neighbor who heard an apparent row between them. Symonds, 31, said in a message posted on Instagram that she had kept news of her engagement secret until now. "I wouldn't normally post this kind of thing on here but I wanted my friends to find out from me," she said.

"Many of you already know but for my friends that still don't, we got engaged at the end of last year... and

we've got a baby hatching early summer," Symonds said, adding: "Feel incredibly blessed". Johnson was congratulated by members of parliament, including his former finance minister, Sajid Javid, who resigned after losing a power struggle over who should control Britain's economy. "Wonderful news!" Javid said on Twitter.

Third marriage

Johnson, known for his ruffled appearance and flamboyant oratory, was previously married to Marina Wheeler, and they had four children together. They announced in September 2018 that they had separated and would divorce after 25 years of marriage. The couple reached a financial settlement earlier this month, British media have reported. Johnson has fathered one other child. He has always refused to say how many children he has. During the election campaign, Johnson said that he would not "put them on the pitch".

Johnson was married to Allegra Mostyn-Owen before Wheeler, so Symonds will be his third wife. Johnson's most notable action so far in office has been to fulfill an election campaign pledge to "get Brexit done". Britain finally left the European Union at the end of January, more than three years after Britons voted in a referendum to leave the bloc.

Johnson will be the first British leader since Augustus Henry FitzRoy, who was prime minister between 1768 to 1770, to remarry in office. Recent British prime ministers' wives have had babies while their husbands were in office. Former Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron's wife Samantha had a baby daughter, Florence, in 2010. Labor Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife Cherie had a son, Leo, in 2000. —Reuters



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister and Conservative leader Boris Johnson and his partner Carrie Symonds arrive at the count centre in Uxbridge, west London. — AFP

Militia kills 24 in DR Congo

BUNIA: Militia fighters in Democratic Republic of Congo killed 24 people and injured 12 others, local officials said Saturday, the latest attack in the restive northeastern province of Ituri. The killings took place late Friday in a region where some 700 people have died since a surge in intercommunal violence in 2017. Dozens of militia groups are active in eastern DR Congo, a legacy of the two Congo wars in the 1990s that dragged in its neighbors Uganda and Rwanda.

Friday's latest massacre was attributed to a militia active in northern Ituri, bordering Uganda and South Sudan, known as Cooperative for the Development of Congo, or CODECO by its French initials. "A total of 24 people were killed by gunshots" by militiamen from CODECO, said local administrative official Innocent Madukadala in the Djugu territory. Alfred Alingi, another local administrator in Djugu, confirmed details of the attack.

The assailants were dressed in military uniform and "were shooting civilians in their way," he said. CODECO are a militia tied to the Lendu ethnic group. The Ituri region has returned to violence since the end of 2017, mainly in its northern part. Conflict between two ethnic groups from 1999 to 2003 caused tens of thousands of deaths there, ending only with the dispatch of a European force - the first rapid-reaction military mission by the European Union outside Europe. —AFP

International

Netanyahu pledges 'immediate' annexation steps if re-elected

PM woos voters a day before Israel's 3rd election in a year

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged yesterday to annex key parts of the occupied West Bank within "weeks" if re-elected, as he sought to sway voters a day before the country's third election in a year. Final polls pointed to another tight race between Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and the centrist Blue and White party, led by ex-military chief Benny Gantz.

All parties have raised concern about voter apathy amid the grinding political stalemate, putting added emphasis on turnout. Netanyahu, Israel's longest serving premier, has been accused before previous elections of making last-minute plays to energize his right-wing base. In an interview with Israeli public radio, he said annexation of the strategically crucial Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank was his top priority among "four major immediate missions".

"That will happen within weeks, two months at the most, I hope," he said in the interview aired 24 hours before polls were scheduled to open. US President Donald Trump's widely-criticized Middle East peace plan, unveiled in late January, gave the Jewish state a green light to annex the Jordan Valley and proposed a committee to set out the exact borders of the territory in question. "The joint US-Israeli mapping committee started work a week ago," Netanyahu said.

Political tactic

Former Israeli defence minister Avigdor Lieberman, also an ex-Netanyahu ally, publicly accused the prime minister of engaging in empty political rhetoric. Lieberman, who heads the nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party and may again be in the position of kingmaker following today's vote, said he had "ironclad information" that Netanyahu's comments on the Jordan Valley were at least partly insincere. "A few days ago, it

became clear to me that he sent a message to (Jordan's) King Abdullah, (saying) 'Don't worry, its just elections, there will be no annexation of the Jordan Valley,'" Lieberman said in a TV interview.

Many experts agree that a unilateral move by Israel to annex the strategically important valley would inflame regional tensions and damage ties with neighboring Jordan, one of only two Arab countries that has agreed a peace deal with Israel. Netanyahu listed his other priorities as signing a "historic" defense treaty with the United States, Israel's key ally, and "eradicating the Iranian threat", without elaborating. He has repeatedly pledged to stop the Islamic republic from developing a nuclear weapon and has not ruled out the use of force.

'Can't sit at home'

Netanyahu said that his fourth "immediate" goal if re-elected-despite facing trial on multiple corruption charges-would be major economic reform to bring down Israel's high cost of living. In November, the 70-year-old, who has spent 14 years as prime minister, became the only head of government in Israel's history to be indicted in office.

He is charged with corruption, embezzlement and breach of trust. His trial opens on March 17. After inconclusive elections in April and September, final opinion polls forecast Likud and Blue and White winning 33 seats each in the 120-member Knesset (parliament). Even counting their respective allies-the right and Jewish Orthodox parties for Netanyahu and the centre-left for Gantz-neither side is expected to secure 61 seats necessary to form a viable coalition.

Those results would be identical to previous rounds, after which both leaders tried, and failed, to form a government. Analysts say that after trudging to the ballot boxes twice in under 12 months, few Israeli voters



RAMAT GAN: People walk along a pedestrian overpass beneath a giant Blue and White (Kahol Lavan) alliance electoral billboard showing the face of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (center) flanked by Justice Minister Amir Ohana (left) and Education Minister Rafi Porretz, with text in Hebrew reading 'Blue and White or Erdogan' (implying Netanyahu mimicking the behavior of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan), in the central Israeli city of Ramat Gan yesterday. —AFP

remain undecided. That has forced candidates to put added energy into bolstering turnout. "I am encouraging citizens to get out and vote," Gantz told public

radio yesterday. "You can't just sit at home clicking your tongue, saying, 'Oy vey! What's happening here?' Voting is critical," he said. —AFP

Somali forces capture Sufi militant camp

MOGADISHU: Somali security forces have stormed a camp of a Sufi militia forcing their leaders to surrender after fighting in which 12 people were killed, officials and witnesses said. Fighting broke out between the army and the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa (ASWJ) militia in Dhumasareb, the capital of the semi-autonomous Galmudug region, and intensified on Friday. "The Somali forces took full control of the base of the rival militias and the situation is normal now, the leaders of the Sufi militias have surrendered to the force commanders," Abdullahi Ahmed, a Somali army commander told AFP by phone.

According to witnesses, most of the Sufi fighters surrendered during heavy fighting in the evening before the Somali security forces managed to make their

way into their main base late in the morning. The leader of the Sufi group Sheikh Mohamed Shakir who was leading the fight against the Somali security forces briefed the press after surrendering to the government forces. "We have decided to compromise for the public after learning the situation was getting worse leading to more problems," Shakir said.

"The government is responsible for our security and that of the town and the public as we have headed our weapons to them," he said. Earlier this month, the parliament of Galmudug elected Ahmed Abdi Kariye, a former minister backed by the federal government, as president of the region. ASWJ leader Shakir rejected the result and declared himself president. A former Galmudug president, Ahmed Duale, also claimed victory by forming his own parliament.

The Sufi group has played a major role in the fight against the radical Shebab Islamists, supported by Al-Qaeda, and has controlled the main cities of Galmudug for the past 10 years. In 2017, Shakir agreed to join the regional administration but later distanced him-



BELEDWEYNE: A girl walks towards her tent at a displacement camp for people affected by intense flooding in Beledweyne, Somalia. —AFP

self from it due to disagreements with its president. He then agreed to a new election before changing his mind and accusing the federal government of

manipulating the process to install one of its supporters. Somalia has been plunged into chaos since the fall of the autocrat Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991. —AFP

What is the real size of the coronavirus epidemic in Iran?

PARIS: International experts are questioning the scale of the new coronavirus epidemic in Iran, where the official death toll is second only to China and risks creating a regional epicenter of contagion. While Iran has acknowledged 43 deaths among 593 confirmed infections nationwide - with a vice-president and deputy health minister among those testing positive - unofficial tolls are much higher.

The London-based BBC Persian service says 210 people have been killed by the virus; a figure it says it collated from hospital sources. The report was immediately dismissed by Iran's health ministry. The People's Mujahedin, an exiled organization that Tehran considers a terrorist group, claims that the epidemic has killed "more than 300", while infect-

ing up to 15,000 across the country.

Six epidemiologists based in Canada used a mathematical model to estimate that there have been more than 18,000 cases on Iranian soil. Their calculations - not yet peer reviewed - take into account the number of cases in other countries that originated from Iran. "When a country exports cases to other destinations it's very likely that the burden of infection in this country is significant", according to Isaac Bogoch, coauthor of the study and a specialist in infectious diseases at the University of Toronto.

'Position of weakness'

This week, Reporters Without Borders added its own criticism of Tehran's handling of the outbreak, accusing the government of stifling news on the spread of the virus. "The authorities insist they have the situation under control but they have... obstructed journalists trying to cover the story," the media advocacy group said in a statement.

On Saturday, Iran's health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour responded to the criticisms, accusing



TEHRAN: Mask-clad pedestrians walk through Tajrish Bazaar in the Iranian capital Tehran. —AFP

foreign media of spreading false news. "Among Iran's radicals, there is an obsession with not giving ammunition to the enemy and avoiding appearing weak," said Thierry Coville, an Iran analyst at the French Institute for

International and Strategic Affairs. Iranian Twitter user Assieh Bakeri speculated: "Talking about coronavirus could soon be considered troubling for public opinion, undermining public security and insulting the president!" —AFP

Migrant workers hit by Lebanon's financial crisis

BEIRUT: Eighteen-year-old domestic worker Mary came to Lebanon to help support her family, but now a financial crisis is preventing her from sending money home to Ethiopia. A crippling liquidity crunch in the Mediterranean country has drastically limited access to dollars, and tens of thousands of migrant workers toiling for remittances in the hard currency are suffering the backlash. On a recent Sunday, Mary strolled down a bustling street in the capital Beirut with her girlfriends, dressed in an elegant outfit of skirt, jacket and ballerinas for her day off.

"I used to earn 400 dollars ... but today I get my salary in Lebanese pounds," she said. "I can't send money to Ethiopia anymore." Around her, migrant workers of all ages

flocked to shops that sell imported food or clothes from home, the women in their Sunday best. Young men sat on the pavement outside calling centres and restaurants, music spilling out onto the street.

The Lebanese pound used to be easily exchangeable for dollars at a fixed rate, but now banks have capped withdrawals of the US currency and its value has plummeted on the parallel market. The de-facto devaluation means Mary has lost at least a third of her salary. But she insisted her employees were not to blame. The problem, she said, "is from the state".

'What will I do?'

In a wave of mass street protests since October 17, Lebanese have railed against what they condemn as a corrupt political class that has mismanaged the country. An estimated quarter of a million domestic workers live in Lebanon, many in conditions that have repeatedly been condemned by their countries of origin and rights group, who point to the fact that many are underage. The large majority of foreign workers hail from Ethiopia, but many

also come from the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

A sponsorship system known as "kafala" leaves maids, nannies and carers outside the remit of Lebanon's labor law, and at the mercy of their employers. Thousands more foreign men work petrol pumps, clean the streets or labor in private businesses and restaurants. Before Lebanon's economy went into meltdown, most of these workers earned the equivalent of 150 to 400 dollars a month, often according to nationality. But their salaries have now been de facto slashed amid the worst liquidity crisis to rock Lebanon since the end of its 1975-1990 civil war.

With access to dollars severely limited and the value of the local currency tumbling, many employers have decided to pay their employees in Lebanese pounds. Migrant worker are then forced to exchange their local wages into foreign currency at a substantial loss on the black market. "What will I do?" Mary asked. "My siblings are in school and I'm supposed to help my family, but now I can't." After years of political turmoil, Lebanon's economy is collapsing, prices have soared, and businesses are struggling to stay open. —AFP

Why is Israel holding its third election in a year?

JERUSALEM: Israelis head to the polls today with a sense of deja vu after trying and failing twice in the past year to break the country's political deadlock.

Why so many elections?

In late 2018, Benjamin Netanyahu, veteran leader of Israel's right-wing Likud Party, seemed to be at the peak of his powers. The dominant political figure of his generation, Netanyahu was about to become Israel's longest-serving prime minister. But he had a precarious one-seat majority in parliament, and called a snap election for April 9, 2019. The immediate reason given was the vulnerability of his ruling coalition after the resignation of Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman. More hawkish than even Netanyahu, Lieberman quit, accusing the prime minister of being too soft on Palestinian militants in Gaza. But many Israelis saw it as a ploy by Netanyahu to gain a renewed public mandate to ward off prosecutors who were then in the final stages of drafting charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust against him. Once re-elected, the theory went, Netanyahu could say an indictment was not in the national interest. He denies wrongdoing, accusing his enemies of a witch-hunt.

What went wrong?

If that was the plan, it backfired. No single party in Israel has ever won an outright majority in parliament, and Netanyahu failed to get enough seats. He struggled for weeks to put together a government. Then, rather than let his principal rival - former armed forces chief Benny Gantz - have a chance to form a government, Netanyahu triggered another election, on Sept 17.

What happened in election No 2?

Again Netanyahu fell short. Likud and Gantz's centrist Blue and White Party ended in a virtual tie. That left Lieberman a king-maker. But Lieberman cited policy differences with both men to avoid anointing either. After months of horse-trading in which Netanyahu and Gantz both failed to win enough support, the outcome, much to the dismay of the jaded Israeli electorate, was the election.

Is this time any different?

Yes. Since the previous election, formal criminal charges have been filed against Netanyahu. Prosecution is now a reality, not a possibility. His trial is due to open on March 17, just two weeks after the election. Also, both previous elections were fought without the electorate knowing the contents of US President Donald Trump's long-delayed Middle East peace plan. That was published in January, and would grant US recognition to Israel's settlements in the occupied West Bank. Palestinians were furious, saying it gives away land they seek for a future state. Netanyahu pledged to annex the settlements after the election.

Could Netanyahu win this time?

Yes. But Netanyahu will need to win support from other parties if he is to form a coalition government with at least 61 of the parliament's 120 seats. The court hearings will prompt rivals to demand that he resign, even before sentencing. A verdict is likely to be months away, and the appeals process could take years.

Could Netanyahu lose to Gantz?

Opinion polls have shown Likud and Blue and White virtually neck and neck, with Netanyahu's party edging slightly ahead in the final stages of the campaign. Netanyahu is a known quantity. But Gantz also has problems - barring an unexpected surge in centrist voters he would have to bring together rightists and those representing Israel's Arab minority, which are on opposite sides of the political spectrum. —Reuters

International

South Korea closes churches as coronavirus tally passes 3,700

Churches hold online services in bid to limit gatherings

SEOUL: Churches were closed in South Korea yesterday with many holding online services instead as authorities fought to rein in public gatherings, with 586 new coronavirus infections taking the tally to 3,736 cases. That came a day after the biggest daily jump of 813 cases in South Korea's battle with the largest virus outbreak outside China, the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) said. The death toll rose to 18.

In Seoul, the capital, about a dozen worshippers were turned away from the Yoido Full Gospel Church, which put a sermon for its 560,000 followers on YouTube, filmed with a small choir instead of all 200 members and 60-strong orchestra. "I had heard there would be no service, but just came to check as I live nearby, but yes, it is so empty," said one of them, Song Young-koo, as he left South Korea's biggest church.

"It's a wise decision to do it online, since the virus would easily spread at mass gatherings and churches can be no exception." Authorities have warned of a "critical moment" in the battle on the virus, urging people to refrain from attending religious services and political events and stay home this weekend. For the first time in its 236-year history, South Korea's Catholic Church decided to halt masses at more than 1,700 locations nationwide. Buddhist temples also called off events, while major Christian churches held online services.

Of the new cases, 333 were from the southeastern city of Daegu, the location of a church at the centre of the outbreak, and 26 from the nearby province of

North Gyeongsang, KCDC said. The agency said some church members in January visited the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the disease emerged late last year, adding that it was investigating to determine if the trip played a role in the outbreak. "We're tracing back how many members had gone to China," its deputy director, Kwon Jun-wook, told a briefing.

"Our top priority is to find out how the coronavirus has been transmitted so widely among the Shincheonji followers," he added, in a reference to the church involved. The numbers of cases was likely to continue growing in early March, he added, pledging greater efforts to rein in key infection sources. At a news conference in Seoul a group of doctors and chiefs of public hospitals urged the government to combat a shortage of beds by assigning them to the critically ill, after two patients died in self-quarantine at home.

Help for North Korea

President Moon Jae-in called for unity and vowed

greater efforts, including an extra budget, to fight the outbreak, in a speech. "The outbreak can threaten our lives temporarily, but it cannot break our unity and hope," he said. Moon proposed joint efforts with North Korea to prevent an outbreak in the neighbor and improve healthcare.

North Korea has not confirmed cases, but has ordered a month in quarantine for those with symptoms, while state media said leader Kim Jong Un held a meeting on tougher measures. The crisis spooked trade and financial markets, leading Samsung Electronics,



DAEGU: Military vehicles spray disinfectant as part of preventive measures against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, on a road near Dongdaegu railway station in Daegu. —AFP

Hyundai Motor and LG Display to temporarily shut down a plant each and prompting boy band BTS to cancel a world tour set for April.

More neighbors suspended flights and banned visitors from South Korea. In a statement, the foreign ministry said Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha asked

Washington to avoid "excessive action that could needlessly shrink exchanges between both countries," during a telephone call with US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun yesterday. The request came after the United States advised Americans not to travel to hard-hit regions, such as Daegu. —Reuters



S Korea asks US to avoid 'excessive' travel curbs

'Reform not over', Pope tells disgraced religious order

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis told members of a disgraced religious order on Saturday they must renounce the legacy of their founder and acknowledge he was a con-man who sold the "illusion" of holiness while living a double life as a paedophile. Francis told the newly elected leaders of the Legionaries of Christ in a prepared speech that its reform was "not over," even 10 years after the Vatican first appointed a commissioner to clean it up.

"A change of mentality in individuals and an institution takes a long time to sink in," Francis said in the speech, which was released by the Vatican after a slight illness forced the pope to cancel the audience where he was to have read it.

Although the Legionaries founder, Mexican priest Marcial Maciel, died in 2008 aged 87, insiders say some older Legionaries who knew him and worked with him have still not come to grips with what the pope called his "criminal behavior". Maciel was perhaps the Roman Catholic Church's most notorious paedophile, even abusing children he had fathered secretly with at least two women while living a double life and being feted by the Vatican and Church conservatives.

Although allegations were made against him as early as 1954, the Vatican and the order only began slowly acknowledging Maciel's abuse in 2006, when Pope Benedict ordered him to retire to a life of "prayer and penitence". In his prepared speech, Francis said that while it was a fact that Maciel founded the order "you cannot consider him an example of sainthood to imitate," adding that "returning to the past would be dangerous and senseless".

Maciel, who ran the order like a cult with himself at the centre and brooked no questioning of his authority or motives, managed to create what the pope called "an illusion." Last Wednesday, the order's new leader, 51-year-old American priest John Conner, promised to turn a page as the group enacted new norms to protect children. Conner, the order's first non-Mexican leader, said in a statement the Legionaries wanted a "change of the institutional culture that allowed so much suffering to occur".

Last December, an internal report covering the period from when Maciel founded the group in Mexico 1941 to 2019 showed that he had abused at least 60 boys and that sexual abuse and abuse of power by superiors in the order was rife. Former members say Maciel gave huge contributions to the Vatican during the papacy of John Paul, who admired the Legionaries' orthodoxy and ability to produce vocations. —Reuters

Vatican opens archives on controversial pope

VATICAN CITY: The Vatican unseals the archives of history's most contentious popes today, potentially shedding light on why Pius XII stayed silent during the extermination of six million Jews in the Holocaust. Two hundred researchers have already requested access to the mountain of documents, made available after an inventory that took more than 14 years for Holy See archivists to complete.

Award-winning German religious historian Hubert Wolf will be in Rome today, armed with six assistants and two years of funding to start exploring documents from the "private secretariat" of the late pope. Wolf, a specialist on the relationship of Pius XII with the Nazis, is anxious to discover the notes of his 70 ambassadors - the pontiff's eyes and ears during his time as head of the Catholic Church between 1939 and his death in 1958.

There should also be records of urgent appeals for help from Jewish organizations, as well as his communications with the late US President Franklin D Roosevelt. The unsealed archives addi-

tionally cover a post-World War II era in which writers were censored and some priests hounded for suspected communist sympathies. The Vatican first published the essentials covering the Holocaust four decades ago, an 11 volume work compiled by Jesuits.

But some crucial pieces are still missing, including the pope's replies to notes and letters - for example, those about Nazi horrors. The Jesuits already published "documents the pope received about the concentration camps, but we never got to see his replies," Wolf said in an interview. "Either they do not exist, or they are in the Vatican," he said. Historians have already examined the 12

German years of Eugenio Pacelli, the future pope's real name which he used while posted there as the Holy See ambassador in 1917-1929

There, he witnessed the rise of Nazism, then returned to Rome to become the right-hand man of his predecessor Pius XI, elected in 1922. Past archives have revealed exchanges in which he was alerted about the extermination of European Jews once he himself became the pope. "There is no doubt that the pope was aware of the murder of Jews," Wolf said. "What really interests us is when he learned about it for the first time, and when he believed that information." —AFP



ROME: Pope Francis wipes his nose during mass which opens Lent - the forty-day period of abstinence and deprivation for Christians before Holy Week and Easter at the Santa Sabina church in Rome. —AFP

Opposition sidelined as Tajikistan votes in parliamentary polls

DUSHANBE: Voting began in Tajikistan yesterday in parliamentary polls that the ruling party of President Emomali Rakhmon is expected to sweep, with only one genuinely critical party taking part and the former main opposition banned. The elections are the first in the country's post-Soviet history without the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, a moderate faith-based party which was once the main opposition but was outlawed in 2015 and the target of a harsh crackdown ever since.

While Rakhmon's People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan is set for a big win, other competing parties from the outgoing legislature-including the agrarian party, the party of economic reform and the socialist party-are all widely seen as proxies that endorse Rakhmon's nearly three-decade rule.

Only one identifiable opposition party will compete in yesterday's ballot-the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan, which has never entered parliament. The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan currently dominates the chamber, holding 51 seats out of 63. As voting began yesterday, Mukhabbat Rakhimova, a teacher in the capital Dushanbe, said it was symbolic that she was casting her vote in a school that had been converted

into a polling station. "I want the lawmakers we elect to make their own big contributions to education," Rakhimova told AFP.

'Pre-agreed limits'

The last elections in 2015 marked a turning point for Tajikistan, a landlocked Muslim-majority country reliant on former overlord Russia for security and next-door China for loans and investment. That year, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan failed to make parliament for the first time since the end of a five-year civil war that pitted Islamists, democrats and regional forces against troops loyal to Rakhmon, costing tens of thousands of lives.

A peace deal for the country was brokered in 1997, with ally Russia acting as a guarantor, and the opposition guaranteed a role in politics. But within months of falling short of the parliamentary threshold, the party was deemed extremist and banned. Eleven members of its political council were jailed. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has determined that the members were arrested "for their exercise of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly," and demanded their release.

Since the party was outlawed, the 67-year-old Rakhmon has strengthened his control over the country. In 2016, he oversaw a referendum that allowed him to rule indefinitely. Some analysts tip his son, Rustam Emomali, currently serving as Mayor of Dushanbe, to succeed him in the near future. Shokir Hakimov, the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan's deputy chair-



DUSHANBE: A woman leaves a voting booth after casting her ballot for Tajikistan's parliamentary election at a polling station in Dushanbe yesterday. —AFP

man, told AFP that its lack of seats is "not because we lack a base" but because of a "lack of political will, poor electoral legislations and falsifications."

The other small parties on the ballot, he said, are "artificially created political structures, which play by the rules of the nomenklatura and keep criticism to within pre-agreed limits." The buildup to yesterday's vote saw well-known journalist and government critic Daler Sharipov jailed as part of a wave of over a hundred arrests that began at the end of last year. Authorities have said the sweep is targeting the Muslim Brotherhood movement, another banned group. —AFP

Coronavirus: Who is most at risk of dying?

PARIS: As the number of confirmed coronavirus cases across 61 countries hit 86,000 Saturday with nearly 3,000 deaths to date, the profile of those most at risk of dying is coming into focus, experts said. But the overall mortality rate remains uncertain, they said. The World Health Organization raised its global risk assessment to its top level Friday, with the global health crisis edging closer to a pandemic. Among those infected with the virus, older adults with preexisting heart conditions or hypertension face a sharply higher risk, according to preliminary statistics, including from a study covering more than 72,000 patients in China.

Among a subset of 44,700 infections confirmed through lab tests as of mid-February, more than 80 percent were at least 60 years old, with half over 70, said the study, that was published in the official China CDC Weekly. Initial reports from outside China are similar, with the first 12 vic-

tims reported in Italy mostly in their 80s, and none under 60. Several had known heart problems. Men in the China study were more likely to die than women by a margin of almost 3-to-2. But whether that was due to behavior - notably that most men in China smoke, while few women do - or biological factors, such as hormonal differences, is still unknown. One striking finding from the China study is the near absence of cases among children. The 10-19 age bracket comprised one percent of infections, and a single death. Children under 10 made up less than one percent, with no deaths reported. "We are still trying to wrap our heads around the deficit of cases among those under 20," Cecile Viboud, an epidemiologist at the US National Institute of Health's Fogarty International Centre, told AFP in an interview. "Is it because young children are less susceptible than adults, and thus simply don't get infected? Or if they do, that they have less disease?" It is surprising infections of very young people are so low, she added, because they tend to be among the hardest hit by almost all respiratory infections - whether viral or bacterial.

Heroic health workers

David Fisman, an epidemiologist at the

University of Toronto, was also mystified. "Where are the infected children?" he wrote in an email. "This is critical - perhaps kids are not being tested because they have mild symptoms." Another possible explanation is that children in China were out of school for the lunar new year holiday when the virus began to spread widely in January. "But young children still live in households where they can be infected by their parents," Viboud noted. A lower rate of infection among the youngest age groups was also seen during the 2002-03 outbreak of SARS, but was less marked. SARS, which is also a coronavirus, broke out in Guangdong Province and killed 774 people out of 8,096 infected.

The death of 34-year old Wuhan doctor Li Wenliang in early February, along with several more health workers in their twenties sparked speculation they had died because of repeated exposure, or even sheer exhaustion. Li's death sparked outrage in China because he had been muzzled by authorities for calling attention to the virus. Cellphone video images on social networks showed nurses and doctors, unable to cope with the caseload, breaking down in hysterics. "A more likely reason why young clinicians are getting infected is

because they were operating outside their level of expertise and training," John Nichols, a professor in the department of pathology at the University of Hong Kong said. "It is noble that the junior doctors pony up valiantly to help, but they most likely would not have had the necessary training in handling infectious patients." The larger question of just how lethal COVID-19 is, remains unanswered.

'Somewhere in the middle'

The ratio of confirmed cases to deaths suggests a mortality rate of 3.4 percent, but several studies have concluded that up to two-thirds of infections in China and elsewhere have gone undetected, which would make the virus far less deadly. "At the moment, we don't have a good understanding of the real mortality rate," Sharon Lewin, director of the Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity at the University of Melbourne told Australian television.

"It is estimated at about two percent." With SARS - which killed nearly one in 10 patients - early mortality figures turned out to be underestimates, in part because victims of the virus did not die quickly. With the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, however, the opposite happened, said Viboud. —AFP

International

China's coronavirus cases rise again as Trump urges calm after US death

Australia reports the first death on its soil

BEIJING: China reported a fresh spike in coronavirus infections yesterday, as President Donald Trump urged calm after the first death on US soil and Australia registered its first fatality. The virus has spread to more than 60 countries around the globe, prompting the World Health Organization to raise its risk assessment to its highest level.

Worldwide, nearly 3,000 people have been killed and about 87,000 infected since the virus was first detected late last year in the central Chinese city of Wuhan. China yesterday reported 573 new infections, the highest figure in a week after a dip. All but three of them were in Hubei province, of which Wuhan is the capital. While the numbers in China are still far lower than the huge daily increases reported during the first two weeks of February, COVID-19 has spread rapidly across borders, with South Korea, Italy and Iran emerging as hotspots. South Korea, which has the most infected people outside China, reported 586 new cases yesterday, bringing its total to 3,736. Australia reported the first death on its soil—a 78-year-old man who had been evacuated from the coronavirus-stricken Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan. There are fears the disease could hammer the global economy, and stock markets last week plunged to their lowest levels since the 2008 financial crisis.



Virus spreads to over 60 countries around the globe

First death on US soil

Global attention turned to the United States on Saturday after the first fatality on American soil was confirmed. "We've taken the most aggressive actions to confront the coronavirus," President Donald Trump said at a hastily arranged White House press conference. "Our country is prepared for any circumstance... There is no reason to panic at all."

The fatality occurred in Washington state's King County, which includes Seattle, a city of more than 700,000 people,

health officials said. The victim was in his 50s and had "underlying health conditions," officials added, as they also announced a possible outbreak in a Washington state nursing home, where a health worker and a resident in her 70s were both confirmed sick with the virus. Other residents and staff were "ill with respiratory symptoms or hospitalized with pneumonia of unknown cause," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

The death and two confirmed Washington cases all involved patients who had not travelled overseas or come in contact with anyone known to be ill, indicating the virus was spreading in the US. "We will see more cases," Health Secretary Alex Azar said at the White House. "But it's important to remember, for the vast majority of individuals who contract the novel coronavirus, they will experience mild to moderate symptoms."

France, Italy measures

France cancelled gatherings of 5,000 people or more after 16 new cases were confirmed there on Saturday, bringing the country's total to 73. Yesterday's Paris half-marathon and an agricultural symposium were among the events axed. Italy, the hotspot of the outbreak in Europe, saw a jump in new cases on Saturday, with its number of infections exceeding 1,000 and the death toll jumping by eight to 29. The outbreak forced the postponement of five matches in Italy's top-flight Serie A football league, including the heavyweight clash between champions Juventus and Inter Milan. In Japan, just 200 people took part in yesterday's Tokyo marathon after it was reduced from a mass participation event of 38,000 runners to just elite athletes. And the sumo spring tournament which opens next Sunday will now be held behind closed doors due to the coronavirus.

In recent days, the epidemic has spread also to sub-

The agreement says the "United States commits to completing this goal" of releasing the Taliban prisoners, but it is unclear how that would happen if Kabul is not on board. "There is no commitment to releasing 5,000 prisoners," Ghani told a rare press conference, noting that any release is "not in the authority of the US, it is in the authority of the Afghan government". "It could be included in the agenda of the intra-Afghan talks, but cannot be a prerequisite for talks," he said.

'Biggest challenge'

While supporters of Saturday's accord say it marks a critical first step toward peace, many Afghans fear it amounts to little more than a dressed-up US surrender that will ultimately see the Taliban return to power. The extent to which that happens hinges on the coming "intra-Afghan" dialogue between the Taliban, the Ghani administration, and other Afghan political players. But critics say Ghani has prioritized his re-election over making a deal with the Taliban, and has struggled to finalize who will negotiate with the Islamic militants.

"The biggest challenge right now is the lack of preparedness of the Afghan government to negotiate, even though they knew for several years ... that this was going to happen and that these would be the parameters of the deal," Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, told AFP. "It would be an extremely lucky situation if in 14 months there was a deal signed with the Taliban," she added, referring to the timeline under which all foreign forces are sup-

posed to quit Afghanistan. After Ghani's re-election was confirmed last month, his bitter rival Abdullah Abdullah immediately rejected the result and vowed to set up a rival administration. Washington has pointedly not congratulated Ghani. Political deal-making is notoriously difficult in Afghanistan, a country still riven by tribal and ethnic rivalries, and where squabbling leaders and warlords struggle to find common ground on important issues. The Taliban had, until now, refused to negotiate with Ghani's government—which they considered a US puppet regime. —AFP

Tough talks ahead as president objects to Taliban prisoner swap

KABUL: Afghanistan's weakened government protested yesterday against a key component of a deal between the US and the Taliban, setting the scene for fractious talks when Kabul and the insurgents meet to strike a separate agreement. President Ashraf Ghani, who faces a political crisis following claims of fraud in his recent re-election, said he would not commit to a clause in the US-Taliban deal that calls for a massive prisoner exchange, something the militants have been demanding for years.

The swap is one part of the accord, fleshed out over more than a year of talks between the US and the Taliban, that was signed Saturday in Doha and lays out a 14-month withdrawal timetable for all foreign forces—provided the militants fulfill various pledges and open talks with Kabul. Ghani committed to continue honoring a partial truce that has seen violence plummet in Afghanistan, but he pushed back against the requirement for the Taliban to release up to 1,000 prisoners and for the Afghan government to release around 5,000 insurgent captives by March 10, when talks are supposed to start.

The Afghanistan's Taliban movement

KABUL: The Taliban governed Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, imposing strict Islamic sharia law before being ousted and launching an insurgency. Here is some background on the movement:

Religious students

The Taliban originated among young Afghans who studied in Sunni Islamic schools called madrassas in Pakistan after fleeing Afghanistan during the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation. They take their name from talib, the Arabic word for student. In the early 1990s, with Afghanistan in the chaos

and corruption of civil war, the Taliban was formed in the southern province of Kandahar under the leadership of one-eyed warrior-cleric Mullah Omar. Omar, who led them until his death in 2013, was from a stronghold of the powerful Pashtun ethnic group from which come most Taliban fighters. Haibatullah Akhundzada is now the top leader, while Taliban co-founder Mullah Baradar heads the political wing.

Dramatic rise to power

Promising to restore order and justice, the Taliban rose dramatically. They drew substantial support from Pakistan and initially had the tacit approval of the United States. In October 1994, they seized the city of Kandahar, almost without a fight.

Reign of terror

The Taliban government imposed the strictest interpretations of sharia, or Islamic laws, establishing religious police for the suppression of "vice". Music, television and pastimes such as kite-flying were banned. Girls' schools were closed, while women

Equipped with tanks, heavy weapons and the cash to buy the support of local commanders, they steadily moved north, before capturing the capital Kabul on September 27, 1996. President Burhanuddin Rabbani had already fled. Taliban fighters dragged former communist president Mohammed Najibullah from a United Nations office where he had been sheltering and hanged him in a public street after torturing him.

New cases

The United States may also restrict travel on its southern border with Mexico, officials said. However, they encouraged Americans to travel around the country, including states that have recorded some of its more than 60 cases. The outbreak is disrupting flight demand and many airlines have suspended or modified services in response. After Saturday's press conference, the White House held a call with airlines to discuss new travel restrictions. American Airlines Inc said late on Saturday it was suspending all US flights to Milan.

Ecuador on Saturday reported its first case, in a woman who had traveled from Madrid, while Mexico reported four cases, all in people who had visited Italy. Brazilian officials confirmed that country's second case, a patient in Sao Paulo who recently visited Italy. As governments worldwide stepped up efforts to halt the spread of the virus, France announced a temporary ban on public gatherings with more than 5,000 people in confined spaces. It reported 16 new cases for a total of 73, and canceled a half-marathon of 40,000 runners scheduled for yesterday.

Switzerland said it is banning events expected to draw more than 1,000 people. More than 700 tourists remain quarantined at a hotel in the Canary Islands, after several Italian guests there tested positive for coronavirus. Schools and universities in Italy, which is experiencing Europe's worst outbreak of the disease, will stay



WUHAN: Medical staff treating a critical patient infected by the COVID-19 with an Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) at the Red Cross hospital in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province yesterday. —AFP

Saharan Africa, while Qatar, Ecuador, Luxembourg and Ireland all confirmed their first cases on Saturday. Governments around the world have scrambled to prevent the spread of the virus, from large-scale lockdowns of millions of people in China to flight bans and travel restrictions from disease hotspots. Beijing's drastic steps include curbing the movement of people, temporarily closing factories across China and quarantining Hubei, a key industrial province

where the virus first appeared. 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. The total in South Korea is expected to rise further as authorities screen 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. —AFP



QUETTA: Activists of Jamiat Ulema-e Islam Nazryate party shout as they celebrate the signing agreement between the US and the Taliban during a rally in Quetta yesterday. —AFP

posed to quit Afghanistan.

After Ghani's re-election was confirmed last month, his bitter rival Abdullah Abdullah immediately rejected the result and vowed to set up a rival administration. Washington has pointedly not congratulated Ghani. Political deal-making is notoriously difficult in Afghanistan, a country still riven by tribal and ethnic rivalries, and where squabbling leaders and warlords struggle to find common ground on important issues. The Taliban had, until now, refused to negotiate with Ghani's government—which they considered a US puppet regime. —AFP

By 1998, they had control of 80 percent of the country, but were only recognized as the legal government by Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. In March 2001 they blew up 1,500-year-old giant statues of the Buddha in the central Bamian valley. Mullah Omar was based mostly in Kandahar where he lived in a house reportedly built for him by Osama bin Laden. The Taliban allowed Afghanistan to become a sanctuary for Al-Qaeda, which set up training camps. —AFP



HONG KONG: Customers wearing face masks amid concerns about the spread of the COVID-19 give their orders inside a 'Cha Chaan Teng', a king of local restaurant, in Hong Kong yesterday. —AFP

closed for a second consecutive week in three northern regions. The country has reported more than 1,100 cases and 29 deaths. Analysts have warned that the outbreak looks set to shunt Italy's fragile economy into its fourth recession in 12 years, with many businesses in the wealthy north close to a standstill and hotels reporting a wave of cancellations. —Reuters

Peace, but not at our cost: Afghan women fear Taliban return

KABUL: As US troops prepare to leave Afghanistan, opening the door for a potential Taliban comeback, women across the war-torn country are nervous about losing their hard-won freedoms in the pursuit of peace. The militants were in power for around five years until the US invasion of 2001. They ruled Afghanistan with an iron fist that turned women into virtual prisoners under a strict interpretation of sharia law. The Taliban's fall transformed women's lives, much more so in urban areas like Kabul than in conservative rural Afghanistan. But across the country, women remain wary of the insurgents, desperate to see an end to the violence, but fearful of paying a heavy price. Here are some of their stories:

'How will I support my family?'

Under the Taliban, women were barred from seeking education or work - rights that Afghan female professionals are fiercely protective of today. In the western city of Herat, saleswoman Setara Akrimi, 32, told AFP: "I will be very happy if peace comes and the Taliban stop killing our people." "But if the Taliban come back to power... with their old mentality, it is a matter of concern for me," the divorced mother of three added. "If they tell me to sit at home, I will not be able to support my family," she said. "There are thousands of women like me in Afghanistan, we are all worried."

'No change in Taliban mentality'

Akrimi's anxieties are echoed by Kabul-based veterinarian Tahera Rezaei, who believes "the arrival of the Taliban will affect women's right to work, freedom and independence". "There has been no change in their mentality," the 30-year-old said. Passionate about her career, Rezaei said she was pessimistic about her prospects if the insurgents return to government, even in a truncated capacity. "Looking at their history, I feel less hopeful... I believe the situation will get harder for working women like me," she said. In the run-up to the US deal, the militants made a vague commitment to respect women's rights in line with "Islamic values", prompting warnings from activists that the pledge was mere lip service and open to broad interpretation. The Taliban control large swathes of Afghanistan and while they now allow girls to attend primary school in some areas, occasional reports of floggings and even the public stoning of women persist, fuelling fears they will turn back the clock if they return to power.

'Every family is grieving'

Many ordinary Afghans are struggling to balance their desire for peace with their dread of the insurgents. "Every family here is grieving because they have lost their children, sons, husbands, brothers in the war," government official Torpekay Shinwari said in eastern Nangarhar province, which witnessed fierce battles between the Taliban and the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate. The 46-year-old said she was praying for peace, but was increasingly concerned that "women would be looked upon as the second sex and suppressed" if the militants gain ground.

'Young generation has changed'

But in Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban, schoolgirl Parwana Hussaini struck a rare optimistic note. "I am not worried. Who are the Taliban? They are our brothers," the 17-year-old said. "We are all Afghans and want peace." Furthermore, she added: "The young generation has changed, and will not allow the Taliban to enforce their old ideology upon us." —AFP

Gatherings banned, travel restricted as coronavirus cases grow worldwide

WASHINGTON: Leaders in Europe, the Middle East and the Americas rolled out bans on big gatherings and stricter travel restrictions as cases of the new coronavirus spread around the world. The United States on Saturday reported its first death from the disease, a man in his 50s in Washington state, where officials said two of the state's three cases have links to a nursing home with dozens of residents showing disease symptoms. Although most Americans face a low risk from the virus, more US deaths could be imminent following the nation's first, CNN quoted Vice President Mike Pence as saying.

"We know there will be more cases," Pence told CNN's Jake Tapper in a clip released on Saturday, echoing President Donald Trump's earlier comments that additional cases in America were "likely." Travelers from Italy and South Korea would face additional screening, Trump and top officials told a White House news briefing, warning Americans against traveling to coronavirus-affected regions in both countries. Pence said an entry ban on travelers from Iran would be expanded to include any foreign nationals who have visited Iran in the last 14 days.

Analysis

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The First Daily in The Arabian GulfTHE LEADING INDEPENDENT
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Risky aid business in anglophone Cameroon

In Cameroon's anglophone regions, humanitarian workers are increasingly caught up in the country's separatist conflict, facing threats and violence from both sides as they struggle to deliver aid. Looting of convoys, attacks on food handouts, even kidnapping: All are part of the risks to aid workers in Cameroon's troubled Northwest and Southwest regions, where thousands have been displaced by fighting between separatist rebels and the military since 2017. Three food distributions were halted in one week alone recently, according to witnesses who spoke to AFP by telephone.

A man aged 29 was shot by soldiers at Ekona village in Southwest Region as people gathered on February 19 to receive rice and other rations from the World Food Program (WFP), the UN agency and villagers said. Ten soldiers sorted 220 internally displaced people by gender and age, said a witness who "hid for my life" in grass nearby. "They beat up everybody and took with them seven of the young guys inside one class of the primary school where they were supposed to do the distribution. They started intimidating the guys, (claiming) that they are separatists," said the witness, who asked not to be named.

The soldiers pulled a young man out of the group and shot him in the groin, the witness said. "He bled to death before the eyes of the military and everyone was there watching helplessly," he added. His account was confirmed by another villager and a regional NGO. The two regions are home to Cameroon's large anglophone minority, who account for nearly a fifth of the population of 24 million.

Years of grievances at perceived discrimination snowballed into a declaration of independence in October 2017, which was followed by a government crackdown. The conflict has claimed more than 3,000 lives and forced almost 700,000 people to flee their homes. Health centres and schools have closed, while whole villages have been burned down.

Army denial

Rights monitors have said separatist rebels and the army are both guilty of atrocities or abuses. Sources say they have carried out attacks on, or disrupted, humanitarian aid. Army spokesman Colonel Cyrille Atonfack Guemo dismissed reports of military brutality as "attempts at disinformation" aimed at "tarnishing the image of our forces". "It is inconceivable that the army, whose mission is to work to improve living conditions... should at the same time oppose the work of humanitarian organizations," the colonel said.

Witnesses said the same soldiers who disrupted food distribution at Ekona had been there before, on Dec 24. The troops arrested a humanitarian volunteer and took him to a police station. "His body, with signs of torture, was found in early January in the bush about 30 kilometres away," said one witness, whose account was backed up by an aid worker who asked for anonymity.

Humanitarian personnel can feel "caught between two forces, finding yourself on a very fine line," said Ayah Abine, president of the Ayah Foundation, a Cameroonian NGO. Soldiers often move in just after humanitarian deliveries, if not during them, while the "ambas" - secessionist fighters - will threaten or kidnap NGO staff if they suspect them of working for the government. On Feb 20, an armed group intervened during a food distribution by Caritas at Bafmeng in Northwest Region.

About 50 children and 20 adults had to scramble for safety in the lorry used by the NGO before it sped away from the scene, according to the Caritas director in Cameroon, Father Paul Njokikang. The priest added that he had been taken hostage three times by separatist groups during humanitarian operations and detained for 24 hours by the army.

Harassment and worse does not spare medical aid. On February 19, soldiers pursued a car on the grounds of a hospital supported by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in the Northwest Region. As both vehicles stopped in the ambulance parking zone, one soldier opened fire and killed the driver, MSF said. "The soldier who fired the shots was immediately arrested" and an inquiry was ordered at once "and is underway", according to the defense ministry.

Total fear

Abine, of the Ayah Foundation, said he had been "almost shot by the military" but was "saved by grace", while armed groups had kidnapped members of his NGO three times. On February 20, he was picked up by gendarmier police in Cameroon's capital Yaounde on suspicion of delivering weapons to the separatists, before being released without charge. Several officials working for international NGOs told AFP that the Ayah Foundation was a neutral party in the conflict. "This is intimidation," one official said.

For the army, Atonfack voiced "distrust regarding certain humanitarian organizations, whose acts sow doubts about their integrity... Ambulances belonging to MSF have been found transporting armed fighters as well as arms and ammunition". "Doctors Without Borders categorically refutes these serious allegations that endanger our patients and teams," MSF said in a statement. "Our ambulances are only used to transport unarmed patients in need of immediate medical care, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, religious or political beliefs." —AFP

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Democratic presidential candidate, former Vice President Joe Biden, celebrates with his supporters after declaring victory at an election-night rally at the University of South Carolina Volleyball Center on Saturday. —AFP

Biden got his comeback. Will it be enough?

Joe Biden got the win in South Carolina he desperately needed. The former vice president's decisive victory on Saturday, his first in the Democratic nominating contests for the Nov 3 election, allows him to more credibly claim that he is the leading alternative to frontrunner Bernie Sanders. But Biden faces significant hurdles. He has just two days to capitalize on the win ahead of Super Tuesday, when 14 states hold contests and more than a third of Democratic delegates are awarded.

His cash-strapped campaign has been unable to advertise heavily in delegate-rich states such as California, Texas, North Carolina and Virginia, which vote on Tuesday. Nor has he been able to compete with the ground-level operations established by Sanders and billionaire former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Instead, Biden will count on a flurry of new media attention - coupled with high name recognition as the No. 2 to Barack Obama, the first black US president - to power his bid for the party's nomination to challenge Republican President Donald Trump.

With his new momentum, Biden hopes to boost his delegate haul from the Southern states in Tuesday's voting to counter Sanders, whose grassroots army and extensive outreach to Hispanic communities could give him a boost in Texas and California. Six of the states voting on Tuesday are in the South, which like South Carolina have a more diverse population than the voting states where Biden fared poorly. Exit poll data showed he won the support from 61

percent of black voters in South Carolina, far surpassing Sanders' 17 percent.

Biden also will finally go head-to-head with Bloomberg, who skipped the early states and has spent more than \$500 million on advertising in a bid to become the Democrats' moderate standard-bearer. Biden and an outside group that supports him have spent \$16.5 million, according to the Wesleyan Media Project. "We don't have as many resources as Mr Bloomberg, but we believe that we've done our work and frankly we do believe that the momentum from this week will help propel us into Super Tuesday," said Biden adviser Symone Sanders.

Biden's struggles in the first two nominating contests in Iowa and New Hampshire made South Carolina so critical that he was unable to campaign elsewhere. A trip to North Carolina on Saturday was his first to that state since October. By contrast, Sanders, who won New Hampshire and Nevada, was able to campaign in places such as Colorado and Texas. At Biden's victory party on Saturday, Representative James Clyburn of South Carolina, whose last-minute endorsement gave Biden a heady boost, said the Biden campaign needed to improve its fundraising efforts. "We all have to sit down and get serious about how we retool this campaign," he told CNN on Saturday. "I'm not going to sit back idly and watch people mishandle this campaign."

'A shakeup is coming'

"We're excited tonight," a source close to

the Biden campaign said on Saturday. "As soon as the booze subsides, and we sober up tomorrow morning, we'll see a campaign that's poor, disorganized and skeletal in crucial states across the nation. A shakeup is coming, and we're ready for it." South Carolina could help push some wary donors off the sidelines for Biden. Several Wall Street donors told Reuters last week they were ready to support Biden if he showed he could win convincingly in South Carolina and on Super Tuesday.

Rufus Gifford, the finance chairman of Obama's 2012 campaign, said he received about 100 messages on Twitter on Saturday night after he asked other candidates' supporters to come over to Biden. "People like to support a winner," Gifford said. "As the moderate lane starts to understand Joe Biden is the best alternative, they will coalesce around him."

After debating between Biden and former South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg for months, Gifford decided to back Biden in late January and has quickly engaged his vast donor network on Biden's behalf. Biden ended January with just \$7.1 million in cash, less than enough to cover one month's expenses for his campaign, according to a campaign finance disclosure filed in February. That compares with \$16.8 million for Sanders and Bloomberg's wealth of more than \$55 billion, according to the publication Forbes.

A spike in online fundraising, including the campaign's biggest one-day haul on Wednesday, showed Biden's candidacy could be strengthening. Any influx of cash following South Carolina

will likely arrive too late to be of much use for Super Tuesday but could help the campaign in key later big voting states such as Florida.

Pivoting south

Alabama, where Biden campaigned yesterday, is a prime example of his Super Tuesday strategy. The campaign is targeting congressional districts such as the state's 7th district, which is more than 60 percent black. Biden won endorsements from the US congresswoman for the district, Terri Sewell, and Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin. "We know that the tide is turning," Sewell said. "We've been waiting for South Carolina because we know that South Carolina demographics really reflect, mostly, the demographics of America."

The Biden campaign has launched a six-figure advertising campaign, including digital, radio and television spots across the Super Tuesday states, but in limited areas and largely aimed at black voters. The ads will not be running on television in California, the biggest delegate prize on Super Tuesday. That means Biden's television ad featuring praise from Obama will almost surely be seen by fewer people than those who saw a Bloomberg ad touting his own relationship with Obama, still popular among Democrats. Mary Curry, an 83-year-old black voter in Raleigh, North Carolina, said early nominating states did not represent the country's diversity and that Biden can unify the country. "He represents all of the people," she said. "There aren't many of us in Iowa." —Reuters

Silicon Valley weighs 'shades of blue' in presidential pick

The young and idealistic voters in Silicon Valley are largely united against US President Donald Trump, but split over the rival Democratic hopefuls as the crucial Super Tuesday primaries loom. Frontrunner Bernie Sanders has gotten the most donations from the "internet industry," according to tracking by the Center for Responsive Politics with rivals Pete Buttigieg and Elizabeth Warren not far behind in the tallies.

"Silicon Valley is many shades of blue," said Vivek Wadhwa, an entrepreneur and author who is a professor at Carnegie Mellon University's Silicon Valley branch. "It is polarized, and it is polarized on the extreme left. There is a consensus here that Donald Trump is the enemy."

Sanders, who at 78 is from a different generation than the typical tech worker, connects with the younger crowd by promoting himself as a "disruptor", like many emerging tech firms, said San Jose State University political science professor Melinda Jackson. "Focus on big ideas, political revolution, generous universal benefits - these ideas really appeal to a lot of folks," Jackson said.

Turmoil opens way for return of Malay nationalists

"The power of the Malays has returned," rejoiced street hawkers Mohd Nor Afiq in Kuala Lumpur after a new prime minister was sworn in to replace 94-year-old Mahathir Mohamad. With the ascendancy of Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, the Southeast Asian country's political switchback will accelerate a return to the days of prioritizing a Malay majority that has felt hard done by since the 2018 election, analysts said.

That is likely to mean an administration willing to spend more freely on affirmative action projects and to put more Malays back into key positions - as well as one that is more religiously conservative in the largely Muslim country. "The coming to power of a coalition largely based on Malay nationalist and Islamic party credentials completely upends the inclusive and multi-racial government that swept to power in 2018," said Michael Vatikiotis, author of a recent book on Southeast Asian politics.

Disaffection among Malays had already been evident through five by-election defeats for the ruling coalition before Mahathir's sudden resignation as prime minister a week ago pitched the

country of 32 million into turmoil. Insiders said such anger was also a factor in the political maneuvering in the days before the king - a post that rotates through Malaysia's nine Malay sultans - chose Malay nationalist Muhyiddin as the new prime minister.

Diversity

Although Mahathir's own rise in past decades was based on prioritizing what Malaysians refer to as "bumiputera", the coalition he formed with more liberal old rival Anwar Ibrahim to win the 2018 election was unprecedented in its diversity. The finance ministry went to someone of Chinese origin for the first time in four decades, and the attorney general's job to a man with Indian roots. More than 40 percent of Mahathir's ministers were non-Malay Muslims. That compared to only a fifth in the cabinet of his ousted predecessor Najib Razak. While celebrating its inclusiveness as a badge of modernizing reforms, the fallen government had not done enough to assuage the concerns of Malay Muslims, according to prominent social rights activist Ivy Josiah. "We were so proud that non-Malays become ministers," she said. "The government didn't realise the fragile relationship between the races, the insecurity of the Malay Muslim and how the opposition could use religion and race to divide."

There had been plenty of warning signs. The government was forced to drop a promise to ratify a UN convention on racial discrimination after protests by groups that feared it would limit priv-

Debating income inequality

With Californians set to vote on this week's Super Tuesday, when 14 states go to the polls, support for Sanders and Warren comes even with the two progressive candidates pledging to sharply raise taxes on high earners and break up the largest tech companies which dominate key economic sectors. "Sanders does appeal to many of the workers who feel the downsides of income inequality," said Jackson.

Some analysts see support for 38-year-old Buttigieg, with a more moderate platform. Reports said a Buttigieg gathering was hosted by Netflix chief Reed Hastings and attended by people linked to Google, Facebook and other large tech firms, an event denounced by rivals as the "wine cave" fundraiser.

"Pete Buttigieg is the favored candidate of Silicon Valley as he has a tech-friendly agenda and a moderate stance in regulation," said Brookings Institution governance studies director Darrell West. "He understands how businesses operate and what they need in order to do well." West added that while idealistic tech company workers are inclined to support progressive candidates, senior executives worry about regulatory backlash.

'The other pole'

Buttigieg has the vote of Manu Koenig, who has worked at a series of tech startups and is running for an elected position in part of Silicon Valley. "For my friends and I, it is just that we want some return to normalcy rather than swinging from one pole to the other," Koenig told AFP. "Clearly, Bernie is the

other pole. That's what excites a lot of people about him and scares a lot of people about him."

The 34-year-old cited the popularity of Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar as a sign Silicon Valley voters want reason and collaboration returned to US national politics. Former vice president Joe Biden "is hardcore normalcy, but he is just too old," Koenig said. "We want normalcy 2.0, or even 3.0," he added, using a reference to improved second or third generations of a technology platform.

He sees former South Bend, Indiana mayor Buttigieg in tune with Silicon Valley ways of thinking, from climate change to quickly rolling out solutions and then improving on them as feedback or data dictate. "I think it is just an awareness of our inter-connectedness and realizing we are developing solutions together," Koenig said.

Tax-averse doubts

Volition startup founder and chief Nick Pinkston sees support for Michael Bloomberg and Buttigieg in the venture capital community. "Venture capitalists don't want to be taxed, and feel like Bernie and Warren are sort of out to get Silicon Valley," Pinkston said. These investors also count on internet giants like Google, Facebook to buy startups they have invested in early, providing lucrative returns. Breaking up big tech would undermine that strategy. Even though the tech world has mostly supported Democrats, a few high-profile executives have allied with Trump including investor Peter Thiel and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison, who recently hosted a fundraiser for the Republican president. —AFP



Malaysia's interim Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad gestures during a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. —AFP

the constitution, all Malays are Muslim. They make up more than 60 percent of the population. Most non-Malays are not Muslims.

Alongside UMNO in supporting Muhyiddin is the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), which has tried for decades to turn the country into an Islamic state and enforce harsher penalties on Muslims for adultery, theft and drinking alcohol. "Malaysia's brief dalliance with political reform and social transformation has come crashing down," said Vatikiotis, saying he believed it resulted from the power struggle that flared between Mahathir and Anwar in the final week of chaos. "It weakened the governing coalition and gave UMNO, PAS and the Malay right a chance to seize power through the back door." —Reuters

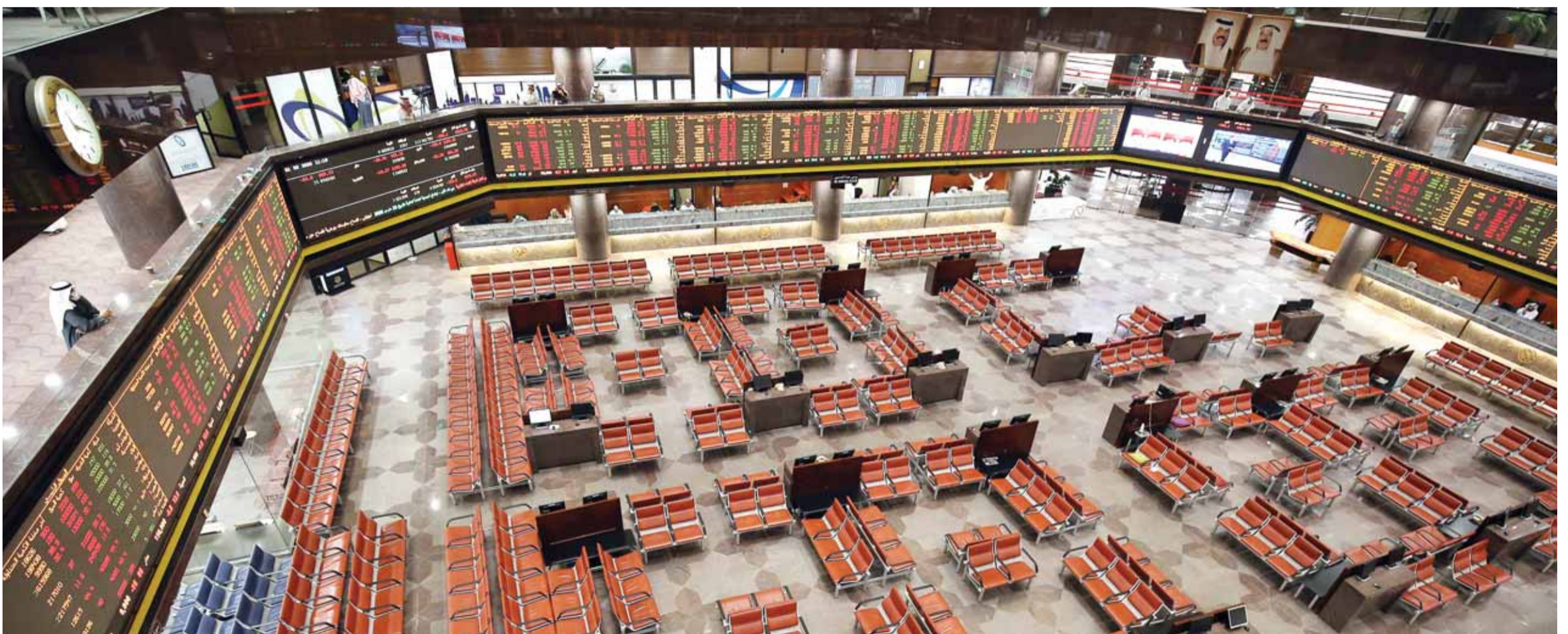
Traditionalists

"It's not that this government will have no Chinese, but at least it will be more balanced," said Mohd Nor, echoing sentiment among Malays in the capital Kuala Lumpur. Muhyiddin took office with the support of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which prospered through six decades of putting Malays first, but was felled amid anger over corruption at the 1MDB state fund. During the election campaign, Mahathir had said his administration would end handouts and that there would be greater transparency in awarding government contracts - which often went to Malays, but there was little sign of action.

"I think Muhyiddin would lead a more overtly pro-ethnic Malay government characterized by social division, economic nationalism, and possibly less fiscal restraint," said Peter Mumford of the Eurasia consultancy. There is also a religious dimension to support for the Malay traditionalist camp. According to

Business

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Argentines' preferred savings**13** Social networks on back foot as
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KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti trader wearing a protective mask follows the market at the Boursa Kuwait stock exchange in Kuwait City yesterday. All of the seven stock exchanges in the GCC which were closed the previous two days for the weekend were hit as oil prices dropped below \$50 a barrel. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

OPEC eyes deeper cuts as Russia resists

OPEC+ to meet March 5-6 to decide on output as coronavirus hits demand

RIYADH: OPEC could agree on deeper oil supply cuts this week, with or without Russia's support, to halt the slide in crude prices triggered by the global spread of the coronavirus, said two sources familiar with the talks. Moscow is resisting further output curbs, arguing that reduced production by the Saudi Arabia-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, will not necessarily revive oil demand, the sources said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said that current prices are acceptable for his country's budget and that Russia - a key member of OPEC+ - has sufficient resources to contend with any deterioration in the global economy.

"Saudi Arabia wants to hold prices from falling, but Russia is still not agreeing. So the only way might be for OPEC to cut alone, which will not send a good signal to the market," one of the sources said. "There should be a cut, there is no other option," another source said, adding that another option might be for OPEC to delay a decision until low oil prices force Moscow to come on board.

Markets rattled

Global oil and stock markets have been rattled by the spread of the coronavirus, which has infected 82,000-plus people globally, with more than 2,700 deaths in China and 57 fatalities in 46 other nations. Brent crude fell to \$49.67 a barrel on Friday, having lost more than \$15 since January.

OPEC has been discussing cutting oil production by a further 1 million barrels per day (bpd), among other options, as it seeks to stabilize declining oil prices, OPEC and industry sources said on Friday. That is more than an initially proposed cut of 600,000 bpd. The existing OPEC+ pact entails output cuts of 1.7 million bpd under a deal that runs to the end of March.

Saudi Arabia has been holding its output to 400,000 bpd beneath its quota, bringing the total effective OPEC+ cuts to 2.1 million bpd. OPEC and allies are scheduled to meet in Vienna over March 5-6 to seek agreement on production policy.

But cutting output without Russia could effectively mean an end to the cooperation between OPEC and Moscow, an outcome that Saudi Arabia and other key OPEC members would not want. Moscow has a history of agreeing to OPEC+ actions only at the last minute after showing initial reluctance.

Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman last month described as "nonsense" a media report that Riyadh is considering a break from the OPEC+ alliance with Russia.

He also expressed confidence that OPEC+ would respond responsibly to the spread of the coronavirus and that Saudi Arabia and Russia would remain engaged on oil policy. The prince has been advocating a swift oil supply cut since the initial outbreak of the virus in January, aware that delays have previously led to costly price collapses, sources familiar with the kingdom's thinking have told Reuters. Saudi

Arabia needs oil prices of about \$80 a barrel to balance its state budget while Russia can cope with prices as low as \$42.

Meanwhile, President Putin said that Russia can cope with the recent decline in oil prices as the coronavirus has spread internationally but offered a chink of light to OPEC as the producer group pushes for deeper supply cuts. Moscow has been resisting further curbs, arguing that reduced output by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, known as OPEC+, will not necessarily revive demand, sources said. OPEC+ is due to meet in Vienna this

week to decide on production policy when its existing supply pact expires at the end of March.

"I want to stress that for the Russian budget, for our economy, the current oil prices level is acceptable," Putin told a meeting with Russian energy officials and producers to discuss the coronavirus and its implications. The price of Brent crude slumped to \$50.05 on Friday, its lowest since late 2018, on fears that the coronavirus outbreak will trigger oil demand destruction.

Russia, which has more than \$560 billion in its reserves, envisages in its budget an average Brent crude price of \$42.40 a barrel, Putin said.

"Our accumulated reserves, including the National Wealth Fund, are enough for ensuring a stable situation, the fulfilment of all budget and social liabilities, even under a possible deterioration of the global economic situation," Putin said.

He added, however, that this does not set aside the need for action, "including together with foreign partners". Putin also highlighted the difficulty in forecasting moves in oil prices and acknowledged that Russia needs to be ready for various scenarios.

Three Russian nationals are receiving treatment in Russia after contracting the virus on a cruise ship in Japan, authorities have said. Two Chinese nationals were taken to hospital in Russia with the virus but have since recovered. Last week the ruble slid beyond 67 per dollar to its weakest since early 2019 and the stock market dropped, pricing in a global sell-off and another increase in tensions with Turkey over Syria. — Reuters

Boursa Kuwait notice

Based on clause 9-26-2 of the Boursa Kuwait Rulebook, trading in the "Premier" Market has been suspended until the end of yesterday's trading session due to the 10 percent decrease of the Market's index. The closing auction session has also been suspended. Suspension of trading in the "Premier" Market does not affect trading on the "Main" Market. Only a 10 percent decrease in that market's index can lead to a full day suspension of trading in the "Main" Market.

Virus-hit China's factories sputter back online

WENZHOU, China: The Xuda Shoes Company is usually bustling at this time of year, with workers having long returned from a Lunar New Year holiday in their hometowns to kick-start production of tens of thousands of shoes daily. But China's coronavirus epidemic has changed all that.

Only about one-third of the roughly 1,000-strong workforce at Xuda's factory in the eastern export hub of Wenzhou are around, the rest blocked by virus-induced travel disruptions and safety measures.

Getting back to full annual capacity of seven million pairs of shoes could take several more weeks, company officials said. The situation in Wenzhou, a trade entrepot for centuries and now a major producer of

much of the world's shoes, eyeglasses and clothing, reflects the slow progress in fully reviving China's economy, the world's second-largest and an indispensable lynchpin of global growth.

China's economy remains rooted in manufacturing, much of that for export, and heavily reliant on countless laborers from the vast interior who had returned home in January for the most important Chinese holiday before the epidemic hit, killing more than 2,800 people and infecting around 80,000. "Factories that want to restart are short of labor. Wenzhou's economy will definitely be impacted," Yang Wenjiang, a top manager with Xuda Shoes, told AFP during an interview at the factory.

"If you don't have workers, you can't produce. If you can't restart, you can't fill orders." The virus shut down provinces responsible for most Chinese economic output, including Zhejiang where Wenzhou is located. With concern rising over the impact on global growth, the world is watching how quickly Chinese

factories can be brought back online.

Ghost town

Adding to the unease, official data released Saturday indicated Chinese manufacturing activity in February was the lowest on record. But you don't need numbers to convince anyone in Wenzhou.

The city is one of the worst-hit by the contagion, with 504 cases of coronavirus infections and one death as of Saturday, compared to 337 infections in far larger Shanghai up the coast.

Consequently, tough restrictions on residents' movement were imposed in Wenzhou and other major Zhejiang cities, with fear of outsiders further complicating the return of laborers. The coastal city, with around three million people in its urban core, remains subdued, with scant road traffic and most businesses shuttered.

The western Shuangyu district, reached by a road called "Shoe Capital Avenue" in Chinese, is home to dozens of footwear factories several stories tall. But it resem-



WENZHOU, China: This photo taken on Feb 27, 2020 shows a facemask-clad worker stitching insoles at the Zhejiang Xuda Shoes Co factory. — AFP

bles a ghost town, with most factories closed or barely operating, streets empty, and row upon row of supplier businesses shuttered and silent. The short-staffing at

Xuda allows ample room for workers to obey new factory requirements to spread out in the canteen at lunch to avoid potential virus transmission. — AFP

Business

NBK Moneymarkets Report

Coronavirus sends markets to risk aversion

Equities melt down, currencies lose track

KUWAIT: Fear has set in markets throughout last week as the spread of the coronavirus sent market sentiment to risk aversion. Investors quickly opted out of risky assets, resulting in a meltdown in equities globally with the FTSE 100 lead the drop in major indices for the year dropping by 12.75 percent. Last Thursday entailed major drops in Wall Street with the Dow Jones losing 1,190 points, a 4.42 percent drop in a single trading session.

In Europe and the UK, indices had double digit losses year-to-date as equities seem to be the most affected asset class by the current chaos. Treasury yields on the other hand dipped to record lows. The US 10-year treasury yield opened the week at 1.42 percent and dropped to 1.11 percent, an all-time low.

As for monetary policy expectations, the market has been aggressive in pricing in cuts by the Fed in 2020 in reaction to the expected global growth and the worries from the effect of the coronavirus. The market has priced in 3 rate cuts by November 2020. The Fed's upcoming meeting which will be held in March 18th has an expected cut with a 100 percent probability as per the Fed Funds Futures. The expectation for major loosening in monetary policy which should result in narrower interest rate differentials have sent the greenback lower against its major rivals.

In the FX sphere, the US dollar lost its momentum this week after the market priced in 3 interest rate cuts in 2020. The dollar index opened the week at 99.855 and

continued to deteriorate as coronavirus spread globally and risk aversion set well in markets, finally closing at 98.132. Both CHF and JPY surged by 1.46 percent and 2.21 percent respectively against the US dollar as safe-haven assets were sought after by investors.

US Crude oil prices sank below \$45 a barrel reaching a drop of 25 percent year-to-date while Brent crude dipped below \$50 per barrel for the first time since December 2018. Markets are terrified that current disruption will hit GDP and downgrades to expectations for global growth will keep rolling in and accordingly oil prices suffered. Within parallel commodity linked currencies such as the Norwegian Kroner, reached levels not seen since mid-2001 at 9.43 against the US dollar.

Lagarde downplays virus effect

Christine Lagarde has played down the likelihood of the European Central Bank providing an immediate reaction to the spread of the coronavirus, which has encouraged economists to cut their eurozone growth forecasts. Lagarde's comments indicate that the central bank is hoping to keep interest rates on hold when it meets to discuss monetary policy in two weeks, despite calls from the market to cut rates and step up the bond purchase program. The policymaker said the bank would have to determine whether the virus was set to cause a "long-lasting shock" that would impact supply and demand as well as inflation. "But we are certainly not at that point yet," she said. The ECB has kept its

Rates -1st March, 2020

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0872	1.0805	1.1053	1.1026	1.0891	1.1160	1.1090
GBP	1.2970	1.2726	1.3018	1.2823	1.2625	1.3015	1.2871
JPY	111.38	107.51	111.68	108.08	106.95	109.95	106.95
CHF	0.9797	0.9610	0.9816	0.9653	0.9500	0.9841	0.9570

policy rates unchanged at negative 0.5 percent since September of 2019 when it cut the deposit rate by 10 basis points. The cautious stance by the ECB may disappoint investors who are hoping for further stimulus to fight the sell-off in financial markets.

The single currency, opened last week at 1.0846 and reached a three-week high of 1.1032 as the expected narrowing differential between the Fed and ECB played a role in the 1.73 percent increase on the week.

Japan's inflation

Japan's inflation continues to be the main focus of the BOJ, and the recent figure released on Friday

shows that core CPI year on year came at 0.5 percent and lower than market consensus of 0.6 percent and the previous reading of 0.7 percent. Moreover, the unemployment rate increased to 2.4 percent from 2.2 percent while the retail sales eased by 0.4 percent on yearly basis. With the current worries on global growth, the BOJ will have a more challenging year to reach its 2 percent target and maintain growth at the desired levels.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar USD/KWD opened at 0.30560 yesterday morning.

Dollars under the mattress: Argentines' savings

BUENOS AIRES: No sooner does she receive her paycheck in Argentine pesos than 43-year-old lawyer Eugenia exchanges them for dollars and takes them home to hide away. The fear of losing everything in a burglary pales in comparison with the mistrust she has for banks and her own country's currency.

"I don't trust the peso: it's not just now, it's always been that way," she said.

Bludgeoned by an eighth major financial crisis since 1950, many Argentines prefer to seek refuge in the US dollar as a form of savings they can hide "under the mattress." Eugenia actually hides hers in the bathroom. "I'd rather be robbed by a thief than a bank," she said.

There's nothing new about this mistrust. "Historically, things didn't go well for those who tried to save in pesos," said Matias Rajnerman, chief economist at consultants Ecolatina.

"Those who did so in dollars, did well. It's the consequence of a broken financial system." For 18 months Argentina has been in a recession provoked by a currency collapse. The poverty rate in the country of 44 million is over 40 percent, inflation is around 55 percent and unemployment has risen over 10 percent.

The economy shrunk by 3.1 percent in 2019, and Argentine debt is more than 90 percent of GDP. One of the country's major problems is its citizens' mistrust of the peso, which has deprived the government of much-needed dollars.

No faith in the peso

When the new government of center-left Peronist Alberto Fernandez came to power, it moved to combat currency flight by slapping a 30 percent tariff on foreign currency purchases and maintaining the previous government's purchase cap of \$200 per month.



BUENOS AIRES: Bludgeoned by an eighth major financial crisis since 1950, many Argentines prefer to seek refuge in the US dollar as a form of savings they can hide "under the mattress."

Ahead of Fernandez's assumption of power, 52-year-old interior decorator Sofia withdrew all her dollar savings.

"What can I do?" she asked, pointing out that the peso lost almost 40 percent of its value in 2019, after losing more than 50 percent in 2018. Fernandez's measures appear to be working, as the peso has stabilized at 63 to the dollar. The exchange rate was 18 to the dollar before the currency crash.

However, a black market exchange, with a rate of 83 to the dollar, has seen a surge in transactions due to the monthly limit on purchasing dollars. But experts say it's unlikely Argentine faith in the peso will grow. "In this country there's a systematic history of violating the saver's legal security," said Rajnerman.

"Private savings end up being seized by the government or exchanged into bonds. It happened several times, it happened in 2001," when Argentina suffered its worst economic crisis in modern times as it defaulted on a \$100 billion debt.

It was the year that then-president Fernando de la Rúa limited Argentines to withdrawing 250 pesos (then worth \$250) a week from banks.

De la Rúa inherited a ticking time bomb from the government of Carlos Menem (1989-1999) who had linked pesos to the dollar. Since then, many Argentines have

hoarded their dollars outside the country.

However the government plans to increase taxes on personal and foreign assets, while also imposing tariffs on those who take their savings out of Argentina.

According to the country's central bank, Argentines are holding \$300 billion of savings in foreign accounts in the United States and Switzerland, among other places. But economists say this dollar flight causes a vicious cycle. "If we keep dollars under the mattress or take them out of the country, it reduces the financial system ... and that makes it difficult to turn things around," said Rajnerman.

Safe deposit boxes

Financial uncertainty has led to a spike in requests for safe deposit boxes in banks, some of which even have waiting lists.

Fabiana, a 56-year-old doctor, wanted to stash her \$40,000 savings in one. "But I didn't get it, many people got there before me," she said. The desperation to escape from government controls, taxes and the banks has led many Argentines to emigrate, despite their country being one of the richest in the world in terms of natural resources.

"In Argentina, no one respects your money," said a 40-year-old businessman who moved with his family to Uruguay and declined to give his name. — AFP

ABK-Egypt reports strong results for financial year 2019

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait - Egypt (ABK-Egypt), one of Egypt's fastest growing banks, has reported strong results for financial year 2019. Net operating profit increased 39 percent year-on-year to reach EGP 1 billion, while net interest income grew 38 percent to EGP 1.43 billion.

ABK-Egypt's year-on-year performance was very strong with net profit standing at EGP 749 million (after excluding foreign exchange revaluation impact), total assets rising by 27 percent to reach EGP 35.69 billion. Customer loans also grew by 20 percent year-on-year to reach EGP 19.14 billion and customer deposits grew by 17 percent to reach EGP 28.19 billion.

Ali Ibrahim Marafi, Chairman of ABK-Egypt, said: "We are extremely pleased with the Bank's performance in 2019, particularly the double-digit increases in net interest income and total assets. We are working hard to ensure we keep the momentum achieved over the past four years. In line with our strategy, we will continue investing in our people as our number one asset, to ensure providing our clients from all segments with the best-in-class service. We have a shared goal of service excellence and growth, to maximize long-term shareholder value."

Khaled El Salawy, CEO and Managing Director of ABK-Egypt, said: "These results reflect ABK-Egypt's underlying strength and our emphasis on steady, profitable growth. All of our key performance indicators are up, with many areas of double-digit percentage growth, which reflects this team's ability to translate our ambitious strategy into tangible results. We are currently working on our digital transformation strategy, which will have a positive effect on



Ali Ibrahim Marafi



Khaled El Salawy

our customer service levels and ultimately the bottom line. I would like to seize this opportunity to thank our management & staff for their continuous hard work & dedication as we move into 2020 with confidence."

In January, ABK-Egypt's progress and efforts were recognized by International Finance Magazine for the third year. ABK-Egypt was named 'Fastest Growing Bank in Egypt', in recognition of its strong commercial performance and its multiple efforts to make banking more accessible and straightforward.

In addition to its extensive and growing bank network, ABK-Egypt offers a range of digital services, such as online, mobile and phone banking, along with a broad suite of corporate, retail and SME banking products and services.

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.836
Indian Rupees	4.254
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 Bhat	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	24.000
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	299.000

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer	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 Peso	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

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	0.111182	0.111182
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
Slovenian Euro	0.027837	0.032837
Swedish Krona	0.311662	0.322662
Swiss Franc		
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 Bhat	0.009369	0.009919
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.000103
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.806689	0.814797
Egyptian Pound	0.019384	0.021214
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

Social networks on back foot as digital campaigns expand tactics

Online giants struggle to curb disinformation and foreign influence campaigns

WASHINGTON: Social platforms are scrambling to cope with the onslaught of political messages involving celebrity endorsements, bots and manipulated videos as the US election campaign is shaken up by Democratic candidate Michael Bloomberg's deep-pocketed efforts. The surge in questionable political content comes as online giants struggle to curb disinformation and foreign influence campaigns which came to prominence in the 2016 election.

While Twitter has banned candidate ads and Facebook has moved for more transparency, none appear prepared for new digital efforts-including memes and paid endorsements-that skirt the rules to get campaign messages to as many people as possible. "The social media platforms don't have a good handle on how they are going to define political advertising," said Boston University professor Michelle Amazeen, who specializes in political communication. Billionaire Bloomberg's entry into the Democratic presidential race has created new challenges for social networks by using paid celebrity "influencers" and "digital organizers" to post messages about his campaign. Bloomberg has spent more than \$56 million on Facebook alone, and US President Donald Trump some \$25 million. "The Bloomberg campaign has taken us into uncharted waters," testing social networks' policy on deception and manipulation, said Emerson Brooking, a researcher at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab. Brooking said that paying an army of social media users to post on his behalf borders on deceptive because it "is intended to create the appearance of a digital grassroots that may not exist." Twitter and Facebook have said they allow some of these messages but that they should be labeled as "paid partnerships" or "branded content" while noting that election disclosure rules remain vague on these activities.

Regulating 'on the fly'

Lindsay Gorman, a researcher at the Alliance for Securing Democracy, a security advocacy group, said social platforms are reacting "on the fly" to the rapidly changing strategies. "We are seeing multiple examples of manipulated media and content, and it is difficult for the platforms to respond to these

new tools, so they are making policy in real time." Most social media restrictions focus on paid advertising but steer clear of "organic" messages from candidates themselves and their supporters. "Bloomberg exposed a vulnerability in the platforms," said Republican digital strategist Eric Wilson. "It's like squeezing a toothpaste tube," Wilson said. "Campaigns want to get their message out and if you cut off ads it moves to a different area, like 'organic' advertisers." Bloomberg drew attention recently for one video from a debate in Nevada that was edited to show his Democratic rivals apparently dumbfounded, with added sound effects from crickets. Some critics argued the ad should be banned-and Twitter said it would be labeled as "manipulative" under forthcoming rules, even though it was not a "deepfake" altered by artificial intelligence. Wilson said the ad used widely accepted campaign techniques and would be permissible on television: "I think if you mash up video clips and add crickets it's not disinformation."

Managing memes

Another thorny issue for social platforms is dealing with memes which can be powerful messages but also may test the limits of misinformation. Candidates like Bloomberg as well as his Democratic rival Bernie Sanders, the current frontrunner, are seeking to learn from Trump's effective use of memes in the 2016 campaign, said Heather Woods, a Kansas State University professor and co-author of "Make America Meme Again: The Rhetoric of the Alt-Right."

"Memes are often satirical or layered with inside jokes, so they're hard to fact-check," Woods said. "In 2016 memes were central to disseminating or transmitting political information but they were also important for bringing together groups of people to support an idea." Memes can be "important persuasive forms of communication" but also may spread disinformation, according to Woods, creating a conundrum for social networks. Memes and other forms of satire are challenging for the platforms, and were used by Russian groups seeking to sow division, according to analysts. Gorman said platforms "haven't really thought about this," but that they should focus on intent rather than format.



WASHINGTON: An AFP journalist looks at a computer screen displaying a political meme based on the Star Wars movie series announcing Bernie Sanders as the new US President in 2020 based on the Star Wars movie series in Washington on Friday. —AFP

"I would draw the line at deceptive manipulation," she said.

Bots again?

Although social networks have had some success in removing automated accounts or "bots," many still operate in the political arena. The online tracker Bot Sentinel found tens of thousands of bots active on Twitter, many amplifying messages on behalf of Trump, with Sanders also high on the list.

"It seems to be a vector for people interfering in our elec-

tions," said Wilson. "There is very little cost and it has an impact." Gorman said social media platforms have made progress in rooting out foreign actors using bots, but questions whether the same manipulation techniques used in 2016 will resurface. "The shift to private groups and encrypted communications will influence the prospects for disinformation," she said, noting that WhatsApp has been used to circulate hoaxes, notably in India. "This trend could make it harder to police disinformation." —AFP

Crypto developers seize on coronavirus for morbid token

NEW YORK: Cryptocurrency developers have created a digital coin that allows traders to bet on the coronavirus epidemic, based on how many people fall ill or die. Called the "CoronaCoin", its supply will diminish every two days based on the rate of new cases, according to its website - suggesting its price could move higher the more people the virus kills.

The coronavirus epidemic is becoming global, with six new countries reporting their first cases on Friday and the World Health Organization raising its global spread and impact alert to "very high". Latest WHO figures indicate more than 82,000 people have been infected, with more than 2,700 deaths in China and 57 deaths in 46 other countries.

The rapid spread of the virus, which emerged in China in December, has stoked a frenzied selloff in global markets, with the three major US stock indexes on track for their worst week since the 2008 financial crisis. Total supply for the CoronaCoin is based on the world population, and tokens will be burnt once every 48 hours based on the number of those that have been infected or have died, according to its website.

"Some people speculate a large portion of the supply will be burned due to the spread of the virus, so they invest," Sunny Kemp, a user who identified himself as one of the developers, said in a chat on messaging app Telegram. Kemp said the team comprised seven developers with more coming on board. He declined to identify others, but said they were located mostly in Europe.

Cryptocurrencies like bitcoin are digital cur-



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

rencies that rely on advanced cryptography to validate their transactions. The nascent asset class has been plagued by frequent price crashes and scams. Transactions are recorded through a digital ledger called blockchain. The CoronaCoin blockchain documents the spread of the virus and the token can be bought and sold on some online exchanges, such as Saturn.Network, according to Kemp.

Around 20 percent of supply of supply will be

allocated for donation monthly to the Red Cross using a well-known cryptocurrency payments processor, Kemp said. Some users of social media platform Reddit users criticized the token. "Frankly, this is amoral," said one. "Tasteless," commented another. "This is why we can't have nice things," wrote a third. Asked whether the token could be seen as morbid, Kemp said: "There are currently active pandemic bonds issued by the WHO. How is that different?" —Reuters

China cuts IPO red-tape in new securities law

BEIJING: China's new securities law which simplifies regulations for stock exchange listings and tightens sanctions on insider trading came into force yesterday. The revised legislation, which was adopted at the end of last year, was "a milestone in the country's capital market reform", the official Xinhua news agency said.

It cuts red tape for initial public offerings, which no longer need prior approval from the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC). Companies are also no longer required to be profitable before listing but must provide precise financial information.

Chinese authorities have recently begun initiatives to attract listings by large tech firms.

In July, the Shanghai Stock Exchange launched its Nasdaq-style STAR board for technology stocks. The platform is responsible for registering IPO requests. The amended securities law also offers better protection for minority investors and requires companies to establish dispute resolution mechanisms to address shareholder grievances and improve transparency.

Companies found guilty of making false or misleading statements or withholding important information from shareholders are liable to face penalties ranging from one to 10 million yuan (\$143,000 to \$1.4 million). The law also includes tougher punishments for securities fraud and insider trading.

Individuals found guilty of insider trading will be fined two to 10 times



BEIJING: China's new securities law cuts red tape for initial public offerings, which no longer need prior approval from the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC). —AFP

the value of their ill-gotten gains. Financial sector employees, including regulators and those who work for brokerages or stock exchanges, are also barred from securities trading for their own account. —AFP

Al-Tijari announces Al-Najma winners

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank conducted the weekly and monthly draws on Al-Najma Account. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Zainab Fadhel Al-Shirazi.

The results of the draws were as follows:

1- Al-Najma monthly account - the prize of KD 20,000 was for the share of Rahmat Tullah Sharif Ullah.

2- Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 was for the share of May Abdulrahman Al-Seaidan.

The bank stated that the account prizes this year is featured by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that Al-Najma Account will offer weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked

bank account payout of KD 1,500,000. Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, where each KD 25 will give the customer one chance to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

America's uninsured and brutal work culture

WASHINGTON: Like many Americans, bartender Danjale Williams is worried about the growing threat of the novel coronavirus.

What makes the 22-year-old in Washington even more frightened: The thought of medical bills she just can't afford, as one of almost 27.5 million people in the United States who don't have health insurance.

"I definitely would second guess before going to the doctor, because the doctor's bill is crazy," she said. "If it did come down to that, I don't have enough savings to keep me healthy." As the virus begins spreading in the west of the country, where the first death was reported Saturday, public health experts warned the US has several characteristics unique among wealthy nations that make it vulnerable. These include a large and growing population without medical insurance, the 11 million or so undocumented migrants afraid to come into contact with authorities, and a culture of "powering through" when sick for fear of losing one's job. "These are all things that can perpetuate the spread of a virus," said Brandon Brown, an epidemiologist at UC Riverside.

The number of Americans without health insurance began falling from a high of 46.7 million in 2010 following the passage of Obamacare (the Affordable Care Act), but has risen again over the past two years. The current figure is about 8.5 percent of the population.

Getting through the door

Public health experts often worry about the destructive potential of a pandemic in poorer parts of the world like sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia.

These poverty-plagued regions have hospitals that are ill-equipped to stop the spread of infectious diseases, or to adequately care for patients needing breathing assistance, which the most severe cases of COVID-19 require.

By contrast, the US has some of the world's best hospitals and medical staff, but those not lucky enough to have good insurance through their employer, and not poor enough to qualify for state insurance, often opt out of the system entirely. A routine doctor's visit can run into hundreds of dollars for those without coverage.

"I think that it's possible if this has the sustained spread, that might highlight some of those health care disparities that we already know about and are trying to work on, but haven't figured out a way to solve," said Brian Garibaldi, the medical director of Johns Hopkins Hospital's biocontainment unit. That's not to say uninsured people have no recourse if they fall seriously ill. US law requires that people who are truly sick get the care they need, regardless of ability to pay. Abigail Hansmeyer, a Minnesota resident who along with her husband is uninsured, said that if she did fall ill, "we may seek out the emergency room for treatment."

But being treated doesn't mean the visit was free and the uninsured can be lumped with huge bills after. "So we have to very carefully consider costs in every situation," the 29-year-old said. One of the key messages the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has put out about the coronavirus is to stay home if you have mild respiratory symptoms, except to go to the doctor once you have called in and if they think you need to. "But a lot of people, depending on their jobs, their position and their privilege, are not able to do that," said Brown.

The US is alone among advanced countries in not offering any federally mandated paid sick leave. Though private companies offer an average of eight days per year, only 30 percent of the lowest paid workers are able to earn sick days, according to the Economic Policy Institute. —AFP

Huawei builds solid foundation for the intelligent world 2030

First global live streaming of Industrial Digital Transformation Conference held

KUWAIT: Mobile World Congress (MWC) Barcelona 2020 has been cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak but yesterday, Huawei held its global Industrial Digital Transformation Conference. It was held via live streaming connecting guests from across the world including UK, Switzerland, USA, Germany and Italy with the theme "Hi, Intelligent World". The conference previewed five trends of an intelligent world 10 years from now and proposed a foundation built on new types of connectivity, computing, platform, and ecosystem. This will enable the intelligent development of a wide variety of industries, including urban development, manufacturing, energy, finance, transportation, and so on. The ASEAN Economic Community, Shenzhen Airport Group, and other customers also shared their insights and experiences in digital transformation.

In the future, information flows with new ICT, such as 5G, AI, and IoT, will help us build the foundation from which everything originates. Simply put, the world of 2030 will be intelligent. Standing at the start of a new decade, Huawei believes the intelligent world 2030 will have five features:

- 1) at a governmental level, people-oriented digital governments will be built to adapt to people's livelihoods better;
- 2) at an economic level, intelligent robots will make up a critical part of a future labor force;
- 3) at a social level, digital technology will help equalize the sharing and proper distribution of education, healthcare, and other public resources, achieving digital equality;
- 4) from a cultural point of view, citizens will be freed from heavy physical labor and tedious repetitive work, and their focus will naturally shift from material value to mental values; and
- 5) from an environmental point of view, the deployment of various digital technologies, we help us monitor and control carbon emissions more effectively and, as a result, help protect the earth.

Ma Yue, Vice President of Huawei Enterprise Business Group, commented: "The next decade will witness rapid development of new ICT. Huawei believes new types of connectivity, computing, platform, and ecosystem will build a solid foundation for the intelligent world of 2030. Ultra-broadband and high-speed networking built using 5G, Wi-Fi 6, and quantum com-

munications will bridge the physical and digital worlds, laying a foundation for the intelligent world."

Ma continued: "New computing will offer a full-stack, all-scenario solution that covers bottom-layer chips, all the way to upper-layer algorithms, spanning consumers to business and which constitutes the core of intelligent transformation. The converged, shared, and digital platform features high efficiency and openness, enabling customers to focus on their own unique advantages and service innovation, therefore playing a key role in enabling the digital transformation of industries. Based on enterprise business Strategy, Architecture, Policy, and Operations (SAPO), the new ecosystem that provides a single field of expertise allied to multiple skills and is deeply integrated, can offer a more comprehensive customer-oriented business solutions."

The intelligent world of 2030 cannot exist without the digital transformation of industries across the spectrum. Huawei has accumulated extensive experience in helping industries such as government, transportation, finance, and electric power achieve digital transformation for the present and the future, through new connectivity, computing, platform, and ecosystem. Currently, more than 700 cities worldwide and 228 of the Fortune Global 500 companies, including 58 of the Fortune Global 100 companies, have selected Huawei as their partner for digital transformation.

Dr Aladdin D. Rillo, Deputy Secretary-General for ASEAN Economic Community commented: "ASEAN's digital economy soared to \$100 billion for first time in 2019, and is expected to grow to over \$300 billion by 2025. For governments, business and society, digital transformation is no longer an option but an imperative path to empower the economy and businesses. To further promote digital transformation in ASEAN, new initiatives are currently being pursued such as the development of 5G ecosystem, framework on international mobile roaming, smart manufacturing, and an ASEAN innovation network. But to be successful, we also need the support of the private sector and market players like Huawei particularly in building an innovation friendly ecosystem and addressing issues related to big data and data privacy."

Zhang Lixuan, GM of Digitalization, Shenzhen Airport Group (SAG), talked



Ma Yue, Vice President of Huawei Enterprise Business Group



Zhang Lixuan, GM of Digitalization, Shenzhen Airport Group



Dr. Aladdin D. Rillo, Deputy Secretary-General for ASEAN Economic Community

about how the group delivered digital transformation and constructed a smart airport. The digital transformation of an airport is a complex project but with its vision of "One Airport, One Dream", SAG created a systematic approach to building a fully-digital airport with outstanding user experience. The Group selected Huawei as its strategic partner for digital transformation, using the Huawei Horizon Digital Platform with cloud-network synergy.

The platform integrated six ICT resources - IoT, big data, AI, video cloud, GIS, and ICP - to construct four comprehensive service systems: security, operations control, services, and management. The single-view of airport operations has had significant benefits, including increasing flight punctuality to 87 percent, and intelligent stand allocation that can complete within seconds, reducing the number of shuttle bus passengers by 4 million annually. This makes Shenzhen Airport become the world's first organization to publish cases on the New Experience in Travel and Technologies (NEXTT) platform. From a security point of view, the new system provides more accurate and intelligent control over terminal areas, airfields, public areas, and cargo areas. The facial recognition solution improves security check efficiency by 60 percent, reduces the risk of passengers' loss of ID card by taking it out for checking, and meets the differentiated requirements of business passengers.

Chen Kunte, former Chief Information Officer of China Merchants Bank and currently Chief Digital Transformation Officer of Global Financial Services in Huawei's Enterprise Business Group, commented on the huge changes in the Chinese banking

industry. In the future, the 'app' will become an ecosystem that integrates retail and corporate customers, and serve as a technology platform to bring banking services into digital world. The traditional concept of banks' digital transformation was only as a technology transformation for replacing core application systems. However, he believes that real digital transformation is a process of integrating IT and business teams and that rapid, step-by-step deployment, fast iteration, and technology agility will drive business agility.

In the future, 5G will drive significant improvements in app capabilities that will help bring banking services into the digital world, helping branches and account managers regain engage with retail and corporate customers much more regularly. He cited China Merchants Bank as an example. The bank established a private cloud and mobile platform, and opened host functions to manage devices and users, and control mobile network security. It also built a big data platform with decoupled architecture and applied AI and machine learning to the entire business chain to enhance credit risk control. Furthermore, it deployed a financial transaction cloud and moved applications from the host to the cloud, enhancing customer experience and supporting continuous service innovation.

Liu Jianming, Director of the Expert Committee on "Smart Grid Technology and Equipment", Industry Development Promotion Center, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) of China, believes that future power systems will integrate digital technology extensively with traditional power. As digital technologies usage continues to expand in the elec-

tric power field, future power systems will evolve toward "universal connectivity, intelligent interaction, high flexibility, and solid security and control."

In his speech, Director Liu introduced several cases of digital transformation practices in China's electric power industry. In 2019, the Qinhai Green Energy Cloud Network Control Platform and Big Data Center supported the Qinhai Province of China for 15 consecutive days using 100 percent clean energy. When applied to power transmission and distribution services, AI technology improved inspection efficiency, and increased the intelligent ability of equipment identification operations by 90 percent. ICT is now supporting the daily operations of the public charging infrastructure, serving more than 500,000 electric vehicles in China with a goal of 6.18 million by the end of the year.

Recently, the coronavirus outbreak has attracted global attention. The Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Sichuan subsidiaries of the State Grid Corporation of China (SGCC) analyzed the power index of enterprise resumption based on big data from the electricity grid. This has helped provide local government authorities with an overview of the resumption of local enterprise production.

We are honored to participate in this astonishing era of intelligent development. Huawei Enterprise Group's "Platform + AI + Ecosystem" strategy focuses on cooperation with ecosystem partners, governments and enterprises to build a solid foundation for the intelligent world with new types of connectivity, computing, platform, and ecosystem, and together delivering the promise of the intelligent era.

Huawei releases new 5G products and solutions

KUWAIT: Ryan Ding, Executive Director of the Board and President of Huawei's Carrier BG, has recently released Huawei's new 5G products and solutions while also launching the company's new 5G Partner Innovation Program. These efforts aim to build a thriving 5G ecosystem and make 5G a commercial success.

5G has developed beyond imagination in terms of deployment, ecosystem, and experience, says Ding, and networks are the foundation for the 5G business. So far, Huawei has been awarded 91 commercial 5G contracts. As a leading global 5G supplier, Huawei is committed to developing the best end-to-end 5G solutions. These will include the industry's highest-performance 5G base station that supports all scenarios. Huawei is also the first vendor in the industry to provide industrial 5G modules for vertical applications.

Ding emphasized that in the 4G era, virtually all operators provided the same network experience. However, in the 5G era, operators can provide differentiated experiences and charge users based on more metrics, including data volume, latency, bandwidth, and number of devices connected. This makes it possible to monetize 5G, and it is critical that operators redefine their 5G business models now.

At the event, Ding also launched the 5G Partner Innovation Program. Through this program, Huawei plans to invest US\$20 million into innovative 5G applications over the next 5 years, contributing to a thriving 5G ecosystem and accelerating the commercial success of 5G. Huawei and its global partners have worked together on multiple 5G projects, covering many domains including new media, campus, healthcare, and education.

Peng Song, President of Huawei's Carrier BG Marketing and Solution Sales Dept, separately confirmed the release of a cutting-edge Huawei 5G network which is intended to help operators achieve commercial 5G success. It includes a series of product solutions, such as the simplified radio access network (RAN), smart IP network, ultra-high-bandwidth transport network, green connections, and AI-enabled end-to-end 5G services.

Looking to the future of 5G, Huawei and



Yang Chaobin, President of Huawei 5G product line



Ryan Ding, Executive Director of the Board and President of Huawei's Carrier BG

several industry partners also launched a 5GDN Industry White Paper this month. Since the establishment of 5G Deterministic Networking Alliance (5G DNA) last year, this is the first time the 5G DNA has introduced 5G Deterministic Networking (5GDN) comprehensively, including definition, concepts, key technologies, and successful use cases of 5GDN. This release opens a new chapter for 5G development and promotes development of more network applications. An analysis of more than 100 applications in over 10 industries showed that the requirements of industry digitalization for 5G networks can be

divided into three aspects: differentiated networks with orchestratable capabilities, dedicated networks with guaranteed data security, and self-service (DIY) networks with autonomous management.

In parallel, Yang Chaobin, President of Huawei 5G Product Line, has unveiled Huawei's 10 key enablers of 5G, including the full-series all-scenario ultra-broadband products and solutions to facilitate all frequency band evolution to 5G, and the innovative end-to-end super uplink and slicing solutions to help operators build full-service capabilities.

These offerings are intended to better cater for end users, home users, and industry users to secure business success in the 5G era.

Main Street leans toward Sanders, Wall St says Trump

NEW YORK: Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders may be surging in the polls ahead of Super Tuesday, but some on Wall Street have made their own conclusions on what November will bring: four more years of President Donald Trump. Ninety-five percent of participants in a Deutsche Bank survey of investors, economists and other market participants released earlier this month said Trump, a Republican, was either "extremely likely" or "slightly likely" to win the general election.

Those results contrast with some wider recent polls cited on RealClearPolitics, which show any Democrat beating Trump in a presidential contest, although top contenders have a bigger lead. The latest Reuters/Ipsos poll, conducted Feb. 19-25, showed Sanders with a seven percentage-point lead over Trump in a hypothetical general election matchup.

The sharp mismatch in expectations could stoke market volatility if Wall Streeters are wrong and a Democrat emerges victorious - especially if that winner is Sanders, whose promises to break up big banks, take on drug compa-

nies and essentially abolish private insurance in favor of a single government-run plan have unnerved some investors. Many on Wall Street were unprepared for Trump's win in 2016, which was followed by sharp swings in asset prices.

"As an investor, I look at this and say the market's nightmare scenario is that Bernie or Elizabeth Warren wins the election," said Phil Orlando, chief equity market strategist at Federated Investors, in New York. "That's not our base case ... but it's a concern," he said.

Warren's policy proposals, like Sanders', have also jangled nerves on Wall Street. Investors will be looking ahead to next Tuesday, when 14 states will cast ballots and Sanders could build an overwhelming advantage if he captures the lion's share of the available delegates.

Those primaries come as the markets are gripped by concerns over the economic fallout from the spreading coronavirus outbreak, with the number of cases beyond China accelerating rapidly. US stocks were extending the week's losses on Friday and were on track for a 7th day in the red after the S&P 500 on Thursday confirmed its fastest correction in history. Orlando said Sanders' rise in the polls also contributed to the recent sell-off. Some investors noted that continued volatility in markets or an economic downturn could wear away at Trump's support. While the market gyrations are likely to drown out some of the potential impact from next week's voting results, some corners are already feeling the effects of Sanders' recent success. — Reuters



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of 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

What's On



KAC receives passengers with special festivities



Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) recently received passengers arriving at T4 with special festivities during which it distributed Kuwaiti flags and gifts and took photos with the passengers on the occasion of

celebrating the national anniversaries.

In this regard, KAC's PR and Media manager, Fayez Al-Enezi said: "Kuwait Airways has been annually keen on commemorating these two happy anniversaries with passengers arriving home".

Al-Enezi added that KAC is always keen on playing an effective role in community service and providing the best services to its customers starting with booking, terminal and onboard services and finally receiving them.



Austrian 'iceman' diver chases records in the deep

It was not the way Christian Redl's latest deep-diving record attempt was meant to end: being hauled to the surface of Austria's frozen Weissensee lake after losing consciousness in the icy waters. Redl - dubbed "the iceman" - had suffered a blackout, something he sees as par for the course in his quest to break the record for the deepest dive under ice. "For me, it's not risky or dangerous. It just happened," the 43-year-old told AFP matter-of-factly after his unsuccessful record attempt last Friday.

The Austrian, who has had similar blackouts before, is part of a small group of freedivers in the world specializing in diving under ice. His aim was to dive 71 meters (233 feet) deep into the Weissensee-itself covered in 30 centimeters (12 inches) of ice-braving the two degree Celsius (35.6 degree Fahrenheit) water wearing just a wetsuit and fins.

But exerting himself excessively on the way up resulted in a lack of oxygen to the brain, which caused a blackout. He was dragged up by one of his six safety divers and pulled onto the ice where a waiting medical team sprung into action with an oxygen mask.

Drowned corpse roles

It is the latest chapter in a life dominated by a passion for diving that began at the age of six when Redl's uncle gave him fins and a mask as a present. They were put to use snorkeling on a Vienna lake, before he started scuba diving aged 10. Seven years later he saw "The Big Blue", French director Luc Besson's film about the friendship and rivalry between two freedivers. "This movie changed my life completely because my biggest dream was to become like Jean Reno in this movie, a world record holder," Redl says. But work commitments meant he



Austrian iceman diver Christian Redl

only had the winter months to attempt records, which led to him to specialize in ice diving, earning him his "iceman" moniker.

At 30 he quit his job as an investment banker to become a professional freediver, supporting himself with teaching and occasional acting work. His ability to hold his breath under water for up to six minutes has given him a somewhat macabre niche of drowned corpse roles. His first record came in 2003, a 90-metre horizontal distance dive under ice. In preparation for his latest attempt, perhaps surprisingly Redl only did one practice dive on the Weissensee itself, otherwise sticking to an indoor pool on the outskirts of Vienna.

"I do everything with my mental strength so I really don't care about the cold," he told AFP before the attempt on Friday. New Zealand freediver and rival Ant Williams, the holder of the record Redl wanted to clinch, understands the challenges only too well.

"The water is not only freezing cold, it is pitch black and foreboding," he told AFP by email. "It is far more intimidating and uncomfortable than normal diving," Williams said, adding that he regards his Austrian rival as "talented" and "more than capable of pushing the record deeper".

'You will die'

As for his hardest dive to date, Redl says that came on Nepal's Gokyo lake at an altitude of 5,160 meters, requiring him to undertake six months of training to deal with the lack of oxygen. "The first 10 doctors said 'it is impossible, you will die'," Redl said. "The 11th one said 'yes, you will die, but it's a cool project'. So I concentrated on the second part of this sentence." Ernest Turnschek, who owns a diving school at Weissensee and has known Redl for more than 20 years, says an increasing number of "hard core" divers have been coming to the lake to try their hand at ice diving.

When he first considered teaching ice diving 30 years ago, many found it laughable. "Now everyone is talking about it... They are fascinated by the hues under the water," Turnschek says. Redl also waxes lyrical about his chosen sport. "The most incredible thing is when you swim back to the surface and you take the first breath, it's like you are reborn. This is really amazing," he says. The urge to go ever deeper, to stay underwater for longer is "like you're addicted". But Redl admits that the sport is not getting any easier for him. "I feel as I get older and older that I need much more training than nine years ago, when I achieved the record the first time" - back then the dive was 61 meters. Nevertheless, Redl has said he may not be able to resist another attempt to re-conquer the record. — AFP



Health & Science

To 11 million Brazilians, the Earth is flat

SAO PAULO, Brazil: Sitting by a model of the Earth shaped like a pancake, Brazilian restaurant-owner Ricardo lets out an exaggerated laugh: "Hahaha! That's how people react when you tell them the Earth is flat," he says.

Ricardo, who declines to give his full name for just that reason, is a 60-something man whose restaurant in Sao Paulo has become a meeting place for people who, like him, reject the notion that the Earth is a sphere.

"The only things I know for certain are that I'm going to die someday and that the Earth is flat," he says.

It is a curious but remarkably large club: more than 11 million people in Brazil — seven percent of the population — believe the Earth is flat, according to polling firm Datafolha. And their influence stretches surprisingly far, in a country currently swept up in the post-truth era and the anti-intellectual, climate-change-skeptic worldview embodied by far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

One of Bolsonaro's most prominent ideologues, the writer and former astrologer Olavo de Carvalho, has said he "cannot refute" Flat-Earth theory. Yet Brazil's Flat-Earthers are also a secretive, at times paranoid, community, communicating via encrypted messages on WhatsApp, invitation-only Facebook groups and especially on YouTube, where their channels have tens

of thousands of followers.

There, they are free to state what they believe, without fear of ridicule: that the Earth is a flat, stationary body. It is an argument they advance with varying interpretations of physics, optics and the Bible, dismissing all evidence to the contrary as a conspiracy.

'Humankind's greatest lie'

Brazilians who believe the Earth is flat are mostly men, often Catholics or evangelical Christians, and with relatively low levels of education, according to Datafolha. But don't confuse education with knowledge, the Flat-Earthers warn. "Flat-Earthers are the smartest. Write that!" says Anderson Neves, a 50-year-old entrepreneur, who has come to Ricardo's restaurant armed with a pamphlet denouncing the "hoaxes" of Newton and Copernicus.

"A malignant pseudo-science has corrupted the education system around the world," says another text he is carrying. It calls the idea of a round Earth "humankind's greatest lie, dictated by the global elite." Next to him, Ricardo's Flat-Earth model shows the sun and Moon as little balls, equal in size, suspended above a disc-shaped planet. "Just look at the horizon. Climb a mountain and take pictures. You can see the Earth isn't curved," says Neves, clutching a level to illustrate his point.

The Flat-Earthers are brimming with counter-factual questions: If the Earth is rotating at 1,700 kilometers (1,000 miles) per hour at the equator, why doesn't the movement make everything fly off? If it's a sphere, why can't we see the curve from an airplane?

They give little credit to photographs from space or scientists' answers about gravity, Foucault's pendulum and two millennia of astronomical observation. "We've known for certain the Earth isn't flat since Galileo, since the early 17th century. But the ancient Greeks had pieced it together more than 2,000 years ago," says astronomer Roberto Costa of the University of Sao Paulo. "To scientists, this (Flat-Earth theory) seems more like a topic for psychologists or sociologists to study. The Earth's shape isn't a scientific problem to astronomers."

Tilted Eiffel Tower?

One of the most prominent of Brazil's Flat-Earthers is Afonso de Vasconcelos, a geophysicist with a PhD from the University of Sao Paulo. Vasconcelos is based in the United States, which is also home to a large community of Flat-Earthers. One of them died last week attempting to launch himself more than 1,500 meters (nearly a mile) into the sky in a homemade rocket.

Vasconcelos operates a YouTube channel called "True Science" (Ciencia de Verdade)



SAO PAULO: Brazilian self-avowed flat-Earth conspiracy theorist Anderson Neves holds a model of the flat earth surrounded by a dome during an interview with AFP in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Eleven million people in Brazil, 7 percent of its population, believe that the Earth is flat, according to Datafolha polling institute. — AFP

where he expounds his ideas to 345,000 followers. Fellow YouTuber Siddhartha Chaibub, "Professor Flat-Earth" (Professor Terra Plana), has nearly 30,000 followers. Last November, Chaibub helped organize the first-ever convention for Brazilian Flat-Earthers, which drew hundreds of people in Sao Paulo.

One of the favorite targets for Flat-Earthers' conspiracy theories is NASA. They accuse the US space agency of pulling a giant fraud. "Man never landed on the Moon. That was a studio set," says Ricardo. As for satellite images showing Earth's curvature from space, he demands: "Where's the tilted Eiffel Tower?" — AFP

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Lifestyle

MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2020



Lightning strikes behind the chapel of Panagia Gorgona in the village of Skala Sykamias, north of Lesbos, on February 27, 2020. — AFP

FOR BALLET SHOES, ONE RUSSIAN COMPANY IS ON POINTE



Nikolay Grishko, the 71-year-old founder of Grishko company, one of the world's top makers of ballet pointe shoes, attends an interview with AFP in Moscow.



An employee of Grishko company produces pointe shoes in the company's Moscow workshop.



Dancer Alexandra Kirshina rehearses on pointes made at Grishko company especially for her.

Craftsman Sergei Murza runs his fingers over the pink satin of a pointe shoe he has just finished making. Then he gives it the final test: the ballet slipper balances perfectly on its tip. Murza produces the shoes in the Moscow workshop of Grishko, a company born in the chaos of the collapse of the Soviet Union and now one of the world's top makers of ballet pointe shoes. In a country better known for exporting oil and arms, Grishko is a rare success story for Russian craftsmanship, its shoes sold around the globe and gracing the stages of the world's top ballet venues.

It's hardly surprising, founder Nikolay Grishko says, given the aura that surrounds Russia's storied ballet tradition. "It is in Russia that classical ballet has reached its highest level," says the 71-year-old, who founded the company more than 30 years ago and continues to run it. Grishko has diversified into clothing and other types of dance shoes, but the ballet line is the company's heart and soul. Nearly 80 percent of its production is for export, with the United States—where the shoes sell under the brand name Nikolay—and Japan the top buyers. Inspired by the liberalization of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev, Grishko set up the company in 1988.

Passing on tradition

A former diplomat posted in Laos and economics professor, he found inspiration



A picture taken at Grishko company shows pointe shoes in the company's Moscow workshop. — AFP photos

close to home. "My wife was a dancer... I already knew what pointes were," he says in his office at the factory, dapper in a dark suit and black-rimmed glasses. When he launched the business, Russia's big theatres like the Bolshoi had their own in-house workshops making pointes. That tradition is now gone, but the expertise built up over centuries lives on in his company.

"I took the best of the tradition of Russian pointes, which have been made since the end of the 19th century. This tradition was passed on in the theatre work-

shops but practically disappeared after the fall of the Soviet Union" in 1991, says the Ukrainian-born Grishko. Today he employs more than 500 people at workshops in Moscow, the Czech Republic and Macedonia. In Russia, a pair of Grishko pointes sells for the equivalent of 30 euros, in western Europe about twice that.

The Moscow workshop is housed on the grounds of the historic Hammer & Sickle Factory, a Soviet-era institution that once housed a steel plant. Grishko's master shoemakers work in silence as they produce 32,000 to 37,000 pairs of pointes

The perfect fit

In the sewing workshop, Olga Monakhova, who is 56 years old and has worked at the factory for 27 years, recalls orders from famous dancers like Anastasia Volochkova and Nikolay Tsiskaridze. Across the capital in her studio, dancer Alexandra Kirshina completes a rehearsal on pointes made especially for her. "We wear them constantly, so it's important that they fit perfectly," says the 28-year-old soloist for the Moscow Ballet. "I used to dance in plastic pointes and I had big problems with my feet."

Star dancers can go through up to 30 pairs of pointes a month, but professionals account for only 10 percent of Grishko's buyers. Most sales go to ballet schools. Grishko says he is even seeing a new kind of client: women who, tired of "boring aerobic exercises" and treadmills, are taking up ballet to keep fit. — AFP



Employees of Grishko company produce pointe shoes.



An employee of Grishko company produces pointe shoes in the company's Moscow workshop.



Dancer Alexandra Kirshina rehearses on pointes made at Grishko company especially for her.



French director Ladj Ly (seventh right) poses on stage with cast members and producers after "Les Misérables" won the Best Feature Film award during the 45th edition of the Cesar Film Awards ceremony at the Salle Pleyel in Paris. — AFP photos



In this file photo French-Polish director Roman Polanski stands on the red carpet of the 45th Deauville US Film Festival, in Deauville, northern France.



French actor Roschdy Zem holds his trophy on stage after he won the Best Actor award for "Roubaix, une lumière (Oh Mercy!)".

WALKOUTS AS ROMAN POLANSKI WINS BEST DIRECTOR AT FRENCH OSCARS

List of winners

- BEST FILM**
Les Misérables, dir: Ladj Ly
- BEST DIRECTOR**
Roman Polanski - An Officer And A Spy
- BEST ACTRESS**
Anais Demoustier - Alice Et Le Maire
- BEST ACTOR**
Roschdy Zem - Roubaix, Une Lumiere
- BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR**
Swann Arlaud - Grace A Dieu
- BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS**
Fanny Ardant - La Belle Epoque
- BEST ORIGINAL SCORE**
Dan Levy - I Lost My Body
- BEST FOREIGN FILM**
Parasite, dir: Bong Joon Ho
- BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY**
Claire Mathon - Portrait De La Jeune Fille En Feu
- BEST EDITING**
Flora Volpeliere - Les Misérables
- BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY**
Nicolas Bedos - La Belle Epoque
- BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY**
Roman Polanski, Robert Harris - An Officer And A Spy
- BEST SOUND**
Nicolas Cantin, Thomas Desjonquieres, Raphael Moutarde, Olivier Goinard, Randy Thom - Le Chant De Loup
- AUDIENCE PRIZE**
Les Misérables, dir: Ladj Ly
- BEST SHORT FILM**
Pile Poil, dir: Lauriane Escaffre, Yvonnick Muller
- BEST DOCUMENTARY**
M, dir: Yolande Zauberger
- BEST FIRST FILM**
Papicha, dir: Mounia Meddour
- BEST ANIMATED FEATURE**
I Lost My Body, dir: Jeremy Clapin
- BEST ANIMATED SHORT**
La Nuit Des Sacs Plastiques, dir: Gabriel Harel
- BEST FEMALE NEWCOMER**
Lyna Khoudri - Papicha
- BEST COSTUMES**
Pascaline Chavanne - An Officer And A Spy
- BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN**
Stephane Rozenbaum - La Belle Epoque
- BEST MALE NEWCOMER**
Alexis Manenti - Les Misérables

Roman Polanski won best director for "An Officer and a Spy" at a fractious ceremony for the French Oscars, the Cesars, that ended in walkouts and recrimination in Paris early Saturday. The entire French academy had been forced to resign earlier this month amid fury that the veteran-wanted in the US for the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl in 1977 — had topped the list of nominations. Protesters chanting "Lock up Polanski!" tried to storm the theatre where the ceremony was being held before being pushed back by police firing tear gas.

And France's Culture Minister Franck Riester had warned that giving the maker of "Rosemary's Baby" a Cesar would be "symbolically bad given the stance we must take against sexual and sexist violence". But Polanski won two awards, best adapted screenplay and best director—with the latter prompting Adele Haenel, who was nominated for best actress for "Portrait of a Lady on Fire", to storm out, crying "Shame!" Haenel has become a hero of the #MeToo movement in France after accusing the director of her first film, Christophe Ruggia, of sexually harassing her when she was only 12. Polanski's film also picked up best costume design.

'Public lynching'

"Distinguishing Polanski is spitting in the face of all victims," Haenel had said in the run-up to the Cesars. "It means raping women isn't that bad." Polanski, 86, and the entire team of his historical drama had boycotted the ceremony, fearing a "public lynching". "An Officer and a Spy" is based on the Dreyfus affair which divided France in the late 19th century when a Jewish army officer was wrongly prosecuted for spying. "What place can there be in such deplorable conditions for a film about the defence of truth, the fight for justice, (against) blind hate and anti-Semitism?" the director told AFP.

Polanski's epic, which won two top prizes at the Venice film festival last year, was in the running in 12 categories at the Cesars. But the big winner on the night was the Oscar-nominated "Les Misérables", set in one of France's deprived and restive suburbs. It took best film and three other prizes including the audience award. It's Mali-born director Ladj



French actress Adele Haenel attends the 45th edition of the Cesar Film Awards ceremony at the Salle Pleyel in Paris.

Ly made an appeal for unity on a highly fraught night, saying "our enemy is not the other, but poverty".

Poisonous atmosphere

"Papicha", a touching story of Algerian women fighting for their freedom by Mounia Meddour, also fared well, winning both best first film and best female newcomer for actress Lyna Khoudri. With the French film industry at war with itself over Polanski, Hollywood star Brad Pitt also snubbed the event having reportedly been offered an honorary award. The French press had dubbed the event "The Cesars of Anguish", with Le Parisien daily mocking up a movie poster of Hitchcock's "Vertigo".

And the ceremony lived up to its billing. The poisonous atmosphere had already worsened on the eve of the awards when 30 film figures from minority backgrounds lashed the lip service they claimed the industry plays to inclusion.

Casual racism

In blistering open letter they said black, North African and Asian-origin performers are mostly confined to stereotypical bit parts in French films. On the night, one of the signatories of the letter, actress Aïssa Maïga, delivering a



French-Algerian actress Lyna Khoudri (left) and French actress Anais Demoustier pose with their trophies after they respectively won Best Female Newcomer award for "Papicha" and Best Actress award for "Alice et le Maire (Alice and the Mayor)".

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.

But it was the absent figure of Polanski which caused most unease, with a presenter only daring to mumble his name when he opened the envelope for his first win. The publicity campaign for Polanski's movie was halted last year after another woman, photographer Valentine Monnier, claimed that she had also been raped by the director in 1975. But that did not stop it becoming a box office hit in France. Polanski had told AFP that he had decided to stay away from the ceremony to protect his family and his team from abuse. "The activists brandish the figure of 12 women who I am supposed to have molested half a century ago," he said. "These fantasies of sick minds are treated as established fact," he complained. — AFP



(From left) French producer Toufik Ayadi, French director Ladj Ly and French producer Christophe Barral pose with their trophies during a photocall after they won the Best Film award for "Les Misérables".



French actor Swann Arlaud delivers a speech on stage after he won the Best Actor in a Supporting Role award for "Grace a Dieu (By the Grace of God)".



French cinematographer Claire Mathon holds her trophy on stage after she won the Best Cinematographer award for "Portrait de la jeune fille en feu (Portrait of a Lady on Fire)".



French composer Dan Levy holds his trophy after he won the Best Original Score award for "J'ai perdu mon corps (I Lost my Body)".



French actress Fanny Ardant smiles as she holds her trophy after she won the Best Actress in a Supporting Role award for "La Belle Epoque".



French producer Jean Labadie stands on stage after "Les Misérables" received the Audience's Cesar award.

Lifestyle | Awards



Iranian actress Baran Rasoulof holds a phone displaying Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof who was awarded the "Golden Bear for Best Film" attends a press conference after the awarding ceremony of the 70th Berlinale film festival in Berlin on February 29, 2020. — AFP photos



(From left) Iranian actress Jila Shahi, Ehsan Mirhosseini, Iranian actress Baran Rasoulof, actor Mohammad Hossein Valizadegan, actress Mahtab Servati, Iranian director of photography Bardia Yadegari, Iranian actor Kaveh Ahangar, unidentified guest, and actress Shaghayegh Shourian pose on the red carpet ahead of the awarding ceremony of the 70th Berlinale film festival in Berlin.



The team of the film "Sheytan vojod nadarad" (There Is No Evil) pose with the trophy on behalf of Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof who was awarded the "Golden Bear for Best Film".



(From left) Iranian producer Farzad Pak, Iranian actress Baran Rasoulof and Iranian producer Kaveh Farnam pose with trophy on behalf of Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof who was awarded the "Golden Bear for Best Film" pose with the trophy.



US director Eliza Hittman poses with the trophy "Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize".



South Korean director and screenwriter Hong Sang-soo winner of Silver Bear For Best Director for his movie 'The Woman Who Ran'.

Iranian dissident, teen abortion drama take top prizes at Berlin film fest



German actress Paula Beer winner of the "Silver Bear for Best Actress".



Italian actor Elio Germano winner of the "Silver Bear for Best Actor".



French director Adrien Merigeau poses after receiving the "Audi Short Film Award".



Director Camilo Restrepo poses with his prize for "Best first Film".

Dissident Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof on Saturday won the top prize at the Berlin film festival for "There Is No Evil", a searingly critical work about the death penalty in his country. Rasoulof, 48, is currently banned from leaving Iran and was unable to accept the Golden Bear in person. Accepting the award on his behalf, producer Farzad Pak thanked "the amazing cast and crew who put their lives in danger to be on this film." The film tells four loosely related individual stories about the death penalty in Iran, from the executioner to the families of the victims.

Industry magazine "Variety" called it Rasoulof's "most openly critical statement yet". Rasoulof was sentenced to a year in prison last year for "attacking the security of the state", and banned from making films for life. Speaking to a news conference via mobile phone, the director said his latest film was about "taking responsibility" under despotism. "You can try to put aside your own responsibility and pass the buck to the government... but (people) can say no," he said.

Teenage abortion drama

The runner-up jury prize went to Eliza Hittman's teenage abortion drama "Never Rarely Sometimes Always", which had been a favorite among critics. Sidney Flanigan plays a 17-year-old from Pennsylvania forced to travel to New York in order to abort an unplanned pregnancy. Hailed for its empathy and emotion, female solidarity is at the heart of the film, in which male characters are marginalized and often predatory. Audiences and critics were particularly enthralled by an intense, single-shot scene in which Flanigan's character answers personal questions at a clinic. "While I was researching this film, I spent a tremendous amount of time inside planned parenthood and other clinics," said Hittman.

She added that she had been "humbled" by that experience, before addressing the nurses and social workers who work in such clinics. "I want to thank them for their incredible service to our countries, for protecting the lives and rights of all people with uteruses." Hittman's success came in the wake of a controversy earlier in the festival over jury president Jeremy Irons' past comments on abortion and women's rights.

In a 2016 interview with the Guardian, Irons had said abortion "harms a woman" and that the church was "right to say it was a sin". At his opening press conference, the jury head was forced to clarify that he supported "wholeheartedly the right of women to have an abortion should they so decide". The debate over women's representation and the #MeToo movement continued throughout the festival, fuelled in part by news Monday of Harvey Weinstein's conviction for rape and sexual assault.

New festival directors Carlo Chatrion and Mariette Rissenbeek also came under fire for picking one fewer female-directed film than in the previous year. And there was widespread outrage over the Russian film "DAU: Natasha", whose cinematographer Jurgen Jurgens won

the Silver Bear for Outstanding Artistic Contribution on Saturday. Part of the sprawling, controversial Russian art project "DAU", it was widely slammed for an interrogation scene which included a graphic sexual assault.

The makers of the film were also forced to deny rumours of abuse on set. Ahead of the awards ceremony, a handful of protesters outside the venue held up a banner reading "DAU = violence and abuse". Yet Jurgens disputed those claims, saying that director Ilya Khrzhanovsky "may push boundaries professionally, but he does not cross them".



Producer Monica Sorelle (left) and screenwriter Keisha Rae Witherspoon pose with the trophy "Golden Bear for Best Short Film".

Nazi past scandal

Another German, Paula Beer, won Best Actress for her role in Christian Petzold's water-themed romance "Undine". The award for Best Actor went to Italy's Elio Germano for his portrayal of the mental and physical struggles of painter Antonio Ligabue in "Hidden Away". "I dedicate this prize to all the outcasts, all the people who are a little bit strange," said the 39-year-old. Germano also featured in "Bad Tales" by Italian brothers Fabio and Damiano D'Innocenzo, which won Best Screenplay.

The award for Best Director went to South Korea's Hong Sangsoo for "The Woman Who Ran", a minimalistic film about a woman whose husband is away on a business trip. Industry magazine IndieWire described the film as a "charming look at smart women dealing with annoying men".

"Delete History", a French comedy about society in the age of the internet, won the "70th anniversary Silver Bear". The prize replaced the traditional "Alfred Bauer Prize", which was removed from the list of "Silver Bears" after it emerged that Berlinale founding director Bauer was a high-ranking Nazi. — AFP



Italian Directors and Screenwriters Damiano D'Innocenzo and Fabio D'Innocenzo pose with the trophy "Silver Bear for Best Screenplay".



Cambodian documentary film director and screenwriter Rithy Panh poses after receiving the "Berlinale Documentary Award".



French director Benoit Delepine and French director Gustave Kervern pose with the trophy "The Silver Bear - 70th Berlinale".

List of winners

GOLDEN BEAR FOR BEST FILM:
"There Is No Evil," Mohammad Rasoulof

SILVER BEAR GRAND JURY PRIZE:
"Never Rarely Sometimes Always," Eliza Hittman

SILVER BEAR FOR BEST DIRECTOR:
Hong Sang Soo, "The Woman Who Ran"

SILVER BEAR FOR BEST ACTRESS:
Paula Beer, "Undine"

SILVER BEAR FOR BEST ACTOR:
Elio Germano, "Hidden Away"

SILVER BEAR FOR BEST SCREENPLAY:
"Bad Tales," the D'Innocenzo Brothers

SILVER BEAR 70TH BERLINALE:
"Delete History," Benoit Delepine and Gustave Kervern

SILVER BEAR FOR OUTSTANDING ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTION, COSTUME OR SET DESIGN:
"Dau. Natasha," Jurgen Jurgens

BERLINALE GLASHUTTE ORIGINAL - DOCUMENTARY PRIZE:
"Irradiated," Rithy Panh

BEST FIRST FEATURE:
"Los conductos," Camilo Restrepo

GOLDEN BEAR FOR BEST SHORT FILM:
"T," Keisha Rae Witherspoon

SILVER BEAR FOR SHORT FILM JURY PRIZE:
"Filipinana," Rafael Manuel Audi

SHORT FILM AWARD:
"Genius Loci," Adrien Merigeau



Iconic singer Umm Kulthum to star in Cairo hologram concert

Legendary Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum will feature in a hologram concert in Cairo next week, the city's opera house director said Saturday. The hologram projection of the Arab diva-dubbed the "star of the orient"-will appear on the opera hall's stage on March 6. "The hologram performance will last between 12 and 15 minutes. It aims to attract younger generations ... and connect them with their history," opera director Magdy Saber

told AFP. The show will also include two singers performing Umm Kulthum songs live and is scheduled to last two hours.

A revered icon of Arab music, Umm Kulthum's career flourished from the 1920s until her death in 1975. Her concerts lasted for hours and live radio broadcasts attracted huge audiences. Commonly known in Egypt as "El Set" or "The Lady", her deep voice is still heard on Egyptian streets and in local cafes, taxis and Nile sailboats. Her repertoire

of religious, patriotic and romantic songs and poetry reverberated across the Arab world.

"Alf Leila wa Leila" ("A Thousand and one Nights") and "Enta Omri" ("You are my Life") are among Umm Kulthum's most enduring hits. Last week, Egypt's culture ministry said the performance "aims to confront vulgarity and redirect attention to our arts heritage". Earlier in February, the union for Egyptian musicians banned performances of popular

electro street music known as mahraganat, which is viewed by conservatives as overstepping moral boundaries. Umm Kulthum hologram concerts were held in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates last year. "We plan to organise similar performances for other classic Arab singers including Mohamed Abdel Wahab and Abdelhalim Hafez," said Saber.—AFP

Taylor Swift takes on toxic masculinity as 'The Man'

Taylor Swift dropped her directorial debut Thursday, releasing the music video for her song "The Man" in which she stars as, quite literally, the man. In heavy prosthetics and convincing drag, the 30-year-old pop juggernaut parades through the video as an obnoxious man who skates through life to success thanks to the privilege of his gender. In one notable scene Swift's male character spreads his legs wide on the subway, unnecessarily crowding the women next to him, and ashes a cigar in the purse of his neighbor.



In this file photo US singer Taylor Swift arrives for Universal Pictures' world premiere of "Cats" at Alice Tully Hall on December 16, 2019 in New York City. — AFP

"I'm so sick of running as fast as I can / Wondering if I'd get there quicker if I was a man / And I'm so sick of them coming at me again / 'Cause if I was a man, then I'd be the man," she sings in the chorus. At the video's end director Swift asks her male

character if he could try another take, but make it "sexier" and more "likable." Swift used the video for the song off her seventh album "Lover" to highlight that she wrote, directed, and owns it-while taking a swipe at the executives she's been publicly feuding with since June 2019 over ownership of her early catalogue.

At one point her character relieves himself on a wall bearing graffiti spelling out the titles of her first six albums, next to a sign that say "Missing. If found return to Taylor Swift" and another barring use of scooters. It's an obvious jab at music industry mogul Scooter Braun, who has a majority stake in the master recordings of Swift's first six albums. Swift owns "Lover," and has vowed to re-record her earlier albums to create copies she owns herself starting in November 2020, the earliest she says her contract allows it.

The video is another notch in Swift's belt as she goes public about her struggles for independence and control of her own voice as an artist who found massive fame young. In the past few years Swift has opened up about politics for the first time, endorsing Democratic candidates in Tennessee in 2018 and criticizing Donald Trump. Her recently released Netflix documentary, "Miss Americana," sees the superstar famous for global hits like "Shake It Off" describe how she was told to stay silent on politics to avoid negative press and upsetting her fans. — AFP



Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, accompanied by his daughter Ashley Biden (center) and wife Jill Biden (right) delivers remarks at his primary night election event in Columbia, South Carolina.—AFP

HOLLYWOOD SPLIT AS DEMOCRATS SWAP GLITZY FUNDRAISERS FOR RALLIES

From Tom Hanks to Scarlett Johansson, Hollywood A-listers determined to see President Donald Trump defeated are badly split over the best Democratic candidate to back with their silver-screen dollars.

A search of federal donation records shows Hanks has cut a check for former vice president Joe Biden, while Johansson has donated to progressive Senator Elizabeth Warren. "Cheers" star Ted Danson gave the maximum \$2,800 to Warren-but his wife, actress Mary Steenburgen, also backed Biden. George Takei of "Star Trek" fame simply couldn't make his mind up. He donated to both Biden and former Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg.

According to Los Angeles-based Democratic strategist Bill Carrick, these split loyalties and multiple donations would be unusual any other year, but have been common in the 2020 race. "Hollywood has always been a very important source of campaign fundraising for presidential candidates," he told AFP. "This time has been a bit different." This is partly due to the large field of potential nominees, with many donors giving to as many as three candidates, Carrick said.

For Steven Maviglio, a Democratic strategist in California's state capital Sacramento, the stars "are as dazed and confused about who's the best one to beat Trump as everyone else." This year's confusion stands in stark contrast to 2016, when Hillary Clinton was Tinseltown's clear favorite. "Hillary was out here in Hollywood all the time," said Maviglio. "I don't think anybody has measured up to what Hillary did last time around here."

Cocktail parties

In fact, some leading Democratic candidates have largely skipped Hollywood's glitzy private fundraiser circuit. Frontrunner Bernie Sanders' message has attracted celebrities including Susan Sarandon-and Dick Van Dyke, Sarah Silverman and Public Enemy will feature at his Los Angeles rally Sunday. Warren has drawn support from singer John Legend. But both Sanders and Warren have blasted the closed-door, uber-wealthy soirees typical of Hollywood campaigns, in favor of pursuing vast numbers of small, online donations.

They have not "invested the time in Hollywood because they don't have the fundraising goals in mind," said Carrick. Billionaire candidate Michael Bloomberg, who is self-funding his run for the White House, has focused more on harvesting support from elected officials in California than movie stars. This has left lucrative Los Angeles cocktail parties, dinners and luncheons open for the likes of Biden and Buttigieg.

Biden has moved to mobilize Hollywood contacts he forged as a senator and vice president-he appeared onstage at the Oscars in 2016 — and is due Wednesday to attend a major fundraiser hosted by former Paramount boss Sherry Lansing. But he has failed to generate the enthusiasm enjoyed by Clinton or Barack Obama. Buttigieg has won a list of celebrity endorsements including Sharon Stone, Kevin Costner and Michael J Fox-but started from a very small base in Tinseltown. —AFP

BTS cancel concerts as S Korea virus cases rise faster than China

K-pop megastars BTS cancelled Friday four Seoul concerts due in April as South Korea's novel coronavirus cases jumped by nearly 600 — a larger rise than the daily increase reported in China, where the disease first emerged. The seven-piece boyband-currently one of the biggest acts in the world-had scheduled four gigs at the capital's Olympic Stadium to promote their new album "Map of the Soul: 7". More than 200,000 fans were expected to attend, their agency Big Hit Entertainment said in a statement, with "a number of global production companies and a large group of expert international crew" also involved. It was "impossible at this time to predict the scale of the outbreak", it said, creating so much uncertainty it was "unavoidable" the shows were cancelled "without further delay".

"We must take into consideration the health and safety of hundreds of thousands of guests as well as our artists," it added. The BTS concerts are the latest events to be cancelled or postponed as the outbreak has spread in the world's 12th-largest economy, including the K-league football season and the World Team Table Tennis Championships. The new school term has been delayed by one week and the US and South Korean militaries have postponed forthcoming joint exercises. Hyundai Motor also suspended operations at one of its Ulsan plants after an employee tested positive for the coronavirus. The auto manufacturer had temporarily stopped all domestic production earlier this month because of a lack of parts due to the outbreak in China.

More infections

South Korea reported 571 new cases on Friday, taking its total-the highest in the world outside China-to 2,337, the Korea Centers for



In this file photo South Korean boy band BTS performs onstage during the KIIS FM's iHeartRadio Jingle Ball at the Forum Los Angeles in Inglewood, California. — AFP

Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) said. That was a larger increase than the 327 reported by China, where nearly 2,800 people have died. The World Health Organization has warned that all countries should ensure their health systems were prepared for an outbreak. The epidemic was at a "decisive point" globally, its chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Thursday and countries could still contain the epidemic if they "act aggressively now".

The South has an advanced health system and a free media, factors observers say improve the reliability of its statistics, and its numbers are expected to rise further as it carries out checks on more than 260,000 people associated with the Shincheonji Church of Jesus. The secretive entity is linked to around half of the nation's cases. A 61-year-old female member developed a fever on February 10, but attended at least four church services in Daegu-the country's fourth-largest city with a population of 2.5 million-before being diagnosed. More than 85 percent of South Korea's

coronavirus cases are in Daegu and the neighboring province of North Gyeongsang, according to the KCDC. The country's death toll remains at 13.

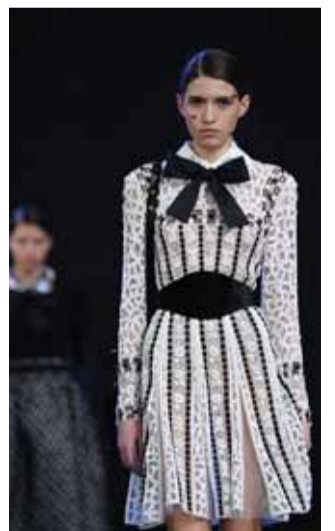
Bulletproof Boy Scouts

One BTS fan said on the band's Facebook page that the decision on the concerts was a "regrettable but inevitable call", although others lamented that the shows had been cancelled, rather than postponed. BTS-or Bangtan Sonyeondan, which translates as Bulletproof Boy Scouts-are the first K-pop group to top charts in the US and Britain. Their latest effort was given a simultaneous worldwide release online last Friday, becoming the most pre-ordered South Korean album of all time, with more than four million copies sold before its release. —AFP



PARIS FASHION WEEK

Models present creations by Elie Saab at the end of the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris, on Saturday. — AFP photos



Classifieds

Monday, March 2, 2020

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

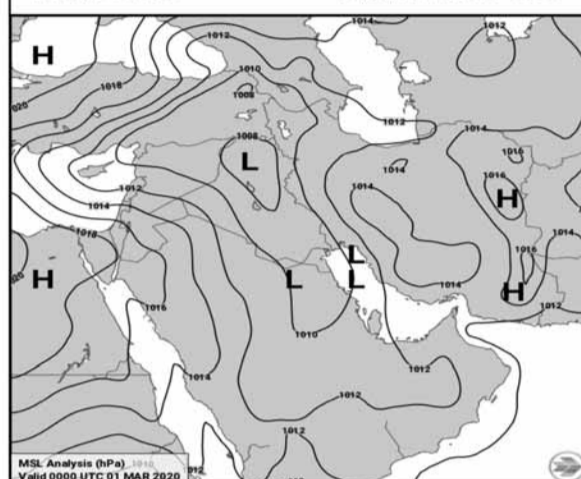
BY DAY: Relatively hot with light to moderate south easterly wind to north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 38 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

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

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings
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STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	17 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	31 °C	15 °C
ABDALY	31 °C	12 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	31 °C	14 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	24 °C	16 °C
SALMIYAH	23 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	23 °C	18 °C
NUWAISIB	29 °C	16 °C
WAFRA	30 °C	16 °C
SALMY	30 °C	12 °C

SFC. CHART 01/03/2020 0000 UTC



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	03/02	Warm	25 °C	12 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 32 km/h
Tuesday	03/03	Warm	24 °C	10 °C	NW	15 - 38 km/h
Wednesday	03/04	Warm with a chance for mist forming over some areas	26 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 32 km/h
Thursday	03/05	Warm with a chance for mist forming over some areas	27 °C	08 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 30 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:54
Sunrise	06:13
Zuhr	12:01
Asr	15:19
Sunset	17:47
Isha	19:04

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	27 °C
MIN. Temp.	09 °C
MAX. RH	77 %
MIN. RH	22 %
MAX. Wind	SE 39 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
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME
Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

EMERGENCY 112

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) DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Monday 2/3/2020				Departure Flights on Monday 2/3/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
PIA	239	Sialkot	00:05	AIC	982	Ahmedabad/Chennai	00:05
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	JZR	215	Jeddah	00:05
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	MSC	412	Asyut	00:15
JZR	716	Sohag	00:35	QTR	1093	Doha	00:25
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	PIA	240	Sialkot	01:05
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
KAC	102	London	00:55	JZR	111	Doha	01:55
KAC	504	Beirut	01:05	KAC	363	Colombo	02:00
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
RJA	642	Amman	01:40	KAC	285	Dhaka	02:00
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	677	Dubai	02:10
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	THY	773	Istanbul	02:20
RBG	559	Alexandria	01:55	JZR	119	Doha	02:25
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	417	Manila	02:30
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	RBG	550	Alexandria	02:55
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	KAC	621	Doha	04:20
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	JZR	707	Luxor	04:40
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
JZR	702	Asyut	04:50	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
KAC	382	Delhi	05:00	JZR	101	Bahrain	05:50
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	DHX	173	Bahrain	06:40
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	RJA	643	Amman	06:55
JZR	654	OSS	05:25	THY	771	Istanbul	06:55
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
JZR	502	Lahore	05:35	UAE	874	Dubai	07:15
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	05:45	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
UAE	873	Dubai	05:50	RBG	214	Sohag	07:50
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:55	KAC	173	Munich	08:20
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	JZR	001	LGW	08:40
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00
BAW	157	London	07:05	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	BAW	156	London	09:10
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
RBG	213	Sohag	07:10	KAC	545	Cairo	09:30
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15	QTR	1085	Doha	09:30
JZR	120	Dubai	07:35	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	101	London	09:45
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:25	KAC	561	Amman	09:45
KAC	622	Doha	08:30	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	117	New York	10:00
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	UAE	856	Muscat	10:00
JZR	102	Bahrain	08:55	KAC	751	ELQ	10:00
KAC	334	Trivandrum	09:00	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
AXB	395	Kozhikode	10:50	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
JZR	708	Luxor	10:55	JZR	305	Istanbul	11:10
AXB	889	Mangalore/Bahrain	11:10	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	AXB	396	Kozhikode	11:50
KAC	352	Kochi	11:35	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
SYR	341	Damascus	12:00	JZR	139	AAN	12:05
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25	AXB	890	Mangalore	12:10
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	UAE	405	Beirut	12:55
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	FDB	071	Dubai	23:45

Taleban deal puts Qatar on stronger footing with US

DOHA: Qatar's role in clinching a historic US-Taleban accord over the weekend could further strengthen its relationship with key ally Washington despite efforts by fellow Gulf Arab states locked in a dispute with Doha to sideline it on the world stage. The deal, which creates a path for the United States to gradually pull out of Afghanistan and opens the way for a potential end to the 18-year conflict, was signed after more than 1-1/2 years of talks that were held mostly in Doha, which hosts the Taleban's political headquarters.

"Qatar has been an enormously important partner to get us to this very moment. When we've had hiccups in the road they have helped us smooth them out," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters after the signing ceremony in Doha on Saturday. Although peace negotiations between the sides within Afghanistan could now drag on for years, the Doha accord allows Trump to claim a major foreign policy success.

"The Qataris have essentially tried to make themselves crucial to the United States in being mediators where the Americans need mediators and of course post-2017... positioning Qatar that way was very important," said James Dorsey of S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Middle East Institute in Singapore. In 2017, Trump initially appeared to side with Saudi Arabia and its allies when they severed ties with Qatar over allegations it supports terrorism and is cosy up to regional foe Iran.

Doha denies the charges and says the political, trade and travel embargo imposed by Saudi Arabia, the

United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt since mid-2017 aims to curtail its sovereignty. Washington, which wants a united Gulf front against Iran, has tried to mediate an end to the dispute which erupted from long simmering tensions over tiny but wealthy Qatar's outsized role in the Middle East and its sponsorship of opposing factions in regional conflicts.

The Taleban deal could place Qatar in a position to help de-escalate tensions between Washington and Iran. Qatar hosts the largest US military base in the region and shares a giant gas field with Iran, which sided with Doha in the Gulf spat. "I think now global actors know where to go if they want conflicts resolved in our region," Qatar's assistant foreign minister Lolwah Rashid Al-Khater told reporters on Saturday.

Two Western diplomats told Reuters that Qatar played a vital role when US-Taleban negotiations broke down. A Qatari official involved in the process said Doha looked for a "face-saving" way to salvage talks when Trump cancelled a meeting in September with Taleban leaders at Camp David after the group claimed an attack in Kabul that killed a US soldier.

"We thought about two things to do. Number one a hostage release or swap and the second one to work on a reduction in violence," said Mutlaq Al-Qahtani, Qatar's foreign ministry envoy for counterterrorism and mediation of conflict resolution. "We thought if we succeeded in those two points we can save the process and bring the parties to the negotiating table again, and that's what we did in November," he told Saturday's news briefing. — AFP



DOHA: Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani meets US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on the sidelines of the peace signing ceremony between the United States and the Taleban on Saturday. — AFP

Kuwait, Gulf bourses dive as...

Continued from Page 1

The Dubai Financial Market dipped 4.5 percent, while its sister market in Abu Dhabi was down 3.6 percent at the close of trading, both one-year lows. Bahrain's bourse ended 3.4 percent down and the Muscat Securities Market in Oman finished down 1.2 percent, in a dismal day for the Gulf Cooperation Council bloc. "GCC equities witnessed a downfall as panic over coronavirus spread across the region," M R Raghu, head of research at Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz), told AFP. "Initial expectations that the outbreak would be contained within China have proved elusive," he said.

At least 115 cases of the coronavirus have been reported by the Gulf states to date, with the majority of infections among people returning from pilgrimages to Iran. Global stocks slumped on Friday, marking the largest weekly drop since the 2008 global financial crisis, as concerns grew that the spread of the virus could wreak havoc on the world economy. Crude oil prices tumbled as well and analysts said central banks, led by the US Federal Reserve, might have to shift into crisis-resolution mode with urgent interest rate cuts.

The Gulf states count China as their main trading

partner and crude buyer, soaking up about a fifth of their oil, but China's energy demand has sagged as authorities lock down millions of people to prevent the spread of the virus. All six GCC states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - have taken measures to curb the spread of the virus, including cutting off transport links with Iran, where some 54 people are confirmed to have died.

Saudi Arabia also banned Muslim pilgrims from travelling to perform the "umrah" to Islam's holiest sites in Makkah in the west of the kingdom. The move is likely to deprive the kingdom of billions of dollars in spending by millions of pilgrims and also creates uncertainty over the annual hajj pilgrimage scheduled for July.

Dubai, which boasts the region's most diversified economy, is hosting the Expo 2020 global trade fair from October, with the hope of attracting around 25 million visitors. Asked yesterday whether the Expo launch may have to be reviewed, the organizers said they were working closely with health authorities. "Expo does not open until October this year, and we will continue to follow the situation closely. We are hopeful that global efforts will succeed in managing the virus," one official told AFP.

The Gulf equities sell-off came as China reported a fresh spike in infections and after the US reported its first death from the virus. "The news flow today is quite negative and it will make the narrative between now and Monday morning even more important than it was on Friday," Matt Maley, an equity strategist at Miller Tabak & Co, told Bloomberg News. — AFP

MoE sets e-learning rules, limits teachers'...

Continued from Page 1

facemasks, thermometers, antiseptics and all types of sanitizers, and daily examine staff members to monitor any possible symptoms and report any detected case.

4. The e-learning process should be conducted according to each school's regulations, bearing the following in mind:

• No students will be allowed into any of the school facilities nor will any student gatherings be allowed elsewhere.

• School administrations will communicate with students via standard electronic means after scrutinizing the textbooks and e-programs used.

• No final tests will be conducted remotely through the platform.

• The remote learning process will include lesson explanations, exchange of information and homework assignments students should do, group research and discussion and other activities that the concerned school administrations deem necessary to improve their students' performance.

5. Schools wishing to activate the e-learning platforms will notify MoE's private education department with their plans.

6. Other schools supervised by the private education department that do not wish to activate the remote learning service will set their own alternative plans after resumption of school.

comeback two years ago - also raised concerns that ongoing court cases against Najib related to the IMDB scandal could be affected by the change of government.

Mahathir came out of retirement aged 92 to take on his onetime protege Najib over the controversy, and has pledged to bring him to justice. Analysts said Muhyiddin's government was in a weak position as it was not clear whether he had a parliamentary majority, and he was a member of a tiny party without a strong support base. He was a senior UMNO figure for decades before being sacked from the party by Najib in 2015 after criticizing the handling of the IMDB scandal, and then allied with Mahathir to oust them at the last elections.

In a volte-face, he joined hands last week with UMNO in his quest for the premiership - although he is not a member. In addition, he lacks "the domestic legitimacy or the international legitimacy the previous government had", Bridget Welsh, an analyst from the University of Nottingham, told AFP. Muhyiddin once controversially described himself as "Malay first" and Malaysian second, and there are concerns race and religious relations could worsen under his Muslim-dominated coalition.

About 60 percent of Malaysia's population are ethnic Malay Muslims and the country is also home to substantial ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indian minorities. The "Pact of Hope" alliance had been riven by infighting between factions over who should succeed Mahathir, who had designated Anwar Ibrahim as his successor. The political crisis began a week ago when a group of ruling coalition lawmakers joined forces with opposition parties in a bid to form a new government and push out Anwar.

In a week of fast-moving twists and turns, Mahathir and Anwar - who have a long and stormy history - briefly locked horns in a fight for the leadership. They then joined forces again in an 11th-hour bid to stop Muhyiddin, but it proved too little, too late. — AFP

Erdogan and Putin would meet on Thursday or Friday. Cavusoglu and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov agreed on the need to create a "favorable atmosphere" to improve working relations between their countries, Russia's foreign ministry said.

Earlier yesterday, Istanbul police detained the editor-in-chief of the Turkish version of Russia's Sputnik website as its offices were being searched in Istanbul. Three of its journalists were also taken to a courthouse in Ankara for questioning, likely related to a Sputnik article in English claiming Turkey's Hatay province was "stolen" from Syria. Colonial power France ceded the southern region to Turkey in 1938. The news website later said they had been released.

The latest fighting in Idlib has uprooted 1 million civilians since December, many of them women and children fleeing towards the Turkish border. Turkey said it would allow migrants to cross into Europe in anticipation of an imminent new migrant influx from Idlib, lifting restraints on movement in place since 2016 under a deal with the European Union.

Greek police fired tear gas to repel hundreds of stone-throwing migrants who sought to force their way across the border from Turkey yesterday, witnesses said, with thousands more behind them after Ankara relaxed curbs on their movement. Turkey's borders to Europe were closed to migrants under the accord between the Turkish-EU deal that halted the 2015-16 migration crisis, when more than one million people crossed into Europe. — Agencies

Big Biden win puts him back...

Continued from Page 1

Tom Steyer, who spent a whopping \$23 million campaigning in the state, dropped out of the race on Saturday after taking just 11 percent of the vote. Pressure is beginning to mount on other trailing Democrats - including Senators Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar, as well as former Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg, all in single digits in South Carolina - to follow Steyer's example and throw their weight behind a frontrunner. Buttigieg, Warren, Klobuchar and billionaire Michael Bloomberg have all made it clear that they will stick around at least through Super Tuesday.

But Buttigieg, who won only 8 percent of the South Carolina vote after notching far better results in the earlier states, appeared to be softening his tone yesterday. The 38-year-old former mayor repeatedly told NBC that his focus now was to do "what is best for the party" in order to "end the Trump presidency". "We'll be assessing at every turn," he said, "not only what the right answer is for the campaign, but making sure that every step we take is in the interest of the party and that goal of making sure we defeat Donald Trump."

As the race goes forward, money will loom ever larger. Biden claimed he had been outspent 40-to-1 in South Carolina, but said his victory there brought in an

infusion of \$5 million in overnight donations; Sanders has raised huge amounts in mostly small donations, including \$46 million in February; and the way billionaires Bloomberg and Steyer deploy their enormous wealth going forward could have a serious impact.

Biden argued yesterday that as a centrist, he would be far more effective atop the party's ticket in November against Trump than Sanders, who calls himself a democratic socialist. "I can bring along Democratic victory up and down the ticket," Biden said on ABC. "I can win the United States Senate. I can keep the House and increase the number" there.

In his victory speech Saturday, Barack Obama's former number two alluded to some Democrats' fears that Sanders might be too radical for many American voters. "We have the option of winning big or losing big," Biden said. Trump himself is said to see Sanders as an easy target in a country where the "socialist" label can be toxic.

Sanders yesterday shrugged off both Trump's tweets and Biden's cautions. While criticizing several of Biden's past stances - including his vote for the war in Iraq - Sanders sounded a conciliatory note. "At the end of the day," he told ABC, "I have known Joe Biden for a very long time. He's a decent guy. I have no doubt if I win he'll be there, and if he wins, I'll be there."

The 78-year-old said he was sure Democrats would come together in the face of a president he said was "a pathological liar, running a corrupt administration". The results tomorrow could help clarify the Democratic race - either giving Sanders an almost insurmountable lead or auguring weeks or months of continued uncertainty. — AFP

day in the Islamic republic, which now has 978 confirmed infections.

"Fortunately, along with the not-so-good news that we hear these days, especially in some provinces, we've had a total of 175 cases of those who have been treated and left the hospital," Jahanpour said. The biggest jump in newly reported cases was in Tehran province, where 170 people tested positive for the virus. Forty-four new cases were reported in the central province of Markazi and 31 in northern Alborz province.

Thirty were reported in the holy Shiite city of Qom, the epicentre of the country's outbreak where its first two novel coronavirus deaths were announced on February 19. There were 28 in the province Gilan, on the Caspian Sea in the country's northeast, 17 in northeastern Khorasan Razavi and eight in southern Fars province.

Saudi Arabia said yesterday it had prepared 25 hospitals to handle any coronavirus cases that might be detected in the kingdom, part of precautionary measures which include closing its borders to foreign umrah pilgrims. Health ministry spokesman Mohammed Abdelali told a news conference that 2,200 hospital beds were dedicated for quarantine cases. The kingdom has not recorded any cases of the new coronavirus so far, he said, adding that Saudi Arabia's trade activity had not been impacted and "is going as usual".

Saudi Arabia, which has Islam's two holiest sites, on Thursday announced a ban on foreigners coming to the kingdom for the umrah pilgrimage, which can take place at any time of the year, and to tourists from at least 25 countries where the virus has been found. Other Gulf Arab states have reported coronavirus cases, many linked to visits to Iran or involving people who have come into contact with people who had been there.

Turkey strikes Syrian planes...

Continued from Page 1

Our only intention there is for the (Syrian) regime to end the massacre and thereby prevent ... radicalization and migration," Turkey's Akar said.

He said that 2,212 members of the Syrian forces had been "neutralized", a term used to designate killed, wounded or captured. The Syrian Observatory, a Britain-based war monitor, said 74 Syrian government troops and pro-Damascus fighters had been killed since Feb 27. Fifty-five Turkish troops were killed in Idlib in February.

Diplomatic efforts by Ankara and Moscow to defuse tensions have failed to agree a ceasefire in Idlib, part of Syria's last major rebel stronghold. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Saturday that while there was progress in talks between Turkish and Russian delegations, the Idlib issue would only be resolved between presidents Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin. A senior Turkish official and a security official said the meeting would be held on Thursday in Moscow. The officials said the two leaders would discuss steps to take in Idlib and that they were expected to reach a mutual agreement. The Kremlin said it hoped

Sports

Barker bags first world track cycling championships gold for Britain

Froome among riders cleared to leave UAE after coronavirus scare

BERLIN: Elinor Barker of Britain, the 2017 world champion, struck again yesterday to claim victory in the women's points race at the world track cycling championships. Barker, 25, totalled 50 points to win from second-placed American Jennifer Valente (34 points) with Norwegian Anita Yvonne Stenberg third on (33 points).

Baker, the Olympic team pursuit champion and four-times world champion, was assured of victory when she stole ahead to lap the peloton twice, earning herself a 20-point bonus along the way. She brought home the first gold medal for Britain, a less dominant force at these world championships in Berlin than in previous editions since the 2012 London Olympics.

Barker on Thursday won silver with the women's team pursuit squad, while Britain also claimed silver in the men's team sprint and bronze in the men's omnium.

Meanwhile, Chris Froome and his fellow Team Ineos riders are among those who have been allowed to leave their hotel and travel home from the cancelled UAE Tour following a coronavirus scare, the team said yesterday.

The final two stages of the UAE Tour, which featured some of the world's leading riders, was called off on Thursday because two Italian participants had tested

positive for coronavirus.

Authorities said on Saturday that the first 167 tests for the virus had come back negative but there have been no further updates. Some 600 riders, staff and members of the media were tested.

"All our riders and staff (are) now leaving UAE after being given the all clear," Team Ineos posted on Twitter <https://twitter.com/TeamINEOS/status/1234025045061705728> on Sunday. "Thank you to all those who have helped us and looked after the team over recent days."

Team Jumbo-Visma and Israel-Start Up Nation squad also confirmed that their riders and staff had left the UAE. Despite receiving the green light to travel home, Team UAE-Emirates decided to extend their stay in Abu Dhabi and go home "only with the safety of non-contagion".

"In the context of this global emergency, the main goal is the safety of all of us and our family members," Team UAE-Emirates, who are funded by the Gulf nation, said in a statement <http://www.uaeteamemirates.com/team-will-remain-uae-precaution>.

"In light of some known cases of flu within our group and other teams, we will be tested again in the next few days and once the situation has improved, riders and staff will return to their families." — Agencies



BERLIN: Great Britain's Elinor Barker celebrates after the women's 25km points final at the UCI track cycling World Championship at the velodrome in Berlin yesterday. — AFP

Russell stars as Racing crush La Rochelle

PARIS: Finn Russell handed out another taster of what Scotland are missing as he helped guide Racing 92 to a 49-0 thrashing of La Rochelle in Top 14 action on Saturday. Russell was at the heart of a Racing performance that saw the home side — missing France internationals Camille Chat, Teddy Thomas, Bernard Le Roux and Virimi Vakatawa — shoot out to a 25-0 half-time lead, going on to consolidate their dominance in a seven-try thumping La Rochelle director of rugby Jono Gibbes dubbed a "disgrace".

Scotland coach Gregor Townsend has decided against selecting Russell so far in the Six Nations after falling out with the fly-half. In his absence, Scotland suffered losses to England and Ireland before rebounding to beat Italy last week to lift, slightly, the pressure on Townsend for Russell's non-selection.

"It's exactly what we'd forecast," Racing prop Cedate Gomes Sa said of the result. "We really wanted to play this match to the max before the international break. And for the first time we were able to do so from the first to the 80th minute."

La Rochelle skipper Victor Vito was left scrambling for positives from the thrashing. "It's the first time we've shipped points like that," lamented the ex-All Black, a two-time World Cup winner. "Either we crack or we come back," he said. "In the end I think it'll be a good thing. We have qualities but we didn't show them today."

Racing opened the scoring through hooker Teddy Baubigny, driven over from an attacking line-out maul after Jules Plisson's deliberate knock-on. There then followed two intercept tries. The first came from Russell, from 60 metres out, the second from Dorian Laborde thanks to Francois Trinh-Duc, who picked off Vito's pass and offloaded before collapsing with a hamstring injury.

Racing extended their half-time lead within four minutes of the restart for the second period, centre



NANTERRE: Racing 92's Scottish fly-half Finn Russell (C) is congratulated by teammates after scoring a try during the French Top 14 rugby union match between Racing 92 and La Rochelle, at La Defense Arena stadium in Nanterre near Paris. — AFP

Olivier Klemenczak driving his way over in the corner after a long looping pass from Fijian playmaker Ben Volavola.

Fabien Sancconnie crossed for Racing's fifth try after a smart Laborde offload before Maxime Machenaud added salt to La Rochelle's wounds, pouncing on a ball that had popped loose from a close-range scrum.

Racing lost Irish full-back Simon Zebo to injury after what looked like a blatant shoulder-charge of a tackle from the former Munster player. Replacement Racing prop Hassane Kolingar rounded off a nightmare match for the Ronan O'Gara-coached La Rochelle side, doing well to wrestle his way to the line, Machenaud going wide with the conversion to at least save the visitors a humiliating 50-plus defeat.

"It's tough for our supporters and the club... it's a disgrace," said Gibbes, a former All Black flanker/lock who previously coached at Leinster, Clermont and Ulster. "49-0, there's no excuse, it's my responsibility! Today we took part in the match, but we didn't play." In later games, defending champions Toulouse slumped to a 20-10 defeat at Bayonne while title hopefuls Lyon were also beaten, 30-6 at Brive. Brive's three tries all came in the first half with a 19-minute hat-trick from winger Joris Jurand. The mid-table side are used to pulling off shocks — they defeated league leaders Bordeaux-Begles 30-9 in October. Today sees Bordeaux host Castres, while ex-Italy captain Sergio Parisse turns out for Toulon at home against his former long-time club Stade Francais. — AFP

Fleetwood seizes one-stroke lead at PGA Honda Classic

MIAMI: Britain's Tommy Fleetwood birdied four of the last six holes, including two spectacular birdie putts from beyond 40 feet, to grab a one-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the US PGA Honda Classic.

The 29-year-old Englishman, runner-up at the 2018 US Open and 2019 British Open, fired a three-under par 67 to finish on five-under 205 after 54 holes at PGA National in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

Fleetwood, who began the day three strokes off the lead, made six birdies against three bogeys on a wild day where he was the only player to shoot a round under par in the final eight groups.

"It's funny, really, how tough certain shots can play," Fleetwood said. "There are just so many factors on a golf course. You can only hit golf shots and see where they play." American Brendan Steele, the 36-hole leader who was three ahead of Fleetwood when the day began, fired a 71 to stand second on 206 with England's 46-year-old Lee Westwood and 42-year-old Luke Donald both on 207 after 71s Saturday.

"I didn't have my A-game today," said Westwood, seeking his first US PGA win since 2010. "Struggled with my game a little bit. Stayed patient and ground it out. I don't think I did too much damage." Fleetwood dropped the ball within six feet at the par-3 sixth and made the birdie putt, then suffered a three-putt bogey from 85 feet at the par-3 seventh. He answered with a five-foot birdie at the ninth but needed four shots to find the 10th green and took a bogey.

His closing charge began with a "love putt" for birdie from 14 feet at 13, followed by a monster 45-foot putt for birdie at 14. "Just looking to lag that one up close. Wasn't expecting it to go in," Fleetwood said. "Bit of a bonus there."

After finding sand with his first two shots at the par-3 15th, Fleetwood blasted out and sank a testy 10-foot bogey putt. "The putt at 15 for bogey was big," Fleetwood said. It bolstered his confidence heading to the finish and at the par-3 17th he rolled in a 48-foot birdie putt.

"At 17, again, another bonus one in there, just to walk it in," Fleetwood said. On the par-5 18th, Fleetwood became only the day's seventh player to reach the green in two, then rolled a 44-foot eagle putt to two feet and tapped in for birdie.

Fleetwood, a five-time European Tour winner who is seeking his first US PGA title, has his first 54-hole lead on the US tour.

WESTWOOD CONFIDENT

Steele birdied two of the first three holes but back-to-back bogeys at four and five and again at 10 and 11 were more than a 12-foot birdie putt at 17 could offset. Westwood made three bogeys and two birdies in the first seven holes, then grinded out back nine pars with a birdie at 12 and a bogey at 16 after his 6-iron from 200 yards landed short and left of the green.

"I wasn't as prepared as I'm used to when I pulled back on the ball," Westwood said of his round. "There was a little bit of doubt in there. I'll have to work on that for tomorrow." It's not that Westwood isn't feeling a boost after capturing January's Abu Dhabi Championship for his 25th career European Tour victory.

"My confidence levels are high," he said. "Any time you win a tournament like I did in Dubai, your confidence has to escalate." Sharing fifth on 208 were South Korea's Im Sung-jae, American Daniel Berger and South African Charl Schwartzel. — AFP

Harris saves England blushes at LA Sevens

LOS ANGELES: England needed a last-gasp try to scrape into the knockout rounds of the Los Angeles Sevens on Saturday and deny minnows Spain a place in the last eight. England had been heading for a humiliating early exit as they trailed New Zealand 21-12 as the buzzer sounded at Carson's Dignity Health Sports Park.

However the English kept their cool and engineered an overlap for 20-year-old Ben Harris, who outpaced the New Zealand cover to score near the posts. Although the late try could not prevent New Zealand from a 21-17 victory that guaranteed top spot in Pool D, the scoreline vaulted England over Spain into second place on points difference.

Spain, who had earlier stunned England 22-5, just missed out on a place in the Cup knockout rounds, with England's late try against New Zealand proving decisive. New Zealand, meanwhile, the leaders of this season's World Rugby Sevens Series after wins in Cape Town and Hamilton, enjoyed a smooth start to the competition.

The Kivis routed Wales 42-7 in their opener before disposing of Spain 21-7 and then defeating England to make it three wins out of three. The New Zealanders will face France in Sunday's Cup quarter-finals while England will face reigning Olympic and World Sevens champions Fiji. Fiji, winners of the Sydney Sevens earlier in February, were also impressive on Saturday, defeating South Korea 45-7 before squeezing past France 33-28. The Fijians locked up first place in Pool A with 38-14 win over Argentina, with Aminiiasi Tuimaba outstanding in a two-try performance.

France, who had drawn 26-26 with Argentina in the opening game of Pool D, reached the last eight on points difference after finishing level on six points with the South Americans. Australia capped an unbeaten run through pool play with a 17-7 victory over the United States. The Group C winners will take on Ireland in the quarter-finals.

The USA, aiming for a hat-trick of victories on home soil, defeated Samoa and Scotland in their first two matches before falling to the Aussies and will take on Group B winners South Africa in the quarter-finals. The Blitz Boks trounced Kenya 31-5 and Canada 33-5 before finishing the night with a 19-19 draw against Ireland. — AFP

Kennedy's stunning 63 secures second New Zealand Open

QUEENSTOWN: Brad Kennedy carded a remarkable eight-under-par final-round 63 to come from behind to win golf's New Zealand Open by two strokes yesterday.

Kennedy, who won the tournament in 2011, started the day two shots behind fellow Australian Lucas Herbert but stormed to victory at the Millbrook Resort course in Queenstown, finishing on 21 under-par 264.

"To do this again after nine years is just unbelievable," said Kennedy of his second win in the event which is co-sanctioned by the Asian Tour and the Australasia PGA Tour. "I actually posted a number in my head last night, 21 was the number, and I didn't think I'd reach it but I just knew that this course was out there to be had, the course is playing unbelievable."

The in-form Herbert, who won the European Tour's Dubai Desert Classic in January, had a costly double-bogey on the 13th. He fought back with three consecutive birdies and, needing another at the 18th to force a playoff, instead dropped a shot for a 67 that left him two strokes adrift of Kennedy.

South Korean 17-year-old Kim Joo-hyung, who shared the overnight lead with Herbert, could only manage a final-round 70 for fourth place on 16-under par, a shot behind third-placed Australian Nick Flanagan. Geoff Ogilvy of Australia, the 2006 US Open champion, had a disappointing final round of four-over 75 to slip back to a share of 54th on two-under for the tournament. — AFP



Brad Kennedy

Sports

Liton hits ton as Saifuddin star in record Bangladesh ODI win

Bangladesh posted 321-6, their highest score against Zimbabwe

SYLHET: Liton Das struck his second one-day international century to set up a crushing 169-run win for Bangladesh in the first ODI against Zimbabwe in Sylhet yesterday. Liton hit 126 off 105 balls with 13 fours and two sixes as Bangladesh posted 321-6, their highest score against Zimbabwe, before they bowled out the visitors for 152 runs in 39.1 overs for their biggest ever ODI win.

The feat surpasses Bangladesh's 163-run victory over Sri Lanka in 2018 and is also their 14th consecutive win against familiar foes Zimbabwe, giving them a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Mohammad Saifuddin starred for Bangladesh, playing his first match since the World Cup last year, and managed 3-22, while skipper Mashrafe Mortaza and spinner Mehidy Hasan chipped in with 2-35 and 2-33 respectively. Chasing a mammoth target, Zimbabwe's innings never got going after Saifuddin took two wickets in his opening spell before Mashrafe took his first wicket in six matches to reduce the side to 23-3.

Teenage debutant Wesley Madhevere made 35 runs while Tinotenda Mutombodzi made 24 before he became the last man dismissed.

Mohammad Mithun earlier hit 50 off 41 balls and Saifuddin remained unbeaten on 28 off 16 balls to provide

a late impetus in Bangladesh's innings after Liton's blazing hundred. "It's not been going well the last 3-4 matches for us in this format. We hadn't been up to the mark in those games, but today we were up for it," Mashrafe said in the post-match presentation.

"Liton batted so well. And it mattered that others batted around him," Mashrafe added. Liton and Tamim Iqbal put on 60 runs in the opening stand before all-rounder Madhevere trapped Tamim in front for 24 for Zimbabwe's first breakthrough. Najmul Hossain along with Liton then added 80 runs for the second, but several dismissals slowed their innings as Najmul fell for 29 and Mushfiqur Rahim departed for 19. Liton brought his first hundred since the Asia Cup final in 2018 before he limped off the ground with a muscle cramp.

Mithun and Mahmudullah Riyad added 68 runs for the fourth wicket to set-up the base for a late onslaught. Zimbabwe captain Chamu Chibhabha complimented Bangladesh on their batting. "I thought the Bangladeshis batted really well. They had a guy bat through for them, and they had partnerships through the game," he said. Chris Mpofu finished with the highest figure for Zimbabwe of 2-68. The second match of the series will be held at the same venue tomorrow. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard for the first one-day international of a three-match series between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday:

Bangladesh innings		Zimbabwe innings	
Liton Das retired hurt	126	T. Kamunhukamwe b Saifuddin	1
Tamim Iqbal lbw b Madhevere	24	C. Chibhabha c Mahmudullah b Mashrafe	10
Najmul Hossain lbw b Mutombodzi	29	R. Chakabva lbw b Saifuddin	11
Mushfiqur Rahim c Mutumbami b Tiripano	19	B. Taylor b Tajul	8
Mahmudullah lbw b Mpofu	32	W. Madhevere c Mashrafe b Mehidy	35
Mohammad Mithun lbw b Mpofu	50	S. Raza Sikandar Razac Mahmudullah b Mustafizur	18
Mohammad Saifuddin not out	28	R. Mutumbami run out	17
Mehidy Hasan c Kamunhukamwe b Mumba	7	T. Mutombodzi c Saifuddin b Mashrafe	24
Mashrafe Mortaza not out	0	D. Tiripano c & b Mehidy	2
Extras: (lb1, w5)	6	C. Mumba b Saifuddin	13
Total: (six wickets, 50 overs)	321	C. Mpofu not out	9
Fall of wickets: 1-60 (Tamim), 2-140 (Najmul), 3-182 (Mushfiqur), 4-274 (Mahmudullah), 5-289 (Mithun), 6-298 (Mehidy)		Extras: (bl, w3)	4
Did not bat: Tajul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman		Total: (all out: 39.1 overs)	152
Bowling: Mpofu 10-0-68-2 (w1), Mumba 8-0-45-1 (w1), Madhevere 8-0-48-1, Tiripano 7-0-56-1 (w3), Raza 10-0-56-0, Mutombodzi 7-0-47-1.		Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Kamunhukamwe), 2-23 (Chakabva), 3-23 (Chibhabha), 4-44 (Taylor), 5-79 (Raza) 6-84 (Madhevere), 7-106 (Mutumbami), 8-109 (Tiripano), 9-130 (Mumba), 10-152 (Mutombodzi)	
		Bowling: Mustafizur 6-0-22-1, Saifuddin 7-0-22-3 (w2), Mashrafe 6-1-0-35-2, Tajul 9-2-27-1 (w1), Mehidy 8-1-33-2, Mahmudullah 3-0-12-0	
		Result: Bangladesh win by 169 runs.	

NZ bowling 'pack' leave Kohli's India reeling at 90-6

CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand fast bowler Trent Boult said his side's "pack" mentality had left India reeling a day two of the second Test on which 16 wickets fell including another cheap dismissal for Virat Kohli in Christchurch yesterday.

At stumps India led by just 97 lead with only four wickets remaining and three days to play. Kohli's side dismissed New Zealand for 235 to take a seven-run first innings lead, but they stuttered to 90 for six at stumps with Boult taking three for 12 off nine overs.

"The bowlers obviously pitched the ball up nicely and got rewards seeing the ball move around like it did. I feel we're in a decent position," Boult said. "We're all enjoying hunting out there as a pack, getting the ball to move around, and I think the bowling unit is very clear about how we're trying to target the opposition."

The tourists were left to rue their inability to remove tailenders when New Zealand's last three wickets put on 82, led by a polished 49 from Kyle Jamieson. With a small first-innings advantage India needed to build a substantial total for New Zealand to chase but they went off script from the start with Mayank Agarwal out for three in the second over.

Prithvi Shaw followed for 14 and at 26 for two, with India needing a win to square the series, the opportunity was ripe for a captain's knock from Kohli. But on 14, a full delivery from Colin de Grandhomme cut back into his pads and he was gone.

"It was a good feeling to see the back of him," Boult said of Kohli's dismissal. "Obviously he's a big player for them and we were just try to put enough pressure on him, keep him quiet and it was nice to see him make a few errors." — AFP



CHRISTCHURCH: India's Cheteshwar Pujara is clean-bowled on day two 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 two of the second Test between New Zealand and India in Christchurch yesterday:

New Zealand 1st innings (overnight 63-0)		India 2nd innings	
T. Latham b Shami	52	P. Shaw c Latham b Southee	14
T. Blundell lbw Yadav	30	M. Agarwal lbw Boult	3
K. Williamson c Pant b Bumrah	3	C. Pujara b Boult	24
R. Taylor c Yadav b Jadeja	15	V. Kohli lbw de Grandhomme	14
H. Nicholls c Kohli b Shami	14	A. Rahane b Wagner	9
B. Watling c Jadeja b Bumrah	0	U. Yadav b Boult	1
C. de Grandhomme b Jadeja	26	H. Vihari not out	5
T. Southee c Pant b Bumrah	0	R. Pant not out	1
K. Jamieson c Pant b Shami	49	Extras: (b9, lb10)	19
N. Wagner c Jadeja b Shami	21	Total: (6 wickets; 36 overs)	90
T. Boult not out	1	Fall of wickets: 1-8 (Agarwal), 2-26 (Shaw), 3-51 (Kohli), 4-72 (Rahane), 5-84 (Pujara), 6-89 (Yadav)	
Extras: (b20, lb4)	24	Bowling: Southee 6-2-20-1, Boult 9-3-12-3, Jamieson 8-4-18-0, de Grandhomme 5-3-3-1, Wagner 8-1-18-1.	
Total: (all out, 73.1 overs)	235		
Fall of wickets: 1-66 (Blundell), 2-69 (Williamson), 3-109 (Taylor), 4-130 (Latham), 5-133 (Nicholls), 6-153 (Watling), 7-153 (Southee), 8-177 (de Grandhomme), 9-228 (Wagner), 10-235 (Jamieson)			
Bowling: Bumrah 22-5-62-3, Yadav 18-2-46-1, Shami 23.1-3-81-4, Jadeja 10-2-22-2			

S Africa, England power into T20 WCup semi-finals

SYDNEY: Laura Wolvaardt smacked a crucial 53 as South Africa whipped Pakistan to make only their second women's Twenty20 World Cup semi-finals yesterday, where they were joined by former champions England who swept past the West Indies.

Proteas captain Dane van Niekerk won the toss and opted to bat on a slow track at Sydney Showgrounds, with her team making a competitive 136 for six, boosted by Wolvaardt's late fireworks. In reply Pakistan, missing captain Bismah Maroof who was ruled out of the tournament on Saturday with a broken thumb, could only manage 119 for five.

"I'm really happy, but have to give credit to Pakistan, they gave it a massive go and kept coming at us," said van Niekerk. "It was an incredible game to be a part of," she added, while paying tribute to Wolvaardt.

"It's only her third time batting at five, she usually bats at the top, and to display her skills like that, she got us the winning total." South Africa have won three from three in Group B — including a six-wicket humbling of England and a 113-run thumping of Thailand — to make a second T20 semi-final following their efforts in 2014.

England, 2009 champions and runners up at the last tournament, secured their place with a comfortable 46-run win over the West Indies, courtesy of fine bowling and a battling 57 from Natalie Sciver.

India are already through from Group A,



SYDNEY: England's players celebrate their victory against West Indies during the Twenty20 women's World Cup cricket match between England and West Indies in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

with defending champions Australia playing New Zealand to determine who gets the last berth. The dangerous Lizelle Lee, who smashed a century against Thailand, immediately went on the attack as she opened the South African innings.

But pace spearhead Diana Baig bowled a beautiful outswinger and she got an edge to Sidra Nawaz behind the stumps in a big breakthrough for Pakistan. Baig struck again with van Niekerk gone for three to leave South Africa at 17 for two.

Mignon du Preez (17) and Marizanne Kapp (31) steadied the ship, then Wolvaardt played what proved to be a critical knock. She carved out a high-quality 53 from 36 balls, including fours off the final three deliveries.

Pakistan made a brisk start, whacking a

quick 18 before Shabnim Ismail removed Muneeba Ali in a rare T20 wicket- maiden. Omaima Sohail lasted just three balls before being run out in a comical mix-up with stand-in skipper Javeria Khan, then the dangerous Nida Dar departed for three.

A desperately unlucky Khan was batting beautifully in her 100th T20 when she was run out for 31. Needing 58 off the last five overs, Aliya Riaz (39 not out) and Iram Javed (17 not out) did their best but were denied by tight bowling.

In the later game, England won the toss and powered to a competitive 143 for five, with the West Indies ending on a paltry 97. "It was just very professional, we knew we had to keep it simple and that's what we did today," said England captain Heather Knight. — AFP

Blues stay hot with shootout win over Stars

ST LOUIS: Ryan O'Reilly scored the winning shootout goal to lead the St. Louis Blues past the visiting Dallas Stars 4-3 Saturday night for their seventh consecutive victory. The Stars rallied from a 3-1 deficit to force overtime — with John Klingberg scoring the tying goal with 19 seconds left in regulation. But O'Reilly scored the only goal in the shootout. The Central Division-leading Blues have had three winning streaks of at least seven games this season, a franchise first. David Perron, Tyler Bozak and Brayden Schenn scored for the Blues, and Vince Dunn earned two assists. Goaltender Jake Allen stopped 28 shots for his third victory over the Stars this season.

LIGHTNING 4, FLAMES 3

Tampa Bay's special teams scored three times against visiting Calgary just after it was announced that captain Steven Stamkos (lingering core muscle injury) would miss the remainder of the Lightning's regular season. Tyler Johnson and Ondrej Palat netted power-play goals, Yanni Gourde had a short-handed tally, and Alex Killorn added a marker. Nikita Kucherov and Mikhail Sergachev each contributed two assists. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 18 saves to notch his league-leading 33rd victory.

Elis Lindholm had a goal and an assist, and Andrew Mangiapane and Sean Monahan posted markers for the Flames. David Rittich stopped 29 of 33 shots for Calgary, which went 6-7-1 in February.

AVALANCHE 3, PREDATORS 2

Erik Johnson had a goal and an assist, Pavel Francouz stopped 30 shots, and visiting Colorado beat Nashville as Johnson's two points gave him 300 for his career. Gabriel Landeskog and Martin Kaut also had goals for Colorado, which has won a franchise-best eight straight road games and six in a row overall. Viktor Arvidsson and Calle Jarnkrok had goals, and Juse Saros had 28 saves for Nashville. The Predators had their three-game winning streak snapped.

SHARKS 5, PENGUINS 0

Evander Kane and Timo Meier each had a goal and an assist, and goaltender Martin Jones posted his second shutout of the season as host San Jose blanked Pittsburgh to spoil the return of Patrick Marleau. Joel Kellman, Logan Couture and Joe Thornton also scored for San Jose, which won its second in a row after snapping a five-game losing streak. Jones made 30 saves for the 24th shutout of his seven-year career. Tristan Jarry stopped 27 of 32 shots as the Penguins suffered their sixth consecutive defeat — their longest skid since the 2011-12 season. Pittsburgh has been outscored 24-8 over that stretch. Pittsburgh acquired Marleau, who played 20 of his 22 seasons and 1,551 games with the Sharks, on Monday for a conditional draft pick in 2021.

OILERS 3, JETS 2

Leon Draisaitl scored two goals and had an assist, and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins tallied three points, including the game-winning goal with 5:16 remaining, to lead Edmonton over visiting Winnipeg. It was the fourth game-winning goal of the season for Nugent-Hopkins, who took a feed from Draisaitl in the right circle and fired a shot inside the left post past Connor Hellebuyck for his 19th goal of the season. Mike Smith

finished with 39 saves for the Oilers, who moved into sole possession of second place in the Pacific Division, four points behind the idle Vegas Golden Knights.

MAPLE LEAFS 4, CANUCKS 2

Defenseman Martin Marincin scored his first goal of the season 18 seconds into the third period to break a tie and Toronto went on to defeat visiting Vancouver. Frederik Gauthier, Auston Matthews and Zach Hyman also scored for the Maple Leafs. Toronto has won three games in a row. Tyson Barrie and Travis Dermott each added two assists for Toronto, and Frederik Andersen made 25 saves. Tyler Motte and Tanner Pearson scored for the Canucks, who have lost two of the first three games on a four-game road trip. Thatcher Demko made 26 saves for the Canucks.

CANADIENS 4, HURRICANES 3

Jeff Petry scored on a breakaway 52 seconds into overtime, and Montreal prevailed over Carolina despite blowing a multi-goal lead in its fifth straight home game. Brendan Gallagher and Phillip Danault each had a goal with an assist. Max Domi scored, and Tomas Tatar recorded three assists for the Canadiens. Charlie Lindgren made 27 saves in getting the call after Carey Price started the previous 11 games. Haydn Fleury, Joel Edmundson and Justin Williams scored for the Hurricanes. Anton Forsberg started in goal for Carolina but was pulled after allowing three goals in 20 shots. Alex Nedeljkovic made 18 saves in relief.

KINGS 2, DEVILS 1 (OT)

Adrian Kempe scored with 3:02 left in overtime to lift Los Angeles to a win against visiting New Jersey. Dustin Brown also scored, and Jonathan Quick made 32 saves for the Kings, who improved to 5-2-1 in their past eight games. Jesper Bratt scored, and Mackenzie Blackwood made 36 saves for the Devils, who are 3-0-2 in their past five games and 8-3-5 in their past 16. Blackwood had 37 saves in a 3-0 win against visiting Los Angeles on Feb. 8.

BRUINS 4, ISLANDERS 0

David Pastrnak scored his 47th goal, defenseman Charlie McAvoy had one goal with two assists and Tuukka Rask needed just 25 saves for his 49th career shutout as Boston extended its road winning streak over New York to 10 games with a shutout in Uniondale, N.Y. Brad Marchand recorded a goal with an assist, and Matt Grzelcyk scored for the first time since November as the Bruins won for the 13th time in their last 16 games. Rask didn't need to do much in posting his fourth shutout of the season while Boston won for the 18th time in the last 21 meetings on the Islanders' home ice. Semyon Varlamov stopped 26 shots for New York, which has dropped three in a row (0-1-2). The Islanders, who went 0-for-6 on the power play, are 2-5-2 in their last nine contests while trying to remain in playoff position in the Eastern Conference.

BLACKHAWKS 3, PANTHERS 2 (SO)

Jonathan Toews had one goal and an assist, and he also scored in the shootout, leading visiting Chicago over Florida in Sunrise, Fla., as Patrick Kane had the other shootout goal, which ended the game. Chicago's Corey Crawford made 38 saves — and he also stuffed Frank Vatrano and Mike Hoffman in the shootout — to earn the win. He is 9-2-0 in his career against Florida. Drake Cagggiula had Chicago's other goal, giving the Blackhawks a 2-1 lead in the second. That looked like it would be the game-winner until Florida's Mike Matheson scored on a breakaway wrist shot with 1:28 left in the third, forcing overtime. — Reuters

Sports

Everton hold United after late goal ruled out by VAR

Ancelotti handed red card after approaching referee

LIVERPOOL: Everton and Manchester United drew 1-1 at Goodison Park in the Premier League yesterday in an enthralling game which ended with late VAR drama and home manager Carlo Ancelotti sent off.

A superb 31st-minute strike from United midfielder Bruno Fernandes had replied to Dominic Calvert-Lewin's early opener and the Everton striker thought he had grabbed the three points in stoppage time with a low shot that deflected off Harry Maguire but his effort was ruled out by VAR.

Everton's Gylfi Sigurdsson was lying on the floor, after having had his initial shot saved by David De Gea. After referee Chris Kavanagh had consulted with his linesman, VAR ruled out the goal for offside, given that Sigurdsson was in De Gea's line of sight.

The decision infuriated Everton and their manager Carlo Ancelotti was handed a red card for his protests after the final whistle.

"It's not the first time I have been sent off and it won't be the last," joked Ancelotti, who, having calmed down after the game, admitted it was a "difficult" decision for the referee.

That last-gasp drama came moments after Everton keeper Jordan Pickford had produced a superb double save to keep out an initial Fernandes effort and then, with his feet, one from substitute Odion Ighalo.

A draw was a fair result however and leaves United in fifth place, three points behind fourth-placed Chelsea, while Everton are 11th. A dreadful error from De Gea gifted Everton a third-minute opener — the

Spaniard dawdled on the ball after a pass-back from Maguire and his attempted clearance was charged down by Calvert-Lewin and flew off the Everton striker into the net.

Calvert-Lewin should have doubled the lead shortly afterwards when he broke free of the United defence but shot just wide of De Gea's right-hand post. United responded well to the early setback though with Nemanja Matic hitting the cross-bar with a long-range effort and then forcing Pickford into a diving save with another well-struck drive.

January signing Fernandes, the Portuguese midfielder who has brought some much-needed creativity to the United side, put the visitors level with a superb low shot from outside the box in the 31st minute.

Djibril Sidibe had given the ball away to Matic, who set up Fernandes for his pinpoint effort, although Pickford accepted he had been "half a yard out of position". Sigurdsson hit the post with a curling free kick 12 minutes after the interval and the home side were the stronger during the second half as United struggled to maintain their excellent first-half level of performance.

"One point each, is what both teams deserve, we had the first half and they had the second," said United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, while Ancelotti also struck a positive tone. "We played really well, I'm happy for this, we have to continue, no complaints, and we have to look forward. The performance was really good against a really good team and we were competitive all the time," said the Italian. — Reuters



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's English defender Harry Maguire (C) defends a free-kick from Everton's Icelandic midfielder Gylfi Sigurdsson during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Manchester United at Goodison Park in Manchester, north west England yesterday. — AFP

Nadal cruises past Fritz to win Acapulco title

LOS ANGELES: World number two Rafael Nadal captured his first ATP Tour title of 2020, easily defeating unseeded Taylor Fritz in straight sets, 6-3, 6-2, in the final of the Mexico Open on Saturday. The 33-year-old Nadal, playing in his first tournament since losing in the quarter-finals at the Australian Open last month, didn't drop a set all week and improved to 19-2 all-time at this event. He nabbed his third Mexico Open title to go with victories in 2013 and 2005. "I couldn't be happier. I played a great event from the beginning to the end," Nadal said. "Acapulco was the first big title that I won in my career, so to be able to stay here after 15 years is amazing."

"I can't thank enough the people who make me feel at home every single time," Nadal wasted no time figuring out Fritz's game in the first career meeting between the two. The 19-time Grand Slam winner made eight unforced errors and needed just one ace

but it came in the final game of the second set to get to championship point.

Nadal closed it out with a blistering serve that hand-cuffed Fritz and gave Nadal his 85th career title. Nadal ceded the world number one ranking to Novak Djokovic after the Australian Open, where the Serb won a record eighth title.

Nadal could have regained the top spot with a win in Acapulco, but he also needed Djokovic to fail to reach the final in this week's Dubai event. Djokovic extended his win streak to 21 matches by beating Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-3, 6-4 earlier Saturday to lift the Dubai trophy. Nadal won the final eight points to take the first set. He seized control by breaking Fritz's serve in the ninth game to go up 5-4. He then served for the set, winning four straight points. On set point he hammered a serve which Fritz barely got back. That set up an overhead smash for Nadal which he put away nicely.

Nadal broke Fritz twice in the second set, including the fifth game to go up 3-2. He broke Fritz again to take a 5-4 lead and then served out the match. Nadal has now won a title 17 consecutive years.

In the women's final, seventh seeded Heather Watson captured her first WTA title in three years by grinding out a 6-4, 6-7 (6/8), 6-1 win over Canadian teen Leylah Fernandez. The persistent Fernandez, of Filipino and Ecuadorean descent, survived nine championship



ACAPULCO: Spain's Rafael Nadal wearing a sombrero holds the trophy after winning the Mexican Tennis Open ATP final match against USA's Taylor Fritz during the Mexico ATP Open men's singles tennis final in Acapulco, Guerrero state. — AFP

points before finally succumbing to Britain's Watson in a two hour, 46 minute marathon. — AFP

Pinturault wins combined to keep globe-seeking Norwegians on edge

HINTERSTODER: France's Alexis Pinturault ensured the race for the overall World Cup title will go down to the wire by winning yesterday's alpine combined in Hinterstoder. The victory in the event comprising a super-G and slalom — a discipline in which he is reigning world champion — was Pinturault's 28th on the World Cup circuit and 10th in the combined. It also sealed a fourth globe in the discipline.

Sitting second after the super-G won by Switzerland's Mauro Caviezel, Pinturault laid down a near-perfect slalom run for a combined total of 2min 04.90sec. "You can't make any mistakes otherwise you have no chance to win it," said Pinturault of the combined. "It's not like in other disciplines where you have a little room where you are able to make mistakes. In the combined, it's impossible." It was a good day's racing for the 28-year-old Frenchman, coming after a confidence-boosting fourth-placed finish in Saturday's super-G.

His victory saw him leapfrog Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen into second spot in the overall standings, on 1,048 points. Overall leader Aleksander Aamodt Kilde (1,082pts) missed out altogether in Saturday's super-G as he failed to finish the course, but the Norwegian held his nerve on the slalom to finish a combative third in the combined to bag 60pts.

Kristoffersen on Saturday came in 22nd in his first-ever super-G race and elected to play it safe in the slalom section of the combined to ensure an 11th-placed finish, and 24 valuable points, to stay in the race (98pts).

"The battle is very close with Henrik and everything is possible... Aleksander is still the leader," Pinturault said. Racers will tackle what promises to be a cliff-hanger of a giant slalom in the Austrian resort on Monday.

It is a discipline in which Pinturault has won four global bronze medals (2015 and 2019 worlds; 2014 and 2018 Olympics), while Kristoffersen is current Olympic silver medalist and reigning world champion.

Kilde, however, has never made a giant slalom podium, meaning Pinturault and Kristoffersen have, at least on paper, a golden opportunity to make up ground on the Norwegian. "It says something about my equipment and how I race now and how I'm skiing in general when slalom works. Super-G was stable, nothing really special," said Kilde.

The Norwegian said he hoped the coronavirus, which has seen the cancellation or postponement of many sporting events worldwide, would not affect the race for the crystal globe. "I'm not going to lose too much energy on it," the 27-year-old said.

shooting in the first half with 7-for-15 shooting from behind the arc in the third to erase a 17-point deficit. P.J. Tucker added 13 rebounds. Tatum paired 32 points with 13 rebounds for Boston, while Brown added 22 points. Marcus Smart scored 26 for the Celtics, who received 15 rebounds and three blocks from Daniel Theis.

MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 105 - LOS ANGELES LAKERS 88

Ja Morant recorded 27 points and matched his career high of 14 assists, and host Memphis snapped a five-game losing streak while ending Los Angeles' seven-game win string. Dillon Brooks scored 24 points, and Jonas Valanciunas added 22 points and 20 rebounds for the Grizzlies, who salvaged the final of four meetings against the Lakers this season. It was the second straight 20-rebound effort for Valanciunas. LeBron James had 19 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds for Los Angeles, which saw its seven-game winning streak come to an end. Anthony Davis had 15 points and nine rebounds, and the 88 points are a season low for the Lakers.

ATLANTA HAWKS 129 - PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS 117

Trae Young led a balanced attack with his 26th double-



HINTERSTODER: Winner Alexis Pinturault of France celebrates on the podium after the Men's slalom run of the Alpine Combined event at the FIS ski alpine World Cup yesterday in Hinterstoder, Austria. — AFP

"Tomorrow we have another race. If he (Pinturault) wins, then I have to step up my game as well." After Monday's giant slalom, there remains in the calendar a trip to the Norwegian resort of Kvitfjell (downhill, super-G), Kranjska Gora in Slovenia (giant slalom, slalom) and then the March 18-22 season-ending finals in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy.

Officials have already ruled that the finals in Cortina, which lies in the Veneto region badly affected by the coronavirus outbreak that has killed 29 people and infected more than 1,000 in Italy, be held without any fans over health concerns. — AFP

double of the season and paced Atlanta to a win over visiting Portland. Young had 25 points — including 10-for-10 from the line — and 15 assists and was one of six Atlanta players who scored in double figures. The Hawks also got 24 points and 10 rebounds from John Collins, his 19th double-double. Portland was led by C.J. McCollum with 35 points. The Trail Blazers also got 21 points and 13 rebounds from Hassan Whiteside and 15 points from Gary Trent Jr.

NEW YORK KNICKS 125 - CHICAGO BULLS 115

Mitchell Robinson scored 23 points, Julius Randle added 22 points and both players snagged 10 rebounds, helping host New York snap a six-game losing streak with a victory against Chicago. New York opened a five-game homestand with its first win at Madison Square Garden since Feb. 6. The Knicks are just 9-20 at home this season. Chicago lost for the 10th time in 11 games despite a game-high 26 points by Zach LaVine. The Bulls finished 1-8 in February to fall a season-low 20 games under .500.

MIAMI HEAT 116 - BROOKLYN NETS 113

Kendrick Nunn scored 21 points and hit a clutch 3-pointer down the stretch as Miami held on against visiting Brooklyn. Nunn's biggest shot of the night was a 3-pointer

Klopp warns Liverpool after unbeaten run ends

WATFORD: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp insisted the title is not won yet after his side were beaten for the first time in 45 games in the Premier League as Watford thrashed the European champions 3-0 on Saturday.

Klopp's men still enjoy a 22-point lead at the top of the table and need a maximum of four wins from their remaining 10 games to secure a first league title for 30 years. However, defeat at Vicarage Road continues a downturn in form as they sneaked past relegation-threatened Norwich and West Ham in their two previous league games and lost the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie to Atletico Madrid.

"What the boys did so far is exceptional but it is not over," said Klopp. "We did not expect the number of games we won. It was never easy and it will never be easy, so now let's carry on." Klopp has long been an advocate of a winter break amid the grueling English campaign to give his players a chance to rest and recuperate.

But a two-week break earlier this month appears to have disrupted the Reds' rhythm. "Shape, form is not something we can take for granted. We fought against each every feeling in the body. We fought against everything and that's why we have that amount of points," added Klopp.

"The biggest surprise for me is that Watford is fighting to stay in the league. Now is the moment when everybody is fighting like crazy. We don't think it is the biggest catastrophe in world football. We feel the defeat really and now we have the chance to show the reaction again."

Ismaila Sarr was the star for Watford as the Senegalese struck twice in six minutes at the start of the second half and then tied up Troy Deeney to add a third. The comprehensive scoreline had the added bonus of edging Watford out of the relegation zone by one goal ahead of Bournemouth.

However, after slipping back into the bottom three following a fine start to his reign, Hornets' boss Nigel Pearson is all too aware of the importance of backing up a famous win for the remainder of the season.

"It's such an important win for us. But it is one win," said Pearson. "They are such an outstanding side, we had to get our performance right and I thought we thoroughly deserved the win. We threatened with the ball and defended with discipline, energy and commitment. That's been the message from day one. It's in our own hands, and we have to deliver that performance week in, week out." — AFP

Westbrook scores 41 as Rockets edge Celtics in OT

BOSTON: Russell Westbrook scored a game-high 41 points, and James Harden found redemption from a poor shooting night with two free throws with 24.3 seconds left in overtime as the Houston Rockets capped a season sweep of the host Boston Celtics with a 111-110 win Saturday. Harden scored 21 points on just 7-of-24 shooting and committed five turnovers. But his free throws, just his second and third of the game, gave Houston the lead. The Celtics' Jaylen Brown sank the buzzer-beating 3-pointer that forced overtime, corralling a loose ball after Jayson Tatum missed two free throws, the second one intentionally, with 5.1 seconds left and Boston trailing 104-101. Westbrook and Harden combined for 12 rebounds and 13 assists, while Robert Covington chipped in 16 points and 16 rebounds for Houston, which followed 6-for-22 3-point

from the right side with one second left on the shot clock that gave Miami a 112-103 lead with 2:44 remaining. Jimmy Butler split a pair at the line with 9.1 seconds remaining to make it 115-113, and the Nets called a timeout. Spencer Dinwiddie wound up throwing the ball into the second row after Joe Harris was late to provide a screen off an inbounds play with 1.7 seconds left. Miami secured its second straight victory when Goran Dragic hit a free throw with four-tenths of a second left.

INDIANA PACERS 113 - CLEVELAND CAVALIERS 104

T.J. Warren scored 30 points, making 14 of 20 shots from the field, as visiting Indiana defeated Cleveland. Malcolm Brogdon collected 22 points and eight assists for the Pacers, who have won five of their last six contests following a season-high six-game skid. Indiana's Victor Oladipo scored a season-high 19 points in his 10th game since returning from a yearlong absence from a ruptured tendon in his right knee. The Pacers' Domantas Sabonis recorded his 46th double-double of the season with 18 points and 13 rebounds. Cleveland's Andre Drummond collected 27 points and 13 rebounds in his return from a two-game absence due to a left calf strain. He also had four assists and four steals. — Reuters

25 Barker bags first world track cycling gold for Britain



26 S Africa, England power into T20 WCup s-finals



27 Everton hold United after late goal ruled out by VAR



City hold off Villa to retain League Cup



LONDON: Manchester City captain David Silva lifts the trophy as his teammates celebrate their win after the English League Cup final football match between Aston Villa and Manchester City at Wembley stadium in London yesterday. Manchester City won the game 2-1. — AFP

LONDON: Manchester City claimed the League Cup for the fourth time in five seasons by beating Aston Villa 2-1 at Wembley yesterday thanks to goals from Sergio Aguero and Rodrigo. Mbwana Samatta pulled a goal back for Villa, but their wait for the club's first silverware since 1996 goes on as Pep Guardiola's men have now won six of the last seven major trophies in English football.

Guardiola made eight changes from the side that won 2-1 at Real Madrid in the Champions League on Wednesday with Kevin De Bruyne among those left on the bench. However, it mattered little as City had the luxury of recalling Aguero, Raheem Sterling and David Silva to the starting XI, and the gulf in class showed.

Guardiola's raft of changes also handed a rare start to Phil Foden and the 19-year-old more than justified his selection. Rodrigo's fine pass picked out Foden to head back into the path of Aguero and the Argentine's deflected effort beat Orjan Nyland in the Villa goal to open the scoring on 20 minutes.

Foden was then inches away from a goal himself with a deflected shot that flew inches wide, Villa felt aggrieved when City were awarded another corner moments later after Jack Grealish fired the ball off Ilkay Gundogan for what should have been a goal kick.

Instead, City doubled their lead as Gundogan's corner was met with a powerful downward header from Rodrigo. Villa could barely even get a touch for the

next 10 minutes as the holders threatened to run riot in a repeat of the 6-1 thrashing they handed the hosts at Villa Park last month.

Sterling had a glorious chance for his first goal of 2020 deflected behind by a brave block from Tyrone Mings. But moments later the reason Mings is ahead of John Stones in the pecking order for England selection became clear as the City defender inexplicably fell to the floor to give Villa a lifeline.

A long ball forward eventually came to Anwar El Ghazi and from his cross Samatta headed low past Claudio Bravo to the delight of the travelling thousands from Birmingham and Villa fan Prince William in the stands. The difference in the desperation for success

between the supports was obvious as Villa were roared on vociferously throughout, while City failed to sell out their allocation. That did not compensate for the difference in quality on the field as City quickly settled back into their rhythm and could then introduce De Bruyne for the final half hour.

However, City failed to turn their dominance into more goals as Rodrigo was denied by a fine save by Nyland from another corner before Aguero then fired into the side-netting to give Villa hope for the last 10 minutes. And they were very nearly punished as the often-criticised Bravo had to make a brilliant save three minutes from time to turn Bjorn Engels' header onto the post and maintain City's grip on the competition. —AFP

Jimenez rocks Spurs as Wolves boost Euro bid

LONDON: Raul Jimenez boosted Wolves' bid to qualify for the Champions League as his late winner capped the visitors' dramatic fightback in their 3-2 victory at Tottenham yesterday. Nuno Espirito Santo's side trailed twice in north London, but hit back from 2-1 down thanks to second-half goals from Diogo Jota and Jimenez. Wolves moved two points above Tottenham into sixth place in the Premier League, as it stands, finishing fifth could lead to a Champions League place, owing to second-placed Manchester City's European ban, against which they are appealing.

Sitting level on points with fifth-placed Manchester United and just three behind fourth-placed Chelsea, Wolves are firmly in the hunt for an unexpected berth in Europe's elite club competition.

They fell behind to Steven Bergwijn's first-half opener, but Matt Doherty equalised and even Serge Aurier restoring Tottenham's lead couldn't knock Wolves

out of their stride. It was a bitter blow for injury-hit Tottenham, who suffered three consecutive defeats in all competitions for the first time this season.

Heading into this weekend, Spurs had kept just three clean-sheets in 22 games in all competitions since Mourinho took charge. So Mourinho dropped defenders Toby Alderweireld and Jan Vertonghen as part of four changes following last week's defeat at Chelsea, with keeper Hugo Lloris sidelined by a groin injury.

Those switches included midfielder Eric Dier dropping back to centre-half and exploited Mourinho's reshuffle time and again. Tottenham had their chances and took the lead with a superb counter in the 13th minute. Giovanni Lo Celso picked out Aurier's run down the right and when the right-back's cross reached Dele Alli, his shot was pushed out by Rui Patrício into the path of Bergwijn, who slotted home from close-range. It was the Dutch winger's second goal since joining Tottenham from PSV Eindhoven in January.

But the hosts remained creaky at the back and Nuno's men crafted an impressive equaliser in the 27th minute. Dier and Japhet Tanganga both made a hash of attempting to clear and Doherty made them pay as the defender fired past Paulo Gazzaniga for his seventh goal of the season. Their hopes have been hit by the loss



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's French midfielder Tanguy Ndombele (L) vies with Wolverhampton Wanderers' Portuguese midfielder Ruben Neves (C) during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, yesterday. — AFP

of Harry Kane, Moussa Sissoko and Son Heung-min, but Tottenham were not enough despite those absences and Aurier put them back in front in first-half stoppage-time. Nuno sat on the Porto bench as reserve keeper when Mourinho guided the Portuguese club to Champions League glory in 2004. And, trying to record his first

victory as a manager over Mourinho at the third attempt, Nuno was back on level terms in the 57th minute. Adama Traore bullied his way past Tanganga and found Jimenez, who slipped a pass to the over-lapping Doherty. Doherty's low cross reached Jota and he tapped in his sixth goal in three games from virtually on the line. — AFP

Bekele breaks Farah's record

LONDON: Ethiopia's Kenenisa Bekele broke Mo Farah's course record as he won the London half-marathon yesterday in a time of one hour and 22 seconds.

Bekele took 18sec off the record set in 2019 by British distance great Farah, who missed this year's edition with an achilles injury.

Britain's Christopher Thompson finished second, with Jake Smith third.

Yesterday's event served as a warm-up event for the full London Marathon on April 26. That race is set to see Bekele go up against Eliud Kipchoge, the reigning Olympic champion from Kenya, as the two fastest marathon runners of all time meet in the British capital.

"The new course record is a great bonus. I wasn't focused on time today, I just wanted to win," Bekele, three times an Olympic gold medalist on the track, told the BBC.

"I'm on schedule in my preparation for the London Marathon in April. There's no question about the crowds in London being great. They were cheering all around the course and it felt like a great place to be." — AFP