

Kuwait cuts discount rate over coronavirus; 2 patients in ICU

One case critical • Two leave quarantine • Saudi suspends umrah • First death in Iraq

By B Izzak and Agencies

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait yesterday decided to cut the discount rate from 2.75 percent to 2.50 percent to soften the impact of the novel coronavirus outbreak. No new COVID-19 cases were reported in Kuwait yesterday for the second day in a row, but the health ministry said the health condition of two infected Kuwaiti women deteriorated and one of them is in critical condition.

CBK Governor Mohammad Al-Hashel said in a statement the Central Bank board took the decision in light of uncertainties on the prospects of global economic growth and repercussions of the coronavirus outbreak, namely its impact on international trade. It also came against the backdrop of a fall in collective demand and gross product after the US Federal Reserve decision to cut the interest rate on the US dollar by 0.50 percent in a bid to cope with mounting hazards emanating from the coronavirus epidemic.

Slashing the discount rate (at the national level) is part of precautionary measures in anticipation of coronavirus-related fallout, Hashel said. Moreover, the move is designed to preserve monetary and financial stability, along with maintaining "attractiveness and competitiveness" of the Kuwaiti dinar, as well as for sake of backing up economic activities and macroeconomic performance, he added.

MP Safa Al-Hashem called on authorities



KUWAIT: Health ministry workers scan employees and visitors of the ministries complex as they arrive to work in Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

to stop expatriates in infected countries from returning to the country without medical tests in advance in their home country. She said that the decision requiring expats from 10 countries to undergo tests for the coronavirus before returning to the country should have been applied immediately and not from March 8. "This is a national security issue and should not be subjected to

political courtesies," Hashem told reporters. She also cast doubt on the credibility of medical centers authorized by Kuwaiti missions, saying the medical certificates must be attested by the embassies.

The health ministry said the measure is temporary and the countries were selected on the basis of recommendations by the

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Biden leads Sanders in White House race as Bloomberg exits

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden reclaimed frontrunner status in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination after notching up stunning Super Tuesday primary victories over Bernie Sanders and receiving the backing of Mike Bloomberg, who dropped out and endorsed the former vice president. "I can't thank you enough for your support," the 77-year-old Biden tweeted after Bloomberg, the billionaire former New York mayor, announced yesterday that he was ending his unconventional campaign.



Joe Biden

"This race is bigger than candidates and bigger than politics," said Biden, who is making his third White House bid after failed runs in 1988 and 2008. "It's about defeating Donald Trump, and with your help, we're gonna do it." Biden, whose campaign had been on life support after the first three nominating contests, won at least nine of the 14 states at stake on Super Tuesday, the biggest day of the election calendar so far. "They don't call it Super Tuesday for nothing," Biden told cheering supporters at a rally in Los Angeles. "Make no mistake about it, this campaign will send Donald Trump packing."

Sanders, a 78-year-old self-described democratic socialist, won his home state of Vermont, Utah and looked to be headed for victory in California, the biggest prize of the night, as vote-counting continued yesterday.

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Local

Kuwait Fights Coronavirus

Minister inspects measures against coronavirus at Kuwait int'l airport

Labor union shows gratitude towards Amir's honoring of employees



KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Acting Minister of State for Services Mariam Al-Aqeel tours Kuwait International Airport yesterday. — KUNA photos

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Acting Minister of State for Services Mariam Al-Aqeel yesterday visited Kuwait International Airport to inspect the precautionary procedures the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is following over the COVID-19 outbreak. Aqeel met DGCA Chief Sheikh Salman Al-Hmoud Al-Sabah and a number of officials and attended the daily meeting of the supreme committee for fighting the virus, where she was briefed about the precautionary measures followed 24/7 at the airport.

Aqeel also visited the Public Authority for Manpower, where she met Director Ahmad Al-Moussa, who briefed her about the newly activated electronic services designed to help fight the spread of the coronavirus. Aqeel also met with the public to inquire about their satisfaction with the new services. She hailed the time and effort saved by using the new e-services. On the third stop of her tour, Aqeel visited the Public Authority for the Disabled, where she also checked the services provided to the public and the

precautionary measures followed there.

Union shows gratitude

Chairman of Kuwait Trade Union Federation (KTUF) and Chairman of the Municipality Employees Syndicate Mohammed Abdullah Al-Aradah thanked His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his orders to honor all employees working on the frontlines of fighting the coronavirus. Aradah added that he met the head of the government communication center and the government's official spokesperson Tareq Al-Mezrem to discuss combining efforts to fight the virus. Aradah said the meeting called for fighting rumors and inaccurate information in such critical circumstances. Both sides also agreed to name a liaison officer to coordinate their efforts.

Voluntary action

Charities Union Deputy Chairman Abdul Mohsen Al-Kharafi stressed the significance of organizing the union's work and suggested forming a tripartite team to supervise promoting voluntary action. Speaking in an open session held by the union with the participation of 38 charities in the presence of the manager of

the charities department at the social affairs ministry Hoda Al-Rashed to discuss the role of charities under the current health contingency, Kharafi hailed the government's efforts and stressed that the meeting aims at combining efforts.

The union's executive manager Abdullah Al-Haidar stressed that the charities' role should focus on boosting religious, educational, faith and health awareness through opening charity premises to respond to inquiries and provide spiritual support. Kuwait Medical Association (KMA) Director Ahmed Al-Enezi said WHO confirmed that the number of people infected with COVID-19 is increasing and stressed that as an NGO, KMA has a role to play in supporting government institutions and coordinate with the charities union, adding that in view of the coronavirus danger, KMA had opened its doors to volunteers.

Enezi hailed the role played by KRCS, noting that it will certainly need more volunteers to act under the supervision of MoH. Director of International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) Bader Al-Sumait suggested providing more volunteers to help contain the disease, adding that KMA had provided 2,000 specialist volunteers. Rashed stressed that the ministry

supports all charities in this regard, noting that the charities union had designed the 'Bader' (Take the Initiative) project and that a call will be made for volunteers to enlist. Nema Zakat and Community Development General Manager Saad Al-Otaibi called for paying more attention to the role played by families and parents in guiding their children and boosting their awareness about the disease, especially now since schools are suspended.

Price control

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) yesterday stressed the continuation of its inspection tours of various pharmacies, markets and co-ops to make sure of the availability of foodstuff and supplies and controlling their prices. A statement MoCI issued in this regard explained that inspection tours conducted on Tuesday resulted in closing one store and inspecting 156 pharmacies and other commercial stores, and filing 35 citations after receiving 97 complaints through its hotline number 135. The statement explained that the violations included unjustified price hikes and using improper tools and materials in handling foodstuff.

COVID-19 changes people's behavior, attitude overnight

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The behavior and attitude of people and the way they are communicating and relating with others saw a noticeable change overnight after the outbreak of coronavirus in Kuwait. In buses, people are wearing masks and talking about the virus. Some won't even talk to you or answer back when you talk to them without a mask. "I don't want to wear a mask, but because people are wearing them, I feel obligated to wear it as well," a passenger said yesterday.

"The driver refuses to talk to passengers unless they have mask. A driver told a passenger to wear a mask or don't talk," another passenger said. "Yesterday, two passengers fought because one of them sneezed and coughed. Even though she was wearing a mask, the other passenger told her to stop sneezing and coughing, and they shouted at each other," she added.

At the Holy Family Cathedral, the main gate was closed, but there was an announcement at the gate that masses and other activities will resume after March 14. The adoration chapel is open and people are advised to worship in silence. But two people are allowed at a time to enter the room to pray. "They told us to avoid kissing the statues and have no contact with people; no handshaking - only a nod is okay," said a worshipper at the church, who was wearing a mask.

Some workplaces and offices in Kuwait have provided sanitizers and masks at the entrance to oblige their employees to sanitize before entering. "In our office, there are verbal rules to avoid shaking hands. We cannot be close to each other too," an office worker said. In malls, signs at every entrance inform and remind the public about the disease and how to prevent this virus from spreading.

In Kuwait, there are 56 reported cases and most of them are recuperating in hospital. All



KUWAIT: A notice fixed outside a church in Kuwait, notifying visitors that it is closed until March 14. — Photo by Ben Garcia

of the cases are for people who visited areas heavily infected with the virus, such Iran and Italy, and there has been no local transmissions yet, according to the ministry of health.

Thermometers in Kuwait schools

KUWAIT: Thermometers will be distributed in schools throughout Kuwait as part of the national measures to counter coronavirus (COVID-19), said the Ministry of Education yesterday. In a press statement, the ministry

indicated that a meeting was held with representatives of the Health Ministry to coordinate efforts in distributing thermometers at schools nationwide. Other measures include pamphlets and instructions informing the

schools populous on how to better prevent the spread of coronavirus, added the ministry. Kuwait suspended schools and universities since March 1 in an effort to counter the spread of COVID-19. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait health ministry workers scan employees and visitors of the ministries complex, as they arrive to their work yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 56 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which all are for Kuwaiti patients who returned to the country from Iran. With the exception of two cases Kuwaiti women in their 70s who have been admitted to the intensive care unit with pneumonia, all cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while two patients have been discharged after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infection, as it has already tested over 3,100 people, the overwhelming majority of them have returned from Iran.

Countries' ban list

As a precautionary measure against the spread of the virus, Kuwait has suspended flights from and to the following countries:

- China
- Hong Kong
- Singapore
- Thailand
- South Korea
- Japan
- Italy
- Iraq
- Iran

In the meantime, Kuwait sent charter flights to bring back Kuwaitis from infected areas, mainly Iran, Italy and Thailand, and test them before entering the country. Meanwhile, authorities have stopped issuing all kinds of visas (visit, work, etc) for Egyptian nationals, while allowing those who already have a visa to enter only after they take tests in Cairo before coming to Kuwait. In the meantime, Iraq has suspended flights from Kuwait, whereas Saudi Arabia stopped issuing umrah visas for all nationalities as a precautionary measures. Furthermore, Kuwait is requiring expatriates to obtain a complete medical examination (PCR-certificate) confirming that they are free from the coronavirus if they are traveling back to the

country from the following countries:

- Philippines
- India
- Bangladesh
- Egypt
- Syria
- Azerbaijan
- Turkey
- Sri Lanka
- Georgia
- Lebanon

Precautions

State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes for the first two weeks of March at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staff). In the meantime, the Civil Service Commission suspended the biometric fingerprint system for staff attendance until further notice.

Hotlines

- The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.

- The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

Local

Coronavirus compounds Gulf economic woes as oil prices slump

Dozens of events scrapped or postponed across region

DUBAI: Energy-rich Gulf states have scrapped or postponed dozens of events as part of measures to contain the new coronavirus, denting economies already hurt by slumping oil prices. From OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia to the region's most diversified economy the United Arab Emirates, sports tournaments, economic conferences and major religious events have been sacrificed in attempts to curb the spread of the disease.

More than 150 coronavirus cases have been detected in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, mostly among people returning from pilgrimages to Iran. The Gulf region is already struggling to cope with decreasing oil revenues as the public health crisis paralyzes economic giant China — the world's biggest oil importer and buyer of Gulf oil. Now Riyadh has suspended the umrah, the minor Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah that draws millions, while other Gulf nations have restricted entry to foreigners.

Citing "precautionary preventive measures" against the disease that has killed some 3,200 people globally, organizers of the inaugural Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah announced it had been postponed indefinitely.

The bustling emirate of Dubai, known for hosting hundreds of conferences annually, has scrapped the Art Dubai exhibition, an international boat show and other events. "We had plans to run a PR event for a jewelry brand during Art Dubai, and to host a gathering on the sidelines of the Saudi film festival," one

French businessman who runs a public relations firm in Dubai said. "Both have been cancelled. I haven't slept well in three nights," he said of the impact on his business.

A number of sports events have also been postponed or cancelled, including cycling's UAE Tour, which was abandoned when two Italian support crew members were diagnosed with coronavirus. Six more related infections followed.



Crisis could affect Dubai Expo

Dubai's debts," it said in a report. If the crisis continues, it could affect the Dubai Expo 2020 global trade fair. Dubai has pinned its economic hopes on the mega-event, which it hopes will attract 25 million visitors from October. Capital Economics estimates the six Gulf Cooperation Council states will lose some \$40 billion of oil revenues this year, after prices crashed from about \$70 a barrel in early January to a low of \$50.

In a bid to shore up prices, the OPEC crude producing cartel and its allies are expected to agree to additional cuts in production when they meet today, further reducing much-needed revenues. Virus containment measures have also hurt the tourism, aviation and retail sectors.

Growth clipped
London-based Capital Economics said the spread of the new coronavirus had prompted it to lower its Middle East 2020 growth forecast by 0.5 percent to two percent. "The UAE is the most vulnerable economy and the fallout threatens to ignite concerns over



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti traders wearing protective masks follow the market at Bourse Kuwait in Kuwait City on March 1, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

The UAE's major airlines, Emirates and Etihad, have asked their staff to take unpaid leave as they cancel and reschedule flights. "In the face of pandemic, amid continued lockdown of communities and corporations, supply chains will get disrupted, consumption and consumer spending will take a hit," said MR Raghu, head of research at Kuwait Financial Center (Markaz). — KUNA

Janitor commits suicide in Fintas

KUWAIT: A building janitor committed suicide by hanging using a metal wire in Fintas, according to the police report. Investigations indicated he was suffering from mental problems. The Egyptian man was in his 40s and worked for the building he committed suicide in. The body was taken to the coroner.

Domestic violence

A Moroccan put an end to differences with her husband by beating and threatening him with a knife. He locked himself in the bedroom and called police. The woman was arrested and charged.

Sheep stolen

A shepherd said 14 sheep were stolen from him in the Kabd desert. The Bangladeshi shepherd told Ahmadi police that seven persons threatened him

with knives, took 14 sheep and escaped. An armed robbery case was recorded and detectives were asked to investigate.

Fraud

A Syrian lost KD 17,000 after he received a call from a person claiming to be a bank employee, and gave his account information over the phone. The Syrian lost his money in three transactions, so he closed the account after informing the bank. Detectives are investigating.

Theft

An unidentified person dismantled the engine of an Egyptian's car and escaped with its parts. The thief was not seen or identified by anyone.

— Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

Reckless driver leaves several people injured



KUWAIT: A combination of pictures released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows the suspect's vehicle after it was located.

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait police are searching for a driver who ran over a number of people while driving recklessly before escaping. Police had arrived to the scene in response to emergency calls reporting

a number of injuries resulting from accidents caused by a reckless driver. The victims were taken to hospital for treatment. Policemen were able to locate the suspect's car, and were able to identify the owner who is still at large. Investigations are ongoing for his arrest.



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Photo of the Day

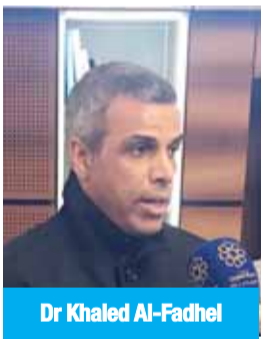


KUWAIT: A view of the Sheikh Jaber Causeway taken from the beach. —Photo by Sandra Pinedo Garcia (Instagram: @sandra.pinedo35)
(Submit your photos for consideration to be featured in the 'Photo of the Day' section at local@kuwaittimes.com)

Kuwait's Oil Minister expresses positivity on oil price recovery

VIENNA: Kuwaiti Minister of Oil and Acting Minister of Electricity and Water Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel said that there is a positive and optimistic view in the recovery of oil prices. This came in a statement the minister made prior to his participation in the 178th Extraordinary Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the eighth ministerial meeting of the OPEC+ coalition, which are scheduled today. "We aspire to have a balance in oil prices in order to reach the required level that satisfies the exporting and consuming countries and that the price level is acceptable to all," said the minister. The meeting comes in exceptional cir-

cumstances due to the spread of the coronavirus, which has become a global concern that has cast a shadow over oil prices, he added. Last December, Oil ministers from OPEC and outside agreed to increase the volume of production cut by 500 thousand barrels in order to stabilize and balance global markets. —KUNA



Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel

GCC chief hails Gulf Interior ministers' efforts

RIYADH: GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf praised Tuesday exerted efforts made by GCC interior ministers in the framework of the joint Gulf security work. Hajraf made his remarks during a meeting with Saudi Interior Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Al-Saud, according to a press statement. Hajraf added that these efforts have resulted in what has been achieved in areas of cooperation in this aspect that focuses on Gulf security and assurances the safety of the Arabian Gulf citizens and their residents and proves that it is a safety controller for the region. GCC chief also praised the great success and mobilization exercise 'Arab Gulf Security 2,' which was held in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates and with the participation of the Gulf interior

ministries, and the high readiness that the security services revealed and their great ability to address all dangers and confront terrorism and its threats. He also appreciated "efforts exerted by the Saudi Interior Ministry in the framework of dealing with the new coronavirus, known as COVID-19, through precautionary measures in line with health preventive measures, and through steps in land and air ports, in order to preserve the safety of citizens, residents and travelers between the countries of the Council." Meanwhile, the Saudi Minister congratulated the Secretary-General on his assumption of the position as Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, noting that the role of the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council in promoting the path of joint Gulf action. He also discussed with the Secretary-General a number of topics related to the Gulf. —KUNA



Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf

Algeria, Kuwait share experiences on protecting women's rights

ALGIERS: Algeria's Minister of National Solidarity, the Family and the Status of Women Kaoutar Krikou said she was eager to learn from Kuwait's experience in protecting people in need. The minister made the remarks during her meeting with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Algeria Mohammad Al-Shabo, where they discuss boosting cooperation in the social field, the ministry said in a statement yesterday. The meeting is part of the minis-

ter's plan to share experience with Arab countries in the social field and protecting women's rights. The minister also noted her country is planning to establish institutions tasked with enabling women to become financially independent. Meanwhile, the ambassador hailed the strong Kuwaiti-Algerian relations, adding that Kuwait is eager to cooperate with Algeria on improving and protecting the rights of women. —KUNA



RIYADH: Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met with President of the Saudi Space Commission Prince Sultan bin Salman in Riyadh yesterday. Sheikh Ali presented to Prince Sultan a copy of a book documented the latter's visit to Kuwait after he flew aboard the US Space Shuttle Discovery in the 1980s as the first Arab in space. —KUNA

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Local

Kuwait's Foreign Minister takes part in Arab ministerial meeting

Sheikh Dr Ahmad meets Jordanian, Omani, Bahrain counterparts



CAIRO: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah participates in the 153rd session of the Council of the Arab League at the ministerial level in Cairo. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah (right) attends the session.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs a coordination meeting with members of the Kuwaiti delegation.

CAIRO: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attended yesterday the 153rd session of the Council of the Arab League at the ministerial level in Cairo. During the meeting, a number of issues pertaining to Arab cooperation and issues of regional importance were discussed. Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi, Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the Arab League Counselor Ahmad Al-Baker and several senior officials of the Foreign Ministry were present at the meeting.

Meanwhile, a senior Omani official called on Arab states to "restructure joint Arab action" and seek to restore confidence with regional and international powers. The Arab League council should examine "our cur-

rent conditions," said Oman's official in charge of foreign affairs Yousef bin Alawi, in a statement he made as he chaired the session. Contrary to aspirations, conditions prevailing in the Arab world are characterized with dissensions and conflicts, he said. On the Middle East question, bin Alawi said Israel has no option other than being engaged in serious negotiations with the Palestinians. For its part, the international community should shoulder "the historic responsibility and act to end this strife by means of attaining justice." The Sultanate of Oman, under leadership of Sultan Haitham al-Saeed, adamantly remains committed to backing the Arab League and cooperating with all Arab states to attain the league objectives and achieve inter-Arab integration, the Omani official noted further. Meanwhile,

the session's chair, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Al-Hakim affirmed his country's keenness on backing all initiatives for resolving the conflicts in Libya, Syria and Yemen. These countries must restore their normal roles within framework of the Arab order, said Al-Hakim, addressing the session.

In other news, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad met yesterday with his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Al-Safadi, on the sidelines of the session. Both ministers underlined the depth of fraternal firm and close relations between both countries and discussed the latest regional and international developments. Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad had also met on Tuesday with Omani Foreign Minister Yousef bin Alawi and Bahraini Foreign Minister Dr

Abdulatif Al-Zayani.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad had arrived in Egypt earlier on Tuesday to head the Kuwaiti delegation in 153rd Arab League ministerial council meetings. The Kuwaiti delegation includes Foreign Minister Assistant Ambassador Ahmad Al-Awadhi. After arrival, the minister held a coordination meeting with Awadhi, Baker and senior figures from the Kuwaiti delegation, in preparation for the meeting. Upon arrival, the Foreign Minister was received by Baker as well as Kuwait Ambassador to Egypt Saleh Al-Thuwikh. The minister also attended a dinner banquet in honor of his visit to Cairo, hosted by Kuwait's Permanent Member in the Arab League. Awadhi and the Kuwaiti delegation also attended the dinner ceremony. —KUNA



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Al-Safadi.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Omani Foreign Minister Yosif bin Alawi.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Bahraini Foreign Minister Dr Abdulatif Al-Zayani.

Burgan Bank sponsors Senyar Forum's National Day celebrations

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently concluded its sponsorship of 'Senyar Forum,' the National and Liberation Day celebration organized by the Kuwaiti Student Association at Temple University in Philadelphia. The grand celebration was held under the patronage and presence of Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Attended by a large number of Kuwaiti students from several universities in the presence of distinguished officials and guests, the forum included special themed recreational and cultural activities. The aim of the forum was to facilitate dialogue by creating a collaborative culture between different students and to enhance networking opportunities as part of its objective to grow youth competencies.

Through the participation in this event, Burgan Bank affirms its leadership in supporting national initiatives and empowering local youth. The bank seeks to foster positive youth development and create an educated and socially conscious generation in line with the Kuwait Vision 2035. Burgan Bank will continue to contribute to the success of the Vision by aiding many such projects that serve the aspirations and ambitions of the young generation to achieve sustainable development in accordance with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Burgan Bank's support of this initiative falls under its full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change. This program sheds light on impor-



tant aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural, social and health initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE'

begins with a vital principle that as a Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the Kuwaiti society.

Kuwait Airways ready to receive Airbus A330-800 aircraft



KUWAIT: Airbus has finished preparing the first A330-800 aircraft purchased by Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC), and which will be received during the third quarter of this year, KAC announced yesterday. The national carrier had signed a contract to purchase eight Airbus A330-800 aircrafts, and they are scheduled to be received in succession until 2026 as per the plan agreed upon when the contract was signed on September 30, 2018.

KAC said in a press statement that the Airbus A330-800 received the airworthiness certificate from European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The A330-800 aircraft is considered among the new generation of the A330 neo family of aircrafts, KAC noted, adding that the plane has the longest range in its category of the wide bodied structures.

ABK commended for support of UNHCR plan

KUWAIT: In line with its ongoing commitment to social responsibility, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) yesterday announced its contribution to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) 2019-2020 Regional Winterization Assistance Plan.

This winter, UNHCR estimated that 4.1 million Syrian and Iraqi Internally Displaced (IDPs) and refugees of other nationalities are in need of winterization assistance in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. For many, this will be the ninth consecutive winter in displacement surviv-

ing hostile conditions and exposure to extreme weather conditions.

The latest humanitarian contribution from ABK will assist the UNHCR to provide the IDPs and refugees with core relief items and resources necessary to battle extreme cold such as high thermal blankets, winter clothes, cash assistance. In addition, the contribution will aid in the maintenance and winterization of shelter including weather-proofing and repairs. It will also be a pivotal resource in the improvement of drainage systems and other infrastructure fixtures in camps and informal settlements.

UNHCR's Head of Private Sector Partnerships in Kuwait, Nader Al-Nakib and his team visited ABK to thank the bank's team for the contribution. Fawzy Al-Thunayan - General Manager of Board Affairs received the visitors and the letter of appreciation.

The partnership with UNHCR is closely aligned with ABK's continuous efforts to make a difference in the markets in which it operates. The Bank has previously participated in UNHCR's '2 Billion Kilometers to Safety' campaign that championed individual acts of solidarity in support refugees.





Australian shops ration toilet paper amid panic

Thousands wait for hospital beds as virus cases surge in S Korea

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KUNDUZ: Afghan security forces stand guard after an attack by Taliban militants near an Afghan National Army (ANA) outpost in Kunduz Province yesterday. —AFP

US hits Taliban as violence spirals

Taliban attacks kill 20 troops, hours after Trump's call

KABUL: The US launched an airstrike against Taliban fighters to defend Afghan forces yesterday, an American military spokesman said, as violence spirals after a string of deadly attacks by the insurgents, throwing the country's nascent peace process into grave doubt. News of the airstrike in southern Helmand province—the first in 11 days—came hours after US President Donald Trump told reporters he had had a “very good” chat with the Taliban political chief, who on Saturday signed a historic deal with Washington to withdraw foreign forces.

Since the signing in Doha however, the militants have ramped up violence against Afghan forces, ending a partial weeklong truce that provided a rare reprieve to war-weary residents. US Forces-Afghanistan spokesman Sonny Leggett tweeted that the airstrike took place against Taliban fighters who were “actively attacking” an Afghan forces checkpoint in Helmand province. “This was a defensive strike to disrupt the attack,” he tweeted.

“We call on the Taliban to stop needless attacks and uphold their commitments. As we have demonstrated, we will defend our partners when required.” He said insurgents had carried out 43 attacks on checkpoints in

Helmand on Tuesday alone. The insurgents killed at least 20 Afghan soldiers and policemen in a series of overnight attacks, government officials said yesterday, casting a pall over peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban, due to begin on March 10.

“Taliban fighters attacked at least three army outposts in Imam Sahib district of Kunduz last night, killing at least 10 soldiers and four police,” said Safiullah Amiri, a member of the provincial council. A defense ministry official speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity confirmed the army toll, while the provincial police spokesman Hejratullah Akbari confirmed the police fatalities.

The insurgents also attacked police in central Uruzgan province Tuesday night, with the governor's spokesman Zergai Ebad said: “Unfortunately, six police were killed and seven wounded.” The news of the attacks came after Trump told reporters in Washington on Tuesday that he had a “very good” relationship with Taliban political

chief Mullah Baradar, with the pair speaking on the phone for 35 minutes, according to the insurgents.

“The relationship is very good that I have with the mullah. We had a good long conversation today and you know, they want to cease the violence, they'd like to cease violence also,” he said. But yesterday, US military spokesman Leggett warned that the “#Afghans & US have complied w/ our agreements; however, Talibs appear intent on squandering this (opportunity) and ignoring the will of the people for #peace.”



Trump had 'very good' chat with Taliban chief

'Common interest'

Trump has touted the Doha deal as a way to end the bloody, 18-year US military presence in Afghanistan—right in time for his November re-election bid. Under the terms of the deal, US and other foreign forces will quit Afghanistan within 14 months, subject to Taliban security guarantees and a pledge by the insurgents to hold talks with the national gov-

ernment in Kabul.

The agreement also includes a commitment to exchange 5,000 Taliban prisoners held by the Afghan government in return for 1,000 captives—something the militants have cited as a prerequisite for talks but which President Ashraf Ghani has refused to do before negotiations start. Trump has said the Taliban and Washington both “have a very common interest” in ending the war. Since Saturday's deal signing, the Taliban have been publicly claiming “victory” over the US and on Monday they announced they would resume attacks on Afghan national forces.

Ghani's government last week sent a delegation to Qatar to open “initial contacts” with the insurgents, but Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen on Tuesday said the militants would not meet Kabul's representatives except to discuss the release of their captives. Apparent differences between the Doha agreement and a separate joint US-Afghan declaration made in Afghanistan underline the obstacles facing negotiators. The US-Taliban deal committed to the release of prisoners, while the Kabul document only required both sides to determine “the feasibility of releasing” captives. —AFP

'Open season on journalists': US lawmakers seek Khashoggi info

WASHINGTON: Senior Republican and Democratic lawmakers renewed efforts this week to push President Donald Trump's administration to make public information about the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which US intelligence officials blame on Saudi Arabia's most senior leadership. Khashoggi, a US resident and columnist for the Washington Post, was killed in October 2018 at Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul.

The CIA believes Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ordered the killing of the journalist, sources told Reuters weeks after his death. Riyadh denies the crown prince was involved in Khashoggi's disappearance. The Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Senators Richard Burr and Mark Warner, wrote to the acting director of national intelligence, Richard Grenell, urging him to reconsider the decision not to declassify information related to Khashoggi's murder.

A source familiar with the matter confirmed the existence of the letter, which was first reported by the Washington Post on Tuesday. Separately, Senator Ron Wyden, a Democratic member of the intelligence panel, told a news conference on Tuesday that he would invoke a little-used 1970s-era authority under which the Senate itself could release information about Khashoggi's death if it is determined that doing so is in the public interest.

“If our country and our friends and our partners do nothing in the face of this barbaric act, it sends a mes-



WASHINGTON: Hatice Cengiz, slain Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi's fiancée, stands alongside US Senator Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon, during a press conference calling for the Trump administration to release details about his killing. —AFP

sage around the world that it's open season on journalists. Period, full stop,” Wyden told a news conference, standing beside Hatice Cengiz, Khashoggi's fiancée. Lawmakers from both parties - Trump's Republicans as well as Democrats - have been critical of the government in Riyadh for years despite its ties to the Trump administration, citing civilian casualties from the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen, the killing and dismemberment of Khashoggi and other human rights abuses.

But efforts to pass legislation to press the Saudis have flagged in Congress, and the administration has pushed ahead with billions of dollars in weapons sales and declined to make public the intelligence findings on the journalist's death. The Democratic chairman of the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee, Representative Adam Schiff, has also written to Grenell saying information about the murder should not be classified. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence has said it is not releasing the information because doing so would inappropriately reveal intelligence sources and methods. —Reuters

String of tornadoes kill 25 in Tennessee

NASHVILLE: A string of tornadoes tore through Nashville, Tennessee, and surrounding counties early on Tuesday, killing at least 25 people, leaving others missing and reducing neighborhoods to rubble as voters across the state cast ballots in the Super Tuesday presidential primary. Governor William Lee told an afternoon news conference the death toll was expected to rise as search-and-rescue crews combed through collapsed buildings and rubble for missing people some 15 hours after the storms hit around 1 am CST.

“It's a tragic day in our state, a sad day. There are 25 confirmed fatalities,” the governor said. “I spent the day touring and visiting with victims and walking through neighborhoods and the devastation is heartbreaking. It's incredible. Prayers are greatly needed.” Lee declined to estimate how many people remained unaccounted for in the state. Nineteen of the 25 fatalities were from Putnam County, east of Nashville.

The National Weather Service said eight tornadoes were believed to have touched down in Missouri, Tennessee and Kentucky, but that number could change following further analysis. It was not yet clear how many landed a direct hit on Nashville. In addition to the fatalities, at least 30 people were injured. Some 48 buildings were destroyed in Nashville, with many more damaged. Fire Department Director Chief William Swann said. Tens of thousands of people were left without power.

“Severe weather and tornados have impacted several counties in Tennessee. Counties with the greatest impacts include Davidson, Wilson, and Putnam Counties,” the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency said on its website. The storm struck as many were sleeping in Nashville, home to 691,000 people and one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States.



TENNESSEE: A home is shown destroyed by high winds from one of several tornadoes that tore through the state overnight in Cookeville, Tennessee. —AFP

“Prayers for all of those affected by the devastating tornadoes in Tennessee. We will continue to monitor the developments. The Federal Government is with you all of the way during this difficult time,” President Donald Trump said on Twitter. The White House said Trump would visit the devastated areas on Friday.

Polls stay open late

Pictures and video posted on Twitter showed lightning illuminating the dark sky as the twisters roared through the country music capital, and daybreak revealed dozens of leveled houses and businesses. Tennessee is one 14 US states holding presidential nominating elections on Super Tuesday and despite the destruction, polling sites were mostly open for voting, officials said, although some had to be moved.

A Davidson County Superior Court judge, ruling on an emergency request by four of the top Democratic primary candidates, extended voting by an hour at polls there and ruled that five sites remain open until 10 pm. Crushed vehicles, piles of debris and broken power lines littered streets blocked by rescue vehicles. Residents carried away belongings from ravaged homes. —Reuters

International

Ethiopia's enslaved child maids seeking solace at night school

'I do anything the employers order me to do ... they beat me, always'

ADDIS ABABA: Each day, 12-year-old Tesfa waits for the clock to strike 3:30 pm and provide her respite from the cooking, cleaning and beatings she endures working as a maid in Ethiopia's capital. Once she finishes her daily tasks - which include caring for a toddler - Tesfa runs to a primary school to avoid being late for a catch-up class tailored towards underage domestic workers. "I'm only happy when I come here," Tesfa, whose name was changed to protect her identity, told said after a class in Addis Ababa last month.

Fiddling with her necklace, she spoke of sleeping on the floor, eating only leftovers and being denied any days off. "I do anything (the employers) order me to do ... they beat me, always," added Tesfa. She was left with the family last year by an aunt who took her from northern Ethiopia to Addis Ababa. Tesfa is one of countless girls working as maids in cities across Ethiopia although official data is lacking. Most come from rural areas and are sent away in search of a living by their families - often via labor brokers or with relatives.

Kept indoors, far from home, and unprotected by labor law, many child servants are denied an education, exploited and enslaved, according to activists that work with such victims. Run by a local charity, the two-hour lessons are attended by about 130 pupils, most of them young maids, who have permission from their employers to go to school once their chores are done.

"These children are hungry for education," Fikirt Assefa, a volunteer for the Organization for Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS), which has been running the early evening classes since 2006. "The classes give them hope and a vision," Fikirt added, recounting success stories of former child maids she had worked with who later went on to become nurses, doctors and engineers.



Countless girls work as maids in the cities

Legal struggle

Yet such triumphs are thought to be rare in a country where the rights of domestic workers are not enshrined in labor law. Their working conditions are regulated by Ethiopia's civil code of 1960, leaving them highly vulnerable to abuses according to lawyers who say this limits their legal avenues to pursue justice and fuels a sense of impunity among exploitative bosses. Under the code, employers must pay domestic workers living in their homes every three months and cover healthcare costs, while being entitled to offset the outlay against owed wages. Former federal prosecutor Mussie Mezgebo Gebremedhin said this meant that the lives of Ethiopia's domestic workers "largely depended on employers' sense of fairness". "The government has drafted a regulation on domestic work but still it has not been enacted," he said. "(It) thinks that domestic work based on a contract can disrupt the family-like conditions or the relationship between the employer and worker."

In one case supported by OPRIFS, 11-year-old Demitu - whose name was also changed to protect her - said she was enslaved as a maid for two-and-a-half years at different houses without pay. Her situation was uncovered by police and she is now staying at a safe house run by the charity while awaiting the trial of two women, who allegedly abused Demitu when she worked for them.

But activists say the legal system is not child-friendly and the government has stressed that the situation needs to improve. "We are not working seriously on child labor (particularly) on domestic workers," said Kibri Hailu Abay, a director at the ministry of women, children and youth. A new labor law passed last year raised the country's working age to 15 from 14. The main challenge is dealing with labor brokers, he said.

Families who are in the market for house help often turn to labor agents, who source young rural girls before taking them to their employers, taking a cut of the salary as commission. Yet

people, who had become associated with jihadists. By mid-February, Ogossagou was the only place for miles where Fulanis, who are mainly herders and sedentary farmers, remained. The soldiers left the village at six in the evening.

"We knew that the moment we were no longer protected, we would be attacked again," said a prominent local, speaking in the provincial capital Mopti. "From that very moment until dawn, I received dozens of calls," he said on condition of anonymity. The man has been residing in Mopti for the last five months after losing seven brothers and his father in last year's attack.

He had alerted six different authorities from the military, the government and the UN peacekeeping force, he said - but in vain. The UN's 13,000-member mission in Mali, called MINUSMA, confirmed it had been told that "armed men had been seen regrouping" near Ogossagou. All the locals interviewed said the attackers were traditional Dogon hunters, who had been blamed for the previous massacre against Fulani.

At the time, there was no hard evidence to back up the allegation and the Dogon militia, Dan Na Ambassagou, had denied it was behind that raid. Mariam Belko Barry, 67, said she had a premonition of impending disaster. "It was impossible to make dinner," she said. "Why prepare meals when you know you are going to be attacked?" Barry said given that the last attack occurred just before dawn, she was "waiting for the sun to rise, because things would be better".

'No sign of danger'

UN troops arrived at the village a little before 2 am, MINUSMA spokesman Olivier Salgado said. It was more than six hours after they were tipped off. They patrolled the village but the 50 peacekeepers saw "no sign of danger" and went on to nearby villages. In Ogossagou, few people slept that night. At five in the morning on February 14, the imam called the first prayer of the day. Bakaye, a herder, went to the

we believe is undiplomatic and does not reflect a great nation like this," Ethiopian Foreign Minister Gedu Andargachew told a press conference on Tuesday.

"We want Americans to play a constructive role. Any other role is unacceptable," he said, warning Washington not to rush the process or try to influence the outcome. Sisi's office said later the Egyptian president had been reassured by Trump that the US would stick with the talks until a deal was signed, though it was unclear if the reassurance came after Ethiopia's criticism. Ethiopia sees the dam as essential for its electrification and development, but Egypt - which depends on the Nile for 90 percent of its irrigation and drinking water - sees it as an existential threat.

'We are neutral'

The biggest worry for Egypt is the filling of the dam's enormous reservoir, which can hold 74 billion cubic meters of water. The US Treasury Department said on Friday that "final testing and filling should not take place without an agreement" - a position endorsed by Sudan. The statement implied that if Ethiopia starts filling the dam before a deal is reached "it would breach an international legal principle not to cause significant harm to downstream nations", said William Davison, Ethiopia analyst for International Crisis Group, a conflict-prevention organization.



ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian Minister for Foreign Affairs Gedu Andargachew (right) gives a press conference jointly with Ethiopia's Minister of Water, Irrigation and Energy, Seleshi Bekele at the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa where they criticized what they called 'undiplomatic statements' by the United States. —AFP

"While Ethiopia disagrees with this and has cause to be concerned, it is not clear if the US has any intention to enforce this position, and it is more likely that negotiations continue in one form or another," Davison said. Ethiopia said Ethiopia felt singled out in the US statement and urged Washington to stay neutral.

"If the Americans apply pressure it should be on all parties, not just our side,"



ADDIS ABABA: An underage domestic worker takes notes in a class on Feb 14, 2020. —Reuters

many unscrupulous brokers are known to have deceived parents with false promises of a better life for their children in major cities, before placing them with exploitative bosses. "We have to ... discuss with them (labor brokers), to show the impact (their actions) will have on the young girls," Kibri added, stressing the need for awareness raising campaigns.

'I'm afraid'

Back at the school, the organizers of the lessons bemoaned the fact that many young maids would miss out on an education. Volunteers with the charity go door-to-door in the capital in a bid to convince employers to allow their servants to attend the class-

es, which cover the initial years of primary education. "The government says it's mandatory to go to school, a basic right," said Tsion Degu, a program manager at OPRIFS. "Every employer must respect it. (But) some resist. Our culture is very hard." The charity gives school supplies and hygiene kits to the girls but struggles for funding - relying on donations from a German charity and the state providing the classrooms for free. During the class, the otherwise glum Tesfa burst into life and moved her body energetically as the maids enjoyed a recital of "heads, shoulders, knees and toes" with one of the teachers. But when the lesson came to an end, reality dawned on Tesfa as she prepared to rush back to her employer to avoid reprisals. —Reuters

Mali village scarred by February 14 massacre

MOPTI: Less than a year after more than 160 Fulani civilians were massacred at dawn in Ogossagou in central Mali, terror returned to the small village. Eight witnesses gave AFP their account of the latest attack on February 14 in which at least 30 civilians were butchered, bringing more bloodshed to the deeply troubled region. Central Mali has been riven by inter-ethnic violence since a jihadist revolt broke out in the north of the West African country in 2012.

The insurgency has claimed thousands of lives, displaced more than a million people and spread to neighboring countries, while deadly tit-for-tat attacks have flared in the centre. The villagers from Ogossagou - now off-limits for foreign journalists not escorted by troops - recounted the fear that gripped them when a military garrison, set up after last year's devastating attack on March 23, left without warning.

When the 40-odd soldiers pulled out on February 13, it felt as though his brothers had left, said 46-year-old Bakaye Ousmane Barry. Abdoulaye Cisse, the regional governor said the soldiers had been withdrawn as part of a redeployment of forces following a slew of deadly jihadist attacks. "We saw the situation was not improving (at the national level), we wanted to change our positioning. Our forces were on the ground, but static, in poor positions," the governor said. "We did not even close (the garrison), we were just regrouping. It was during this time that drama hit Ogossagou for a second time." But the decision left the villagers - divided between the Fulani and Dogon ethnic neighborhoods - to fend for themselves.

Impending doom

After being targeted in attacks, Dogon communities in the region began to form self-defence groups that were then accused of reprisal raids against the Fulani

Ethiopia chides US for 'undiplomatic' role in dam talks

ADDIS ABABA: The United States has been "undiplomatic" in its role facilitating talks between three countries on the Nile River over a giant dam, Ethiopia said on Tuesday, but promised to continue negotiations. The US has been enabling talks between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, set to become the largest hydropower plant in Africa.

The \$4 billion project has set Addis Ababa and Egypt at loggerheads since Ethiopia broke ground in 2011 - Cairo worried that filling a huge reservoir too quickly could stanch the Nile's flow lower down. The US Treasury Department stepped in last year after Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi put in a request to his ally US President Donald Trump.

Last week, the Treasury Department said an agreement had been reached and urged Ethiopia to sign "at the earliest possible time" and Egypt said it had signed the "fair and balanced" deal. But Ethiopia, which skipped the most recent round of talks, denied any deal had been agreed. "The recent statement by the US

19-year-old arrested over mosque threat

WELLINGTON: New Zealand police arrested a 19-year-old man over an "abhorrent" threat made this week against one of the Christchurch mosques targeted in a mass shooting last year. As New Zealand prepares to mark the one-year anniversary of the massacre by a self-avowed white supremacist that killed 51 Muslim worshippers, police condemned the threat and increased patrols at two mosques that were attacked.

The intimidating message made on an encrypted messaging app reportedly showed a man in a balaclava sitting in a car outside the Al Noor mosque accompanied by threatening text and a gun emoji. "This type of imagery has no place in Aotearoa New Zealand - it is abhorrent and will not be tolerated," Canterbury police commander superintendent John Price said in a statement, referring to the country by both its Maori and English names.

He said the man, who has not been named, was arrested after police executed a search warrant at a Christchurch address and located several items, including a vehicle. Price said the man had been charged on an unrelated matter, which was not disclosed, and police were still gathering evidence over the mosque threat. He said police had also increased patrols around the Al Noor and Linwood mosques and would be maintaining "a visible presence" as the March 15 anniversary approaches.

"The safety of the community is our utmost priority," he said. Price praised members of the public who reported the threatening image and warned against sharing it online. He said the image had been referred to New Zealand's chief censor David Shanks to see if it should be classified as objectionable material, which would make sharing it a crime punishable by up to 14 years in jail.

Shanks last year outlawed video livestreamed on social media during the shooting and a Christchurch man who later shared it was jailed for six months. The alleged mosque attacker Brenton Tarrant, an Australian national, is due to go on trial on June 2 facing terrorism charges plus 51 counts of murder and 40 of attempted murder over the killings. —AFP

Egypt hangs ex-elite soldier turned Islamist militant Ashmawy

CAIRO: Egypt executed an ex-special forces officer turned top Islamist militant, Hisham Ashmawy yesterday over involvement in several high-profile attacks, said the army. "The execution by hanging was carried out based on a decision by the military court ... and after taking all the relevant judicial procedures," said army spokesman Tamer Al-Rifai.

Ashmawy-dubbed Egypt's "most wanted man" by local media - was a former officer with Egypt's special forces who went on to fight with Al-Qaeda linked groups. On Monday, a Cairo court sentenced Ashmawy to death along with 36 others over 54 crimes including killing police officers and blowing up several security installations.

Born in 1978 or 1979, Ashmawy joined the Egyptian Armed Forces as a young man and rose to join the elite unit, but was dismissed in 2012 over his hardening religious views. Ashmawy was convicted last November by a military court over his role in 14 crimes including the 2014 killing of 22 soldiers in a border post attack, and a 2013 assassination attempt on a former interior minister, who survived the attack.

He was also found guilty of having led the Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis Islamist militant group in the turbulent Sinai region. Ashmawy broke with the organization after it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group in November 2014. Other charges against him included infiltrating to Libyan territories and forming an Al-Qaeda aligned militant group, Al-Mourabitoun, there. —AFP

International

Australian shops ration toilet paper amid coronavirus panic

Australia has 44 virus cases, 4 local transmissions

SYDNEY: Australia's major grocers put strict limits on purchases of toilet paper yesterday, after shoppers stripped shelves in a rush of panic buying spurred by fears over a coronavirus, while the country recorded its fourth case of local transmission. One of the first nations to take a hard line in tackling the epidemic, Australia imposed border controls a month ago on visitors from the epicenter of the outbreak in China.

However, Australia now has 44 cases, four of them involving people who caught the disease despite not having left the country. Despite the few sufferers compared to countries such as Iran and South Korea, social media has been awash in recent days with photographs and videos of people stockpiling goods, from staples to sanitizers.

The demand for toilet paper, in particular, has sparked the trending hashtags #toiletpapergate and #toilet-papercrisis on Twitter, along with photographs of overloaded shopping trolleys, and calls for calm from baffled officials. "We are trying to reassure people that removing all of the lavatory paper from the shelves of supermarkets probably isn't a proportionate or sensible thing to do at this time," Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy told a parliamentary panel yesterday.

The biggest grocery chain, Woolworths Group Ltd, limited sales to four packs a shopper, to keep up stock levels while suppliers ramp up production. The local arm of Costco Wholesale Corp limited buyers to one bulk buy pack each. Even Prime Minister Scott Morrison has weighed in on a purchasing trend that appears to be at odds with other countries' stockpiling of items with a long shelf-life, such as tinned goods,

telling the public major grocers had assured him they could meet any spike in demand.

Police confirmed they were called to a supermarket in Sydney to deal with "a disturbance in an aisle", with media saying the authorities had cordoned off the toilet paper shelves as a result. Shoppers have swooped on other products also. Costco has put limits on purchases of milk, eggs, rice, disinfectants and soap. Weeks ago, Coles Group Ltd began posting signs in stores warning of shortages of hand and laundry sanitizer.

Coles said it was working with suppliers and transport partners to improve availability of popular products, but did not confirm if it was also rationing sales of some. "We have increased deliveries from our distribution centers and our teams are working hard to fill the shelves," it said in an emailed statement. German-owned discounter Aldi Inc and US-listed Kimberly-Clark Corp, which makes toilet paper for the Australian market via domestic units, were not immediately available for comment.

Major grocers limit sales of toilet paper

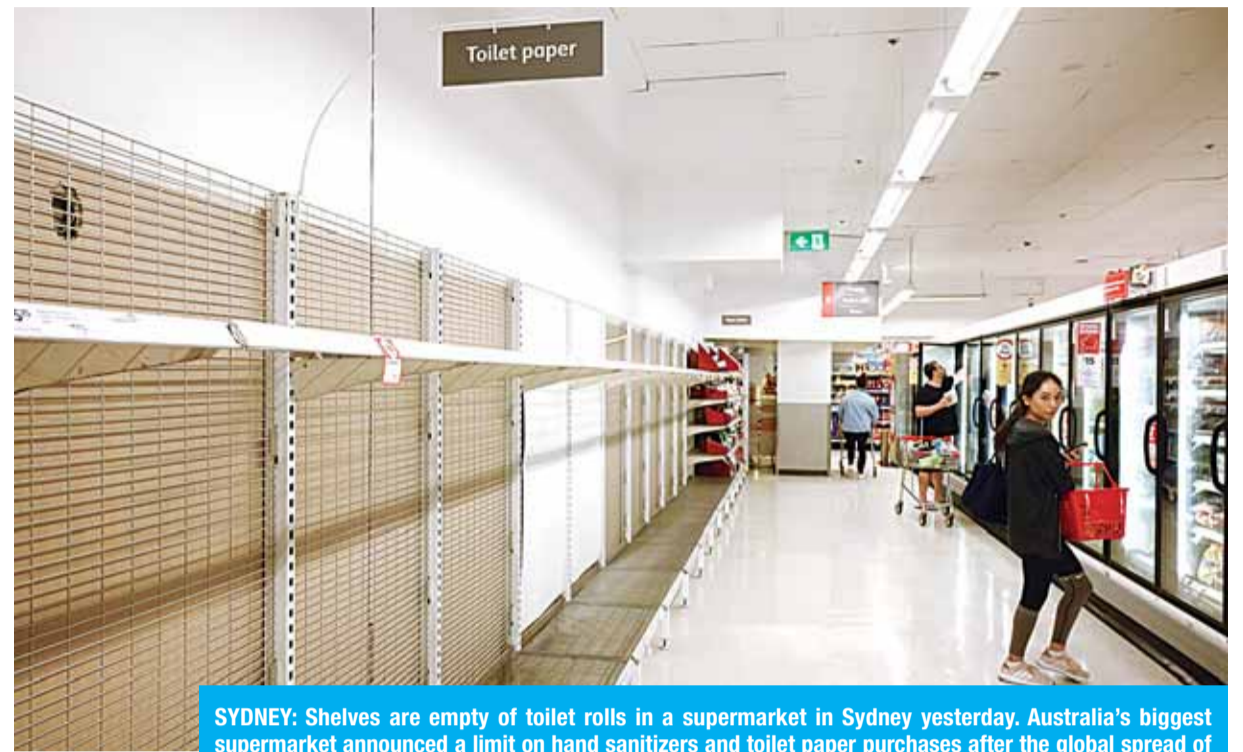


the Australian market via domestic units, were not immediately available for comment.

Travel bans

While the bulk of Australia's virus victims caught it overseas, the two latest cases involve people who have not left the country. The most populous state of New South Wales said a female aged care worker had caught the virus, which has spread to at least one resident of the centre where she worked.

It said an 82-year-old man was in hospital, while officials await results of a test on a 95-year-old woman who died on Tuesday after developing a respiratory ill-



SYDNEY: Shelves are empty of toilet rolls in a supermarket in Sydney yesterday. Australia's biggest supermarket announced a limit on hand sanitizers and toilet paper purchases after the global spread of coronavirus sparked a spate of panic buying Down Under. —AFP

ness. "Whether it was related to coronavirus, we don't know," state health minister Brad Hazzard told reporters about the death. State officials were already investigating how a 53-year-old doctor was stricken, despite having no infected patients. A fourth case, announced on Monday, involved a woman who could have caught it from her brother.

Since Feb 1, Australia has banned foreigners who

recently travelled through China, and extended its ban last week to arrivals from Iran, but cautioned it could no longer guarantee an infected person would not penetrate border checks. The government yesterday confirmed a man who had recently returned from Iran had caught the virus, prompting officials to order two weeks of self-isolation for anyone arriving from Iran since Feb. 19. —Reuters

Chinese cybersecurity company accuses CIA of hacking campaign

BEIJING: Chinese antivirus firm Qihoo 360 said CIA hackers have spent more than a decade breaking into the Chinese airline industry and other targets, a blunt allegation of American espionage from a Beijing-based firm. In a brief blog post published on Monday in English and Chinese, Qihoo said it discovered the spying campaign by comparing samples of malicious software it had discovered against a trove of CIA digital spy tools released by WikiLeaks in 2017.

Qihoo - a major cybersecurity vendor whose research is generally followed for the insight it offers into China's digital security world - said the Central Intelligence Agency had targeted China's aviation and energy sectors, scientific research organizations, internet companies, and government agencies. It added that the hacking of aviation targets might have been aimed at tracking "important figures' travel itinerary."

Qihoo published a catalogue of intercepted malicious software samples as well as an analysis of their creation times that suggested that whoever devised the tools did so during working hours on the US East Coast. The CIA and the Chinese Embassy in Washington did not immediately return messages seeking comment. A message seeking additional comment from Qihoo's chief security officer, Yuejin Du, was not immediately returned after business hours in Beijing. The United States - like China and other world powers - rarely comments when accused of cyberespionage.

There has, however, long been evidence in the public domain - released by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, in the US case, or by US prosecutors and private cybersecurity firms, in China's case - that both countries hack their opponents. The allegations leveled against Beijing by US companies have for years been laid out in lengthy, data-heavy reports. More recently, Chinese companies have begun doing the same with respect to other foreign hacking groups.

The timing of Qihoo's most recent publication could be related to last month's indictment of four Chinese military hackers over a massive breach at US credit reporting agency Equifax, said Adam Segal, who studies China and cybersecurity issues at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. He said outing CIA operations publicly could be a way of sending a message to Washington - while at the same time burnishing Qihoo's reputation.

"This is great public relations for them," Segal said. Qihoo's publication is the latest fallout from WikiLeaks' release of CIA hacking tools in 2017. US prosecutors have accused a disgruntled CIA coder, Joshua Schulte, of handing the digital espionage arsenal to WikiLeaks as revenge for a series of professional setbacks, calling the leak "instantly devastating."

"Years of work and millions of dollars developing those tools went up in smoke," Assistant US Attorney David Denton told a jury at Schulte's trial in New York last month, according to a transcript of his remarks. Schulte denies the allegation, saying he is being unfairly blamed for the breach because of his contentious relationship with his colleagues. The Manhattan jury in Schulte's case is expected to begin its deliberations Tuesday. —Reuters

Poverty gap fueling northern-southern migration in Nigeria

LAGOS: Mustapha Abdullahi spent his childhood in constant hunger "roaming the streets for food" in his village in northern Nigeria, unsure when his next meal would arrive. Like many living in areas where opportunities are scarce, he knew he had to move. When he turned 12 he travelled south to Nigeria's commercial megacity, Lagos. "I came to Lagos to look for money," Abdullahi, now 40 said. As with many of the arrivals from the north, he has made his living driving a motorbike taxi locally known as an okada. Yet a recent ban on okadas across major parts of Lagos has left drivers struggling to feed their families.

Rising migration to Lagos has caused the city's population to soar-spurred by widening inequality between the largely-Muslim north and Christian-majority south. According to the World Bank, 87 million people in Africa's most populous country live in extreme poverty-of which 87 per cent live in northern Nigeria. The nation's total population is around 190

There may no longer be too many cooks in kitchen - in Brexit UK

PETERBOROUGH: Before dinnertime at Damian Wawrzyniak's restaurant, he is busy preparing an elaborate array of dishes - slow cooked lamb with fermented broccoli inspired by his time cooking at the world-famous Noma restaurant and Polish sausages from his homeland. Wawrzyniak came to Britain 16 years ago before gaining renown working as the head chef at the London Olympics and cooking for members of the royal family.

But these days he spends his time worrying about finding enough trained staff for his restaurant and another business he wants to open this year. The 40-year-old said he will have to raise prices in his restaurant by about 20% if he has to pay his waiters and junior chefs the minimum salary set by the government to bring European Union nationals to Britain to work from next year. Wawrzyniak said about 70% of his staff come from the EU and he has yet to receive a single application for a chef position he advertised last month.

21 killed as torrential rain, floods hit Brazil

SAO PAULO: At least 21 people have been killed in torrential rain that hit the Brazilian states of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, triggering flash floods and destroying homes, authorities said Tuesday. Another 32 people are missing in Sao Paulo, raising fears the toll could rise further. Violent storms in recent days have dumped a month's worth of rain on some areas in a matter of hours, devastating the southern coast of Sao Paulo state and poor neighborhoods on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, the country's second most populous city.

At least 16 people were killed early Tuesday in Sao Paulo state after floods and landslides hit the coastal cities of Santos, Sao Vicente and Guarujá, authorities said. One of the victims was a rescue worker who was killed by a landslide. "I express my solidarity with those who are suffering from these heavy rains," Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria wrote on Twitter.

million people. "Regionally, the north lags far behind the south in every human capital outcome," a 2019 World Bank report said.

A jihadist insurgency in the northeast, armed attacks and kidnappings in the northwest, and the impact of climate change have caused conditions in northern Nigeria to worsen. Authorities in Lagos said the ban on motorbike taxis and rickshaws was aimed at cutting down on "deaths and disorderliness" on the city's choked roads. But many drivers like Abdullahi suspect it was aimed primarily at the large number of northerners who have headed south in search of a better life.

'Manchester of the north'

In the 1980s, Kano, the north's most populous city and commercial nerve-centre, was known as "Manchester of the north", home to more than 500 textile producers. Yet after a collapse in local industry in the 1990s, there are now fewer than 100 factories, and widespread unemployment after hundreds of thousands of job losses. In recent decades, agriculture has been the dominant trade in northern Nigeria, in part due to vast expanses of land. Yet climate change has hit agricultural yields hard and insecurity has rendered many areas unsafe to farm. The effect has been increased migration to cities such as Lagos, Nigeria's capital Abuja and the southern oil-hub Port Harcourt, where

"I can't find enough staff at the moment and if these costs have to be passed on then prices will rise dramatically," Wawrzyniak said. "The biggest problem will be finding the people to work here. Without people, this business doesn't exist." British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government recently outlined plans to close the borders to unskilled workers, ending the era of cheap labor from the EU in restaurants, hotels and factories.

Under new post-Brexit rules starting next year, migrants will have to meet a number of criteria to qualify for a work visa, including specific skills. Applicants will be required to receive a job offer with a salary of at least 25,600 pounds (\$32,680) and an ability to speak English. Business owners say this will make it harder to recruit staff at a time when economists say the country is near full employment. They say fewer immigrants will lead to higher prices, lower profits, and force businesses to close.

EU citizens make up about a quarter of the 3 million workers in Britain's hospitality industry, the country's fourth-biggest employer, according to a KPMG report. In London, about 75% of waiting staff and 25% of chefs are from the EU. Concern over the impact of high levels of immigration from the European Union was one of the key drivers behind Britain's 2016 vote to leave the bloc.

Several highways were blocked by fallen trees and landslides, including some linking Santos, the biggest port in South America, to Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest city and economic capital. In Rio de Janeiro, authorities said the death toll had risen to at least five after three days of violent rain that destroyed houses, swept away cars, and left some communities covered in water or mud. The victims were electrocuted, buried in landslides or drowned, emergency officials said. The disaster turned political in Rio when the city's Mayor Marcelo Crivella, a far-right evangelical Christian bishop, blamed residents for the flooding. During a visit to an affected community, he complained to journalists that "people can't be throwing trash on hillsides, in storm drains and in the street." In the middle of the press conference someone pelted Crivella in the face with a mud ball - which was captured in a video that went viral online.

"The water knocked my granddaughter and I and off the sofa. Dirty water came flooding into my kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms, everything. I lost everything," Ivone Cardoso, 65, a resident of Rio's Realengo neighborhood, told AFP as she swept mud and water out of her house. Brazil is having an especially intense rainy season this



PORT HARCOURT: A worker walks past the Port Harcourt refinery built in 1989, Rivers State. A poverty gap and widening inequality between the largely-Muslim north and Christian-majority south, has caused a north-south migration in Nigeria. —AFP

jobs are easier to come by. Recent data is not available, but a 2010 study from Nigeria's National Population Commission estimated 23 percent of the population were "migrants" and 40 percent of those living in Lagos came from other regions. Awwalu Usman, a 32-year old subsistence farmer from Kano, started travelling to Lagos eight years ago to work as a cobbler. —AFP



LONDON: The common restaurant at the co-living building The Collective Old Oak is seen in north west London. —AFP

Since the Brexit vote, annual immigration from within continental Europe has fallen by more than half. Supporters of tougher immigration rules say the large pool of EU workers, particularly after the accession of several former communist states in central and eastern Europe in 2004, meant British workers' earnings have stagnated. —Reuters



SAO PAULO: General view of the destruction caused by a landslide at the Morro do Macaco Molhado favela in Guarujá, 95 km from Sao Paulo after torrential rains killed at least 21 people in Brazil. —AFP

summer. In January, more than 50 people were killed in Minas Gerais state, which neighbors Sao Paulo, in several days of violent rain. —AFP

International

India coronavirus cases rise to 28, including 17 Italians

Modi to go into virus lockdown for Holi festival

NEW DELHI: Sixteen Italians in India have tested positive for coronavirus, India's health minister said yesterday, as the total number of cases in the country rose sharply to 28. On Monday, the world's second-most populous country had only six reported cases of coronavirus, but it is one of places US intelligence agencies are most closely monitoring due to concerns over how it would cope with a widespread outbreak.

An Italian visiting the western desert state of Rajasthan was among those who had tested positive earlier. And yesterday, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said 15 of 21 tourists from Italy - Europe's worst-affected country - who had been taken to a quarantine facility on the outskirts of New Delhi had tested positive for the virus. Their Indian driver was also placed in quarantine, the minister said.

Vardhan said authorities were taking extra precautions against the spread of the virus after the sharp rise in cases. "We will now screen all international passengers. We will not limit our screenings to 12 countries as we did earlier," Vardhan told a news conference. More than 93,000 cases have been reported worldwide, and several thousand have died from the flu-like coronavirus, which emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year and has since spread to more than 80 countries.

Virus lockdown

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday he will stay away from celebrations during one of the country's biggest festivals as coronavirus fears gripped the country of 1.3 billion people. India has been one of the latest countries to report a surge in

cases, sparking a run on masks, while the government said all air passengers entering the country would now be screened for the virus that has killed more than 3,000 around the globe.

Modi said he would stay away from events for Holi, the "festival of colors", which is normally a raucous day when paint and water are splashed in the streets of many cities. "Experts across the world have advised to reduce mass gatherings to avoid the spread of COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus," Modi said on Twitter. "Hence, this year I have decided not to participate in any Holi Milan program."

The Hindu festival, which this year falls next Tuesday, marks the beginning of spring. Ever since he became prime minister in 2014, Modi has taken part in high-profile events for Holi and other major festivals, mingling freely with crowds. India has reported 28 cases of the new coronavirus so far, up from five on Tuesday, with 16 of them Italian tourists who have been quarantined in New Delhi. India is the world's second-most populous country after China, where the virus first emerged last year.

Worldwide, around 3,200 people have died from the virus with more than 90,000 infections. With the new cases, India has stepped up preventive measures. Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said all air passengers entering the country would now be screened for symptoms. India has already barred visitors from Italy, Iran, South Korea and Japan, except diplomats and officials from international bodies. Authorities say isolation wards are being set up in 25 Delhi hospitals in expectation of a flood of cases. —Agencies



MATHURA: Women beat men with sticks during the Lathmar Holi celebration in the village of Barsana on the outskirts of Mathura in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh yesterday. Lathmar Holi is a local celebration of the Hindu festival of Holi, usually some days ahead of the Holi festival which is a spring festival, also called 'festival of colors' observed in India at the end of winter season. —AFP

Indonesia seizes half a million virus masks amid panic buying

JAKARTA: Indonesian police seized over half a million face masks from a Jakarta-area warehouse after the country's first confirmed cases of coronavirus sparked panic buying and sent prices for prevention products skyrocketing. Authorities were questioning two people after the Tuesday evening raid at a warehouse in satellite city Tangerang, where nearly 600,000 surgical masks were found.

The owners did not have permission to distribute the masks, police said. "Mask prices have skyrocketed everywhere and there are shortages, most likely because hoarders are trying to make money at the public's expense," Jakarta police spokesman Yusri Yunus said yesterday.

Those convicted of hoarding masks could face up to

five years in jail and hefty fines, police said. The warehouse raid came after hundreds of boxes of surgical masks were also seized Tuesday at a Jakarta apartment. And police said they busted a factory at the weekend allegedly making and distributing counterfeit masks that did not meet health standards. "Those masks are useless," Yunus said. "They won't protect people who use them."

The crackdown was ordered by Indonesian president Joko Widodo who has called on citizens to avoid panic buying—even as store shelves are cleared and prices soar for masks and hand sanitizers. Major cities including Tokyo, Hong Kong, Sydney have also seen panic buying sparked by the virus. Indonesians, meanwhile, are scooping up a traditional herbal tonic known as jamu and in one city sellers dressed as Batman and local superhero Gundala were handing out the drink to motorists.

"My sales have more than doubled since Monday," said Nur Hidayati, 29, a jamu seller in Bogor near Jakarta. "People tell me they want jamu to stay healthy and immune from the virus." On Monday, Indonesia confirmed its first coronavirus cases, say-



BANDA ACEH: A health worker wearing a protective gear checks a quarantine room at a hospital in Banda Aceh yesterday. —AFP

ing a 64-year-old woman and her daughter, 31, tested positive. Globally, coronavirus has infected more than 90,000 people and killed at least 3,100 people. But Indonesia—a Southeast Asian archipelago of more than 260 million—had yet to report a confirmed case until this week. —AFP

Virus cases surge in S Korea as thousands wait for hospital beds

SEOUL: South Korea reported hundreds of new coronavirus cases yesterday as many sick people waited for hospital beds in Daegu, the city at the centre of the worst outbreak outside China. The new cases bring South Korea's total to 5,621, with at least 32 deaths, the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) said. Most cases were in and around Daegu, the country's fourth-largest city, where the flu-like virus has spread rapidly through members of a fringe Christian group.

Health officials expect the number of new cases to be high for the near future as they complete the testing of more than 200,000 members of the sect, as well as thousands of other suspected cases from smaller clusters. "We need special measures in times of emergency," South Korean Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun

told a cabinet meeting, referring to extra medical resources for hotspots and economic measures including a \$9.8 billion stimulus.

"In order to overcome COVID-19 as quickly as possible and minimize the impact on the economy, it is necessary to proactively inject all available resources." COVID-19 is the illness caused by the new coronavirus which emerged from China late last year to spread around the world. Hospitals in South Korea's hardest hit areas were scrambling to accommodate the surge in new patients.

Travel restrictions

In Daegu, 2,300 people were waiting to be admitted to hospitals and temporary medical facilities, Vice Health Minister Kim Gang-lip said. A 100-bed military hospital that had been handling many of the most serious cases was due to have 200 additional beds available by Thursday, he added. South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Tuesday declared "war" on the virus, apologized for shortages of face masks and promised support for virus-hit small businesses in Asia's fourth-biggest economy.

Moon's office yesterday said he had cancelled a planned trip to the United



DAEGU: South Korean medical workers wearing protective gear carry samples as they visit a residence of people with suspected symptoms of the COVID-19 coronavirus, near the Daegu branch of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus in Daegu. —AFP

Arab Emirates, Egypt and Turkey in mid-March due to the crisis. At least 92 countries have imposed some form of entry restrictions on arrivals from South Korea, according to a tally by Yonhap news agency. Vice Foreign Minister Cho Se-yeon met the US ambassador yesterday as part of Seoul's efforts to prevent the United States from imposing restrictions.

In the meeting, Cho outlined South

Korea's efforts to control the outbreak and urged the United States not to take steps that would affect exchanges between the two countries, the foreign ministry said. US President Donald Trump said this week his administration was watching Italy, South Korea and Japan - all with severe outbreaks - and would make a decision about travel restrictions "at the right time". —Reuters

Pakistan struggles to combat devastating locust plague

PIPLI PAHAR: Pakistan's farmers are struggling to combat the worst locust plague in nearly three decades as insect swarms decimate entire harvests in the country's agricultural heartlands and send food prices soaring. Heavy rains and cyclones sparked "unprecedented" breeding and the explosive growth of locust populations on the Arabian peninsula early last year, according to the United Nations.

The insects have since fanned out and wreaked havoc on farms from East Africa to India before making their way into Pakistan from the desert on the country's southwestern border with Iran. The crisis is so severe that the government has declared a nationwide emergency and urgently appealed for help from the international community.

'Combat operation'

Officials in southern Sindh province fear the infestation will devastate the supply of cotton, the local

cash crop, ahead of its harvest in the coming months. Local surveys of the damage are continuing, but the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture says nearly half of all crops have been destroyed near the port city of Karachi. "I have not seen an infestation like this one in my career," said Shehbaz Akhtar, an agricultural official charged with locust eradication efforts in the village of Pipli Pahar in central Punjab province.

Local authorities had "launched a combat operation" to clear the area of infestation with pesticide sprays, he said. Clouds of the noxious gas envelop the nearby fields each morning, where villagers gather the husks of dead insects for an official bounty of 20 rupees (13 cents) per kilogram bag. "We spray twice a day here," says Fayyaz Azeem, clad in a face mask and thick industrial gloves on top of a tractor discharging pesticide into rows of crops. But the process is slow and time-consuming, and by the time locusts are killed off in one field they have often already destroyed the next.

The pesticides used by officials are also dangerous for consumption, so even when the locusts are dead the remaining crops have to be discarded. Some farmers have been forced to opt for more desperate solutions while waiting for their fields to be sprayed and have attempted to scare off the swarms by shouting and banging pots. A team of Chinese experts has arrived in Pakistan to survey the crisis, food security

ministry chief Muhammad Hashim Popalzai said.

Beijing could also offer aerial spraying - a much faster and more efficient method of pest control - and Pakistan may also import pesticides from China. Earlier reports circulating online suggested China was planning to send thousands of ducks to Pakistan to devour the scourge. Pakistani officials said no such plans were being considered. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has also set up meetings between India and Pakistan to prevent the swarms from spreading, Popalzai said.

'What can I do?'

Agriculture accounts for 20 percent of Pakistan's GDP but the sector has already struggled for years in the face of drought and dwindling water supplies. The country is also experiencing 12-year inflation highs, with the cost of sugar nearly doubling and flour prices jumping 15 percent in the past year.

Years without a locust attack meant the government "had become complacent" about the risks of a new infestation, said Pakistan Farmers Bureau president Zafar Hayyat. Though he applauded the steps being taken to fight the plague, Hayyat warned of the risk that swarms would return mid-year after the next locust breeding season.

For many farmers in Pipli Pahar, the extermination

Sanitizers get priority over S Korea's soju drink in virus crisis

SEOUL: Makers of soju, South Korea's national drink and one of the world's best selling spirits, are jumping into the fight on the largest outbreak of coronavirus outside China by sharing their stockpiles of alcohol with makers of sanitizers. Disinfectants, such as hand sanitizers, are flying off the shelves, along with medical-grade masks, as infections in South Korea have surged past 5,000 in just over a month since its first patient was diagnosed.

South Korean soju makers have responded to soaring ethanol demand for sanitizers by donating the alcohol that goes into the drink, a distilled spirit with 17% to 20% alcohol by volume traditionally based on rice, but now often wheat or potatoes. "Ethanol demand for disinfection has grown while supply is limited...we have decided to provide it," an official of Daesun Distilling, based in the southeastern city of Busan said.

To banish the virus, the company has pledged to donate 32 tons of ethanol for use in disinfecting buildings and public places in Busan and southeastern Daegu, the city at the centre of South Korea's outbreak. "We plan to keep donating until the coronavirus outbreak is stabilized and to donate 50 tons more," added the official, who sought anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to media.

South Koreans drink an average of about 12 shots of soju each week, media say, citing industry figures. Ethanol for alcoholic drinks can be produced by fermentation or distillation, typically from grains and plants. The chemical can also be made from petrochemical feedstock. Whether used for liquor or disinfection, both have the same chemical structure and can break apart the virus particle, said Lee Duckhwan, a chemistry professor at Sogang University in Seoul, the capital.

"If there's any difference, that is the liquor tax imposed on ethanol produced by liquor makers," Lee said. The virus fears boosted February sales of soaps and hand sanitizers, including those with an alcohol base, to four times the level a year ago, data from a major retailer Lotte Mart shows. Shares of ethanol producers also jumped. Following Daesun Distilling, Hallasan Soju, based on the resort island of Jeju, also provided 5 tons of ethanol to authorities on Tuesday, a company official said. —Reuters



PIPLI PAHAR: A farmer holds dead locusts in Pipli Pahar village in Pakistan's central Punjab province. —AFP

campaign has already come too late. Sitting in the corner of a wheat field with her cow, Rafiya Bibi watches the flurry of pesticide spraying around her. The locusts have already destroyed her crops of canola, sunflower, chili and tobacco, which she had bought after borrowing 45,000 rupees from the government. With no harvest, she has no way to repay the loan. "What can I do?" she said. "All I can do is cry, what else can I do?" —AFP

Analysis

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
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lose land, sand mining
for Singapore blamed

From a boat on the Salween River in southeastern Myanmar, Than Zaw Oo pointed to a brown stretch of water he said was once full of lush paddy fields. "This used to be my land," said the 51-year-old farmer, frowning at the murky waves. All but six of the 24 acres where he used to grow rice and vegetables have slipped into the water in recent years, he said. Another farmer, Than Tun, said he had lost 15 acres of his land to erosion. While official records were not available, other villagers backed their accounts.

Farmers and politicians in Chaungzon township, just outside the southern town of Moulmein, worry that erosion in the area is being exacerbated by the ships that dredge its bed for sand each night. The sand is mainly bound for Singapore, the world's biggest importer, for use in reclamation and construction projects.

Both the Myanmar government and the company whose ships do the dredging in Chaungzon deny the dredging is causing the erosion. But the dispute highlights the fractious issue of sand-mining in Southeast Asia as Singapore is forced to look farther afield to slake its thirst for the mineral following bans on the trade in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia over environmental concerns.

Sand mining has been blamed by scientists for damaging sensitive ecosystems around the world, accelerating coastal and riverine erosion, and exacerbating the frequency and severity of floods and droughts, according to a 2019 report by the UN Environment Program. Malaysia, formerly the biggest source of sand for Singapore, in 2018 introduced an outright ban on the export of sea sand, used for land reclamation, and imposed tighter controls on river sand, used mostly in construction.

Cambodia made a similar move in 2017, while Indonesia banned exports to Singapore in 2007, causing a "sand crisis" that brought building activity almost to a halt. Singapore, an island state that has grown 25 percent since its independence in 1965 thanks largely to aggressive land reclamation, has since bolstered its stockpiles, according to sand traders.

Officials in Myanmar and industry sources in Singapore say the bans have prompted Singapore to seek new supplies from countries like Myanmar. Almost 1 million tons of sand went from Myanmar to Singapore in 2018, earning over \$6 million, according to the most recent UN data on the trade. That amount is expected to have increased substantially following the Malaysia bans, according to the Myanmar government.

"Since the Philippines, Cambodia, and Vietnam almost completely stopped exporting sand to Singapore, the sand from Myanmar has become much more in demand," said Aye Lwin, joint secretary-general of the Myanmar Port Authority, which grants licenses for sand-mining operations. The benefits of the mining - including tax revenues for the government - outweighed the costs, he said. "I believe it only causes little environmental damage," Aye Lwin said. "But it generates funds for the government."

'An easy target'

The Singapore-registered company dredging in Chaungzon, Starhigh Asia Pacific Pte Ltd, has extracted hundreds of thousands of tons of sand since 2013, according to the local member of Parliament, Kyi Kyi Mya. She said at least 150,000 tons were extracted in 2018-2019, but did not have the exact number for other years. Starhigh dredges the sand legally through a license with the local government that does not limit the amount of sand the company can extract.

Most of the sand Starhigh extracts is sent to Singapore. The company last year bid to supply sand to JTC Corporation, a Singapore government agency for infrastructure development, according to a tender on a government procurement site. Starhigh also supplied sand for a JTC reclamation project in Singapore completed in 2018, according to Starhigh's managing director, Si Thu Phyo. He said the sand for that project came from Myanmar as well as Vietnam and the Philippines.

JTC referred questions from Reuters to Singapore's Ministry of National Development, which said the country imports sand on a commercial basis and that suppliers are expected to abide by laws and regulations in source countries. The Myanmar government says the environmental impact of the dredging is minimal and necessary to clear waterways of built-up sediment.

In 2014, the company paid compensation to local farmers who claimed that mining too close to the shore had led to landslides, according to Kyi Kyi Mya, the MP in Chaungzon. Starhigh did not comment on any compensation paid to farmers but said "whenever it is possible, we will help locals with small landfill work at our own cost." Si Thu Phyo, the Starhigh managing director, told Reuters that erosion was present in the area before dredging work started. "Dredging is always an easy target when it comes to environmental complaints," he said. "People don't understand and are worried." —Reuters

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Democratic presidential hopeful former Vice President Joe Biden takes a selfie with supporters after addressing a Super Tuesday event in Los Angeles on Tuesday. —AFP

Biden, once counted out, rebounds on Super Tuesday

For a candidate left for dead just weeks ago, Joe Biden has scored a dramatic comeback in the Democratic White House race, capped by victories over chief rival Bernie Sanders in a majority of the 14 states contested on Super Tuesday. After going zero for three in the first early voting contests last month, Biden's White House hopes were suddenly revived with early projected wins in major southern battlegrounds Virginia, North Carolina and Alabama. He went on to score wins in Tennessee, Arkansas, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and rival Elizabeth Warren's state of Massachusetts.

"They haven't buried me yet," the 77-year-old former vice president told ecstatic supporters in Los Angeles. "I'm here to report, we are very much alive!" Despite being heavily outspent by Sanders and with only patchwork organization on the ground in some states, Biden claimed what he cheekily called the "#Joementum" in a tweet. But he hardly has a cakewalk to the Democratic nomination and the right to face Donald Trump in November.

He must out-duel Sanders, the self-declared

democratic socialist, in a battle for a majority of the delegates who formally pick the nominee at the party convention in July. Sanders, 78, seized the early advantage by securing the most votes in Iowa, which kicked off the race, and the next two states. He claimed victories Tuesday in Colorado, Utah, his home state of Vermont, and was projected by exit polls to win California, the largest US state, with its motherlode of 415 delegates at stake.

In Texas, the night's second biggest prize with 228 delegates, Biden narrowly defeated Sanders. If Biden also stays competitive in California, he may well be the delegate leader by the time the Super Tuesday dust settles, showing he is able to build a broad coalition of voters. "Maybe not quite the equal of Lazarus," veteran television anchor Dan Rather tweeted, "but I haven't seen a political back-from-the-dead story quite like Joe Biden's."

Firewall

From the start, Biden's campaign expressed confidence they could bounce back from poor showings in early states and win the 1,991 delegates necessary to secure the nomination outright.

For Bloomberg,
Tuesday debut
anything but super

Michael Bloomberg crashed and burned in his presidential primary debut on Super Tuesday, failing to win any states in a dismal performance that left the former New York mayor facing questions about his future in the Democratic race. It was an ugly night for the billionaire US media tycoon who had entered the nomination contest last November with high hopes and deep pockets, investing a record \$500 million from his personal fortune into advertising before his name even appeared on a single ballot.

As the candidate who claims he is best positioned to defeat President Donald Trump in November licked his wounds, his campaign signalled to NBC News that Bloomberg will reassess his candidacy Wednesday when a fuller data picture comes in. Earlier in the day Bloomberg bristled when asked whether a third place was good enough for him - indicating he considered himself a top three player along with centrist Joe Biden and leftist Bernie Sanders.

But results ultimately showed Bloomberg facing a crushing fourth place finish in no fewer than five of the 14

Super Tuesday states including key battleground Virginia, where he came up empty after reportedly sinking \$18 million into advertising and ground operations in the state, dozens of times more than winner Biden invested there. One consolation: Bloomberg was projected to win in the remote Pacific island territory of American Samoa, hardly the nation's heartland.

"Bloomberg spent \$500 million and won American Samoa. Bad business model," one user razzed on Twitter. The 78-year-old New Yorker told reporters he would not quit the race, insisting he was "in it to win it." Hours later as results trickled in, Bloomberg put on a brave face. "No matter how many delegates we win tonight, we have done something nobody thought was possible: in just three months we've gone from one percent of the polls to being a contender for the Democratic nomination," he told supporters at a watch party in Florida.

Millions 'down the drain'

Bloomberg's strategy has been unconventional. He challenged the party custom of campaigning heavily in the four early states of Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina, opting instead for a Super Tuesday splash. "While my fellow candidates spent a whole year focusing on the first four states, I was out campaigning against Donald Trump in the states where the election will actually be decided" such as Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Florida, he said.

But the current Democratic race is a battle for a majority

of the delegates who pick the nominee at the party's national convention in July. And while Bloomberg picked up small clumps of delegates in California, Tennessee, Colorado, Texas, Utah and Oklahoma, he is well short of rivals Sanders and Biden, and narrowly trails Senator Elizabeth Warren. Inescapably, he will face mounting pressure to bow out and clear the way for fellow moderate Biden, whose Tuesday showing made him the definitive challenger to Sanders in the nomination race.

Trump has relentlessly mocked his fellow septuagenarian New York billionaire, and Tuesday was no different. "The biggest loser tonight, by far, is Mini Mike Bloomberg," the president tweeted, saying his hundreds of millions of dollars in ads went "down the drain". "He got nothing for it but the nickname Mini Mike, and the complete destruction of his reputation."

Up until Tuesday, Bloomberg had signalled he intended to compete all the way to the Democratic National Convention, which gathers July 13-16 in Milwaukee. In doing so he acknowledged that his only real possibility of winning the nomination may be a contested convention where no single candidate arrives with the majority of delegates needed to win outright. Bryce Graham, a 22-year-old supporter at Bloomberg's Florida event, called him "the best candidate to get the job done, to economically shift this country, to also win against Trump". Bloomberg's chances were "slim", Graham acknowledged. "But it's not looking that bad. He is showing out in support" of Biden. —AFP

Oversize vehicles
offer tenuous
home amid
housing crisis

Judith Ortiz was living in an apartment near San Francisco, working in a restaurant, when she realized she could no longer make ends meet. Rents had gotten too high, she recalled, and the job was not paying enough. About a year ago, she took a step that experts say is increasingly common amid the record rental affordability crisis gripping the United States: She left her apartment and bought an RV, a large vehicle equipped with beds, plumbing and a small living space.

Today Ortiz lives in the RV - short for recreational vehicle and designed for camping or road trips - with her sister and two-year-old niece. The arrangement allows her "to be in the neighborhood and not stay on the street", said Ortiz, 45. But it is hopefully only a temporary solution, she said, adding that living in an RV in the street was unsafe and that her sister had been hassled. "Nobody wants to live in an RV. It's just convenient because the cost of living is way too high," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from East Palo Alto, California.

A dramatic rise in homelessness in the United States after the recession of 2008-09 has been running parallel to an increase in people living in vehicles, said Graham Pruss, a University of Washington anthropologist. Those living in oversize vehicles make up a unique subset, he said: "RVs are being used as a new form of affordable housing." In places like Seattle, the booming tech industry has made it difficult for those with lower-paid jobs to find a place to live. "People who work

in the service economy can't live here," said Pruss, who works with the city of Seattle on homelessness issues. "They have to live 100 miles away - or they're using these vehicles."

Mobility, property, privacy

Especially for those who are newly experiencing homelessness, an RV can be enticing, Pruss said. They "look around them on the street and see everyone else living in tents, and there's a valuation, seeing (a) vehicle as better," he said. "Especially an RV, which has a stove - you have mobility, a certain property right, privacy." The number of those living in vehicles has skyrocketed over the past decade, Pruss said - in Seattle, rising within a decade to 3,372 from 881 in 2008, according to official annual counts.

And the anecdotal evidence is clear, he said: RVs have become an incredibly common sight on the streets of many U.S. cities, particularly on the West Coast. Yet RVs as a housing option pose unique challenges for cities, support services and residents alike, said researchers and activists. Their size - often more than 20 feet long, and wider than a standard vehicle - makes it difficult to find parking. RVs also often have toilets or sinks, meaning residents have to figure out a way to safely dispose of wastewater, while generators can be noisy.

These factors also make them easy targets for residential neighborhoods that may not want them on their streets, and for cities to crack down on them. Ordinances to outlaw sleeping in a vehicle rose by 213 percent in 2019, according to a report from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. Such bans now exist in 50 percent of US cities, the report said.

Downsizing

RV residents can also pose an additional complexity as they may not want to move out of their vehicle, said Jennifer Adams, an outreach manager with the Bridge Care Center, a charity in Seattle. Instead, they may see



RVs and other oversize vehicles on a street in Seattle in 2014. —Reuters

themselves as having made a purposeful decision to downsize, and thus may not want to access homelessness services that could be of help, she explained. "A lot of them are a lot more independent - it costs a lot more money to be that way, and they usually have an income," said Adams, referring to those living in RVs.

The city's tech industry has displaced roofers, painters, fishermen and other contractors, she said, and those are the types that may consider moving into an RV to save costs. Adams herself lived in a variety of vehicles from 2008 to 2013, at times renting an RV from someone else, an increasingly common business, she said. It was difficult being forced to move the vehicle constantly, Adams added, and at one point residents of the neighborhood that she was parking in started to attack people living in RVs. But the experience wasn't all negative. "I have tons of pictures of all of the wildlife from that time - raccoons, ducks and bunnies. It was peaceful," she said.

Safe zone

Beyond outlawing or heavily regulating RVs, many cities have yet to find a strategy for dealing with this new style of housing. Even "safe parking" programs, a rising phenomenon in which church or municipal parking lots are opened to those sleeping in their vehicles at night, typically have not allowed RVs, if only because of their size, said Alicia Garcia, who works on homelessness issues in the San Francisco Bay area.

Last May, one of the first to focus solely on this community opened up in East Palo Alto, overseen by Garcia's charity Project We Hope. Parts of the city had become overrun with RVs, she recalled, and authorities had started contemplating new laws that would force them out. "People were afraid - a lot of it was about their children not being able to stay in the school district. Many had grown up in that community and felt they were being driven out," Garcia said. —Reuters

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Business

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VIENNA: In this file photo, OPEC President UAE Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei (center) speaks as he sits with Minister of Energy of Russia Alexander Novak (left) and OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Sanusi Barkindo (right) of Nigeria during a meeting at the headquarters of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) with OPEC members and non-OPEC members in Vienna. — AFP

OPEC pushing Russia to support big oil cut

Saudis, others seek new cuts of 1 million bpd or more

VIENNA: Saudi Arabia and other OPEC members were seeking to win support from Russia yesterday to join them in new additional oil output cuts to prop up prices which have tumbled by a fifth this year because of the coronavirus outbreak. A technical panel of several representatives from OPEC states, Russia and other producers recommended on Tuesday cutting output by between 0.6-1.0 million barrels per day (bpd) during the second quarter only.

It also recommended that existing cuts of 2.1 million bpd by the group known as OPEC+, which meets in Vienna this week, be extended until the end of 2020.

Russia has so far signaled it might be willing to agree to extending existing cuts, which expire in March, but might find it difficult to sign up to deeper cuts. "OPEC hopes for a cut bigger than 1 million but the challenge is still Russia," an OPEC source said. Two other sources confirmed talks were now focusing on additional cuts in excess of 1 million bpd. Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman met his Russian counterpart Alexander Novak yesterday. The Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC), comprising a handful of OPEC and non-OPEC ministers, will convene in Vienna later.

The Saudi and Russian ministers have made no public statements so far since arriving to Vienna.

'Downward revisions'

Sources told Reuters this month the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries could agree deeper cuts even without Russia. One source said yesterday that Russia would seek to keep its participation in any new cut to a minimum.

"Cuts will need to at least be towards the top end of the range, as we see further downward revisions in demand growth as Covid-19 spreads. There is more evidence of the spread of the virus having an impact on demand outside of China," Warren Patterson from ING said in a note.

Existing cuts have not been enough to counter the impact of the new coronavirus, Covid-19, on China, the world's biggest oil importer, and on the global economy. Factories have been disrupted, fewer people are travelling and other business has slowed, driving down oil demand. Benchmark Brent oil prices were around \$52 a barrel yesterday, a level at which many OPEC states will struggle to balance their budgets, although Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the current price was acceptable.

With global efforts to prevent the virus spreading, OPEC has said the number of delegates at its meetings in Vienna this week will be kept to a minimum and journalists have been barred from entering the OPEC headquarters. Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh arrived for the talks in Vienna as Iran's government said the virus had now affected most of the provinces in the Islamic Republic.

Yesterday's JMMC meeting is part of the process of drawing up recommendations for the wider meeting of ministers from OPEC today and a meeting of OPEC+ ministers tomorrow. — Reuters

'Avoid hugs': OPEC in the time of coronavirus

VIENNA: When OPEC ministers descend on Vienna to decide oil production policy, their meetings are usually accompanied by displays of brotherhood between the men in charge of a third of global crude supplies. This time, as the world battles a coronavirus outbreak, they have been given strict instructions: no handshakes, no hug and wash your hands frequently.

"Avoid close contact," reads a poster that greets ministers and delegates as they enter the headquarters of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries in the Austrian capital.

"Avoid handshakes and hugs," it adds and, to prevent any misunderstanding, it also shows an image of two stickmen embracing with a large, red cross next to it. As an additional safeguard, the number of delegates attending the OPEC meeting has been restricted and journalists have been barred from the OPEC building.

Outside the headquarters, the usual crowd of reporters clustering around ministers as they come and go from hotels have been noticeably smaller. Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak and several OPEC ministers and delegates had their temperature checked

before entering the OPEC headquarters yesterday.

"If someone arriving to OPEC has a temperature above 37.5 Celsius, an alert will be raised," a source, who was speaking from inside the OPEC headquarters, told Reuters. OPEC member Iran, some of whose officials have gone down with the virus as the country grapples to contain one of the worst outbreaks outside of China, South Korea and Italy, sent its minister, Bijan Zanganeh, to this week's meeting. A waitress at the Palais Kempinski where he and ministers from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Venezuela stay said she was following advice to keep her hands clean with regular washing or sanitizer. "That's all you can do," she said.

A spokeswoman said her hotel was following the recommendations from the health authorities, adding: "We do not want to spread panic." Austria's airport authorities began mandatory temperature checks on Tuesday for passengers on direct flights from Iran, which has two such flights a week, and South Korea, which has three, according to a Vienna Airport spokesman.

Health authorities in Lower Austria, the province where the airport is located, said temperatures of all passengers from Iran were checked yesterday and no cases were found. Not all officials followed the guidance on keeping a distance. OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Barkindo was shown in photos issued yesterday in a handshake for the camera with the Russian minister and Nigeria's Timipre Sylva. But others were more cautious. "I told people I won't be shaking hands with them," said one OPEC delegate. — Reuters

US Fed leads charge against economic hit from virus

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve led the charge in the global response to the growing economic risk posed by the coronavirus, announcing an emergency interest rate cut Tuesday to boost confidence. But the immediate impact seemed the opposite of what was intended: investors fled to safe assets, sending the 10-year Treasury to its lowest ever return while stocks lost most of the ground recovered Monday.

That move came after weeks of haranguing by President Donald Trump for more stimulus, but he was not satisfied and called

for even more. In a unanimous decision, the Fed's policy-setting committee slashed its key interest rate by a half point to a range of 1.0-1.25 — the first inter-meeting cut since late 2008 at the height of the global financial crisis.

The large, highly unusual move made just 15 days before the next scheduled policy meeting reflected growing concerns that the spreading virus will take a bite out of the US and global economies as supply chains linked to China, the epicenter of the outbreak, are shut down.

"My colleagues and I took this action to help the US economy keep strong in the face of new risks to the economic outlook," Fed Chair Jerome Powell said in a press conference. The market reaction seems to support the concerns of economists who worry the aggressive move goes too far and, rather than calm fears, could unsettle investors worldwide if they view it as a sign the US central bank expects a recession.

The Dow Jones Industrial average lost nearly three percent, or 800 points, eroding

most of the ground recovered on Monday, while the yield on the 10-year Treasury bond fell below 1.0 percent for the first time ever. While Powell said the US economy remains on solid footing with a strong labor market supporting household spending, the broader spread of the virus is disrupting economic activity and "the risks to the US outlook have changed materially."

The Fed chief said it is too soon to know how persistent and severe the impact will be, and acknowledged that cutting interest rates does nothing to fix the broken supply chain. But, Powell said, "we do believe that our action will provide a meaningful boost to the economy... and will help boost household and business confidence."

The cut was not enough for Trump, who demanded the central bank "further ease and, most importantly, come into line with other countries/competitors." "We are not playing on a level field. Not fair to USA. It is finally time for the Federal Reserve to LEAD. More easing and cutting!" Trump tweeted.



WASHINGTON: US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell gives a press briefing after the surprise announcement the FED will cut interest rates on Tuesday in Washington, DC. — AFP

International coordination

Powell once again denied the central bank is bowing to political pressures, saying "we make our decisions in the interests of the American people" based on "the best analy-

sis and research." Companies worldwide have been buffeted by actions taken by governments to stem the outbreak that emerged in China, where entire cities have been locked down and factories shut. — AFP

Business

IMF rescue deal seen as only way out for ailing Lebanese economy

Lebanon needs \$30bn to refloat economy: Former economy minister

BEIRUT: The Lebanese government must swallow its misgivings and reach a rescue deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or risk economic implosion and further turmoil, economists, diplomats and politicians said. Privately, some government officials acknowledge that an IMF bailout is the most logical solution to Lebanon's economic crisis, according to a source familiar with ongoing discussions.

But to get such a rescue program in place, the new government would have to overcome the objections of Hezbollah, the powerful Iranian-backed power broker in Prime Minister Hassan Diab's cabinet and its Christian and Shiite allies, who are concerned about the austerity measures an IMF rescue would involve.

As Lebanon's financial crisis drags on and government revenues dwindle, the bill to rescue the country is rising. Former economy minister and ex-vice central bank governor Nasser Saidi estimates the economy will need \$30 billion, and an additional \$25 billion to recapitalize a banking system in hock to the state. "Lebanon needs external liquidity both for the balance of payments but also for the government," Saidi said. "That's why the external package and the IMF reform program which comes with all the associated reforms which we need is so necessary". A \$1.2 billion payment on a Eurobond is falling due on March 9 and even though Lebanon is widely expected to restructure its foreign-currency-denominated debt that is unlikely to be enough to deal with the total debt burden, economists and analysts say.

The IMF has estimated that Lebanon's public debt would reach 155 percent of gross domestic product by the end of 2019, one of the biggest debt burdens in the world. Any move to restructure will further pressurize local banks, which after years of funneling their deposits to the state, have an exposure to Lebanese sovereign debt that stands at almost twice their capital base. The government could look at forcing depositors to take losses as another way to alleviate its burden. But the Lebanese banking system has been built on attracting deposits from overseas and grabbing such cash would make it more difficult for Lebanon to attract hard currency in future.

The banks have already seen deposits drain away, despite effectively imposing capital controls on ordinary

savers, and urgently need to restock their balance sheets.

Lebanon hired US investment bank Lazard and law firm Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP last week as advisers. But with inflation shooting up to 30 percent, the pound depreciating by 40 percent since October and the number of jobless rising every day, analysts say only a full IMF deal will unlock the tens of billions of dollars Lebanon now needs.

"The IMF opens doors to international assistance. An IMF program is inevitable", said Toufic Gaspard, a former government and central bank economist.

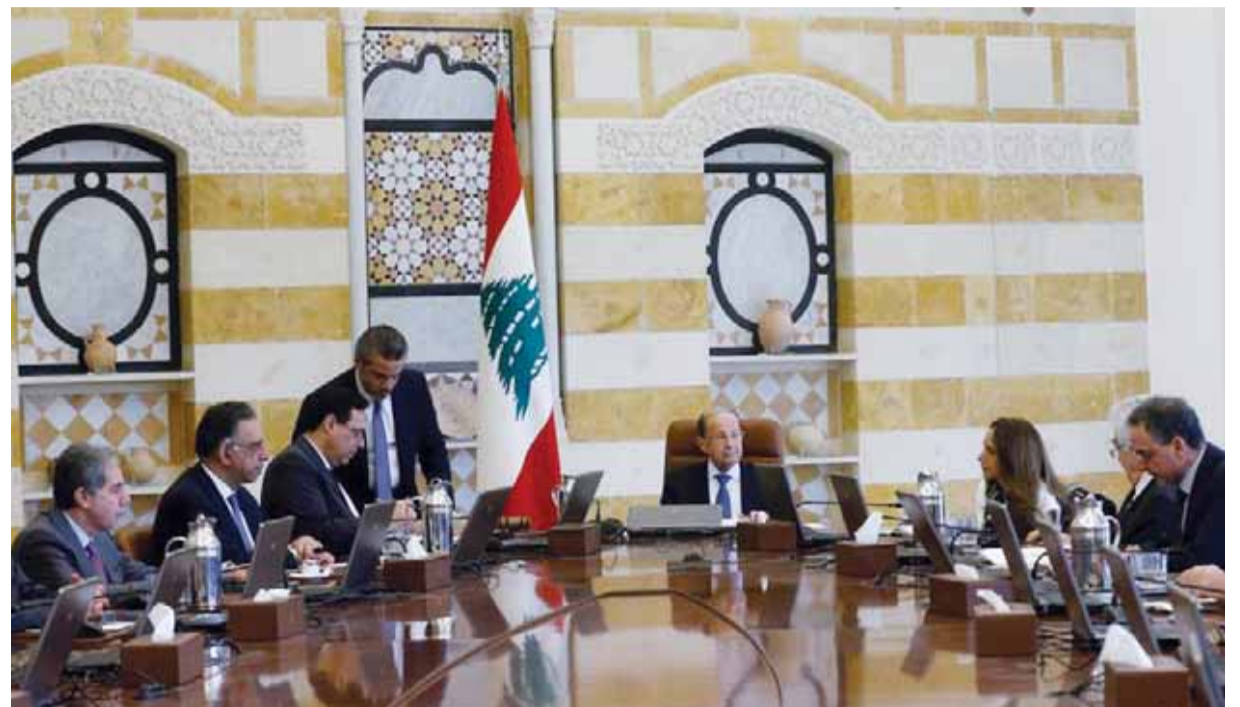
"It's likely Hezbollah will eventually accept an IMF plan because they have no other option. The alternative will be serious political and economic crises".

The government said it was working its own rescue plan without resorting to an IMF program and was only seeking IMF technical assistance. A senior Hezbollah official said that terms required by any IMF bailout would spark social unrest. "The position is not towards the Fund as an international financial institution but on the terms offered to Lebanon, because they will lead to a popular revolution," Hezbollah MP Hassan Fadallah told Reuters. "Our position is against this type of program and not against the Fund as an organization."

The IMF declined to comment, referring instead to a statement from last week when it said its staff had held five days of "very informative and productive" talks with Lebanese authorities, and stood ready to provide further technical advice as the Lebanese government formulated its economic reform plans. Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton declined to comment. Lazard was not immediately available to comment.

Plan B?

Some analysts argue Hezbollah will have to relent because its Shiite constituency, especially those who paid the public payroll, will be among the worst hit by economic collapse - and because the IMF is the only alternative to that risky outcome. "Unless the right, responsible decisions are made, there's a big collapse coming and it's unknown what will come out of it: will it be the same Lebanon or a different Lebanon?" said Alain Aoun, a senior member of the Christian Free Patriotic Movement party, a Hezbollah ally.



BEIRUT: In this file photo, Lebanon's President Michel Aoun heads a cabinet meeting at the presidential palace in Baabda. —Reuters

"The price for the Lebanese system will be very high, bigger than just a change of government," said Aoun, adding that so far no party had presented a credible alternative to an IMF program. Hezbollah's Fadallah did not respond to a question about an IMF program being the only way to avoid economic disaster. Corruption and bad governance are seen as root causes of Lebanon's problems and the crisis, which has seen street protests against the ruling elite, represents the most serious threat to the country's stability since the 1975-1990 civil war.

An attempt by the previous government to raise revenues by taxing WhatsApp calls ignited mass demonstrations that eventually prompted it to resign. An IMF bailout, which would require structural reforms, could

however unlock funds from other sources. European donors led by France, which has led previous efforts to ensure Lebanon's solvency and stability, have held up a \$11 billion package of loans for infrastructure agreed in 2018 because there has been no serious effort to reform the economy. Western diplomats said they have avoided calling for Lebanon to seek IMF assistance, saying that must be a Lebanese decision but stressed that any Western emergency funding for Lebanon would only come as part of an IMF program.

They said Lebanese officials face an uphill struggle to persuade donors—who have coughed up billions of dollars in aid in the past—to believe in their willingness to implement a reform plan on their own. —Reuters

India's top court strikes down RBI banking ban on cryptocurrency

MUMBAI: India's Supreme Court yesterday allowed banks to handle cryptocurrency transactions from exchanges and traders, overturning a central bank ban that dealt the thriving industry a major blow.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had in April 2018 ordered financial institutions to break off all ties with individuals or businesses dealing in virtual currency such as Bitcoin within three months. The ban led to plummeting trade volumes and exchanges shutting their businesses.

A three-judge Supreme Court bench said in their ruling that while the central bank had the power to take pre-emptive action, the court questioned the "proportionality" of such measures. "RBI needs to show at least some semblance of any damage suffered by its regulated entities. But there is none," the court said in a 180-page ruling. Nischal Shetty, chief executive of the WazirX cryptocurrency exchange, welcomed the ruling saying investment had stopped "in the crypto and blockchain space in India", but that would now change.

However, the industry still faces hurdles as a government panel has recommended a ban on all private cryptocurrencies. In July, the panel also recommended jail of up to 10 years and heavy fines for anyone dealing in digital currencies. —Reuters

Indonesia's luxury car 'owners' cry foul over tax

JAKARTA: No one was more surprised to learn that Dimas Prayitno owned a Rolls-Royce than the 21-year-old Indonesian himself, who was baffled when told he owed \$15,000 in taxes on the luxury vehicle. But a look at the construction worker's home in a rundown neighborhood quickly convinced officials that Prayitno was the latest victim of tax evasion by one of Jakarta's wealthy elite.

Rampant tax dodging costs Indonesia billions of dollars in lost revenue annually and it has taken on a renewed urgency as Jakarta moves to pass a raft of bills aimed at revving up Southeast Asia's biggest economy and adding millions of poor to the middle class.

"I was shocked and asked them 'what car?'" Prayitno told AFP about his visit from tax officials. "How could I afford a car when you see me living in a house like this?" Prayitno-whose top pay is about 150,000 rupiah (\$10) a day-later learned he'd been duped by a former boss who took his government ID card ostensibly for a legitimate purpose.

But instead, the employer registered his luxury car in Prayitno's name to

dodge taxes. About 350 Rolls-Royces, Ferraris and other top-end cars in Indonesia's capital-punctuated by a yawning divide between rich and poor—are improperly listed in the name of low-income people like Prayitno, the tax agency said.

Cars, not bricks

But it's just a fraction of the tax evasion problem. In December, the CEO of state-owned airline Garuda Indonesia was sacked after allegedly smuggling a Harley-Davidson motorbike and expensive bicycles into the country on a commercial plane.

He was accused of using a subordinate's name on import papers to avoid detection-and taxes.

Days later, Indonesia's customs office said it had foiled a separate plot to smuggle dozens of luxury cars and motorbikes in mislabeled shipping containers to dodge more than \$3 million in levies. "We're going to crack down on this illegal activity," finance minister Sri Mulyani said at the time.

"The contents of the shipping containers were listed as bricks but we found cars instead."

Last year, the Global Financial Integrity Report (GFI) estimated Indonesia lost some \$6.5 billion in tax revenue in 2016 due to mislabeling on goods flowing in and out of the country. The corruption-riddled Southeast Asian archipelago of more than 260 million is also one of the world's worst for illegal movements of funds across international borders, according to GFI.



JAKARTA: Indonesia's Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati (top right) gesturing next to a seized luxury car during a raid in Jakarta. —AFP

Indonesia has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios regionally and the World Bank in January called for better tax collection efforts. The call comes as parliament debates a raft of new legislation that would cut corporate taxes while making big internet firms pay more levies, part of a broader effort to cut red tape and loosen rigid labor laws to spur investment. But raising domestic tax revenue is also key as President Joko Widodo kicks off a second term with plans for more costly infrastructure spending, including a planned move of the capital to Borneo island from congested Jakarta.

'Manipulated'

In 2016, Jakarta offered an amnesty for tax evaders who would declare their hidden assets at home and abroad, which raked in levies totalling nearly \$10 billion. But that was just a fraction of assets thought to be stashed away. Registering a car, a company or other property in the names of low-income people and subordinates is a common scheme used by wealthy Indonesians to avoid paying tax, experts said. "Authorities should look at the beneficial owners not the people who are used to register that wealth," said Fair Tax Forum researcher Nurkholis Hidayat. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2,850
Indian Rupees	4,188
Pakistani Rupees	1,985
Sri Lankan Rupees	1,679
Nepali Rupees	2,624
Singapore Dollar	221.720
Hongkong Dollar	39.423
Bangladesh Taka	3,588
Philippine Peso	6,069
Thai Baht	9,809
Malaysian Ringgit	78.312

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.708
Qatari Riyal	84.156
UAE Dirhams	795.841
Bahraini Dinar	813.600
UAE Dirham	83.422

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	21,000
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19,637
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1,230
Tunisian Dinar	113,830
Jordanian Dinar	432,390
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.204
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.644

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	306.200
Euro	343.860
Sterling Pound	394.390
Canadian dollar	230.490
Turkish lira	49.780
Swiss Franc	322.490
US Dollar Buying	298.750

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	305.850
Canadian Dollar	229.720
Sterling Pound	393.425
Euro	342.930
Swiss Frank	295.250
Bahrain Dinar	813.370
UAE Dirhams	83.675
Qatari Riyals	84.915
Saudi Riyals	82.455
Jordanian Dinar	432.670
Egyptian Pound	19.613
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.681
Indian Rupees	4.178
Pakistani Rupees	1.982
Bangladesh Taka	3.596
Philippines Peso	6.052
Cyprus pound	18.190
Japanese Yen	3.845
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.639

Malaysian Ringgit	74.075
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.390
Thai Bhat	10.735
Turkish Lira	50.495
Singapore dollars	219.748

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.385028	0.398929
Czech Korune	0.005417	0.014717
Danish Krone	0.041620	0.046620
Euro	0.333969	0.347669
Georgian Lari	0.108913	0.108913
Hungarian	0.000925	0.001115
Norwegian Krone	0.028963	0.034163
Romanian Leu	0.054056	0.070906
Russian Ruble	0.004636	0.004636
Slovakia	0.009183	0.019183
Swedish Krona	0.028303	0.033303
Swiss Franc	0.313227	0.324227
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.191661	0.205661
New Zealand Dollar	0.185839	0.195339
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.223736	0.232736
US Dollars	0.302100	0.306650
US Dollars Mint	0.302600	0.306650
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002892	0.003693

Chinese Yuan	0.042584	0.046084
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037234	0.040074
Indian Rupee	0.003624	0.004396
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002765	0.002945
Korean Won	0.000247	0.000262
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069526	0.075526
Nepalese Rupee	0.002611	0.002951
Pakistani Rupee	0.001337	0.002107
Philippine Peso	0.005872	0.006172
Singapore Dollar	0.215069	0.225069
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001324	0.001904
Taiwan	0.010107	0.010287
Thai Baht	0.009422	0.009972
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.806030	0.814130
Egyptian Pound	0.019367	0.022107
Iranian Riyal	0.000085	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000201	0.000261
Jordanian Dinar	0.426977	0.435977
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000102	0.000252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021207	0.045207
Omani Riyal	0.790179	0.798121
Qatar Riyal	0.083448	0.084486
Saudi Riyal	0.080567	0.081867
Syrian Pound	0.001299	0.001519
Tunisian Dinar	0.103913	0.111913
Turkish Lira	0.043579	0.053424
UAE Dirhams	0.082731	0.083563
Yemeni Riyal	0.000996	0.001076

Business

BoJ's Kuroda offers bleak view on economy, warns of virus damage

TOKYO: The coronavirus outbreak could inflict serious damage on the Japanese economy, Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said yesterday, stressing the central bank was ready to take "appropriate action" to underpin a fragile recovery. The remarks came as fears of recession put pressure on the BOJ to follow in the footsteps of other central banks and ramp up stimulus at this month's rate review.

Japan's economy had been expected to recover in the current quarter, but the epidemic has hurt exports and consumption through a decline in Chinese tourists, Kuroda told parliament.

"If the epidemic is prolonged, it could also affect production," he said. "We need to be mindful that the impact from the outbreak could be big," Kuroda said, adding that consumer sentiment was already being hurt.

The remarks underscore a growing concern among BOJ policymakers over the fallout from the epidemic. The economy is already reeling from last year's sales tax increase and natural disasters that disrupted production. Robust capital and government spending continue to underpin growth, but the recovery depends largely on how long it takes to contain the epidemic, Kuroda said.

"We will carefully watch economic and market developments, and take appropriate action as needed," he said. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told the same parliament committee that the government would take "sufficient and necessary" fiscal steps to fend off economic threats.

No emergency meeting?

The epidemic has dashed hopes that Japan's economy will rebound from the cur-



TOKYO: A pedestrian wearing a face mask walks past an electric quotation board displaying the Nikkei 225 Index on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. — AFP

rent quarter's expected weakness and sustain a domestic demand-driven expansion. Kuroda has repeatedly said the BOJ won't hesitate to ease further if risks threaten its elusive 2 percent inflation target. But some at the BOJ feel monetary policy can do little to eradicate fears about the epidemic, sources familiar with its thinking said.

Kuroda had already pledged on Monday to pump more liquidity into markets and step up asset buying to calm markets. Many BOJ policymakers feel they have done enough for

now and are in no rush to do more, at least before their rate review on March 18-19, they said. Some market players speculate the BOJ may take policy action in an emergency meeting before the scheduled rate review, similar to the Federal Reserve's move in the United States. "When the situation is changing day by day, it might make sense to scrutinize developments carefully rather than act too hastily," one of the sources said on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. — Reuters

UK PMI points to best growth since September 2018

LONDON: Britain's economy grew at its fastest rate since September 2018 last month, though manufacturers and the services industry increasingly felt the impact of the spreading coronavirus as the month went on, a business survey showed yesterday.

The all-sector IHS Markit/CIPS UK Purchasing Managers' Index rose to 53.0 in February from 52.8 in January, as a jump in construction activity outweighed small losses in momentum in the larger services and manufacturing sectors. The services PMI slipped to 53.2 from a flash estimate of 53.3 and a 16-month high of 53.9 in January, which reflected a post-election bounce in business sentiment that risks being undermined by the coronavirus.

"Whether this expansion can be sustained in coming months is starting to look increasingly at risk," IHS Markit economist Chris Williamson said. "The survey data leave policymakers juggling between current signs of both improved economic growth and rising prices, while risks to the outlook have clearly intensified."

Taken at face value, the PMIs suggested Britain's economy is growing

at a quarterly rate of just over 0.2 percent, faster than at the end of 2019, IHS Markit said.

But Bank of England Governor Mark Carney said on Tuesday - shortly before the U.S. Federal Reserve cut interest rates - that the economic impact of the virus could be large and policymakers were working on possible responses. The PMI survey took place between Feb. 12 and Feb. 26, and towards the end of this period the impact of the coronavirus began to grow.

"There were a number of reports citing a negative impact on sales from the coronavirus outbreak, particularly to clients in overseas markets," IHS Markit said. "The loss of momentum for incoming new business also contributed to the sharpest drop in backlogs of work since last September."

Britain's economy has shown signs of recovery since Prime Minister Boris Johnson's emphatic election victory in December. But a PMI survey of the manufacturing sector on Monday showed factories suffered a big jump in delays in their supply chains as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. — Reuters

Honeywell plans 'most powerful' quantum computer

WASHINGTON: US manufacturing and technology group Honeywell said Tuesday it will bring to market "the world's most powerful quantum computer" aimed at tackling complex scientific and business challenges. The company said it had achieved a breakthrough in quantum computing, which uses subatomic particles to speed up processing, and would launch the new computers within three months. It released a scientific paper describing the accelerated quantum capability.

Honeywell said it had entered into partnerships with two quantum software and algorithm providers, Cambridge Quantum Computing and Zapata Computing to accelerate its efforts and find new ways to deploy quantum computing. "Quantum computing will enable us to tackle complex

scientific and business challenges, driving step-change improvements in computational power, operating costs and speed," Honeywell chief executive Darius Adameczyk said.

"Materials companies will explore new molecular structures. Transportation companies will optimize logistics. Financial institutions will need faster and more precise software applications. Pharmaceutical companies will accelerate the discovery of new drugs. Honeywell is striving to influence how quantum computing evolves and to create opportunities for our customers to benefit from this powerful new technology." Quantum computing is based on the use of quantum bits or qubits, which can perform trillions of calculations per second and in some cases outperform the fastest traditional supercomputers.

Honeywell said it was collaborating with JPMorgan Chase on financial applications for the technology.

It is also working with Microsoft to allow enterprise users to access Honeywell's quantum computer through the Microsoft Azure cloud platform. The company said it hopes to address computing challenges that have been impractical to tackle with traditional computers. — AFP



In this file photo, a logo of US-based automotive supplier Honeywell International is pictured at the entrance of its factory, in Conde-sur-Noireau, northwestern France. — AFP

IMF, World Bank switch to virtual Spring Meetings

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, citing growing concerns about the fast-spreading coronavirus, on Tuesday said they will adopt a "virtual format" for their Spring Meetings instead of convening in person in Washington.

The institutions' Spring Meetings, scheduled this year for April 17-19, usually bring some 10,000 government officials, business people, civil society representatives and journalists from across the globe to a tightly packed, two-block area of downtown Washington that houses their headquarters.

Officials said the IMF will still release an updated World Economic Forecast that will likely include a downgrade of its global outlook due to the outbreak,

which has taken a heavy toll on air travel, manufacturing and tourism around the globe. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva last month said the virus outbreak would likely shave 0.1 percentage point from global growth.

The institutions began considering the move as the disease continued to spread rapidly around the world after emerging in China in late December. There are now almost 91,000 cases globally, including 80,000 in China, and over 3,000 people have died. Infections have appeared in 77 countries and territories outside China, with Argentina the latest to report its first case.

The coronavirus outbreak is plunging the world economy into its worst downturn since the global financial crisis more than 10 years ago, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development warned on Monday. Georgieva and World Bank President David Malpass said in a joint statement that they were focused on ensuring the health and safety of participants and staff. — Reuters

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Business

Flydubai sees return to profitability

Boeing 737 MAX aircraft grounding severely impacts growth strategy

KUWAIT: Flydubai has yesterday announced its annual results for the reporting period ending 31 December 2019. It reported a total annual revenue of AED 6.0 billion (\$1.6 billion) compared to AED 6.2 billion (\$1.7 billion) last year; a decrease of 2.6 percent compared to the same period the previous year. It also reported a profit of AED 198.2 million (\$53.9 million). The airline concluded an interim settlement agreement with Boeing.

Ghaith Al-Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer at flydubai, commenting on flydubai's 2019 annual results, said: "We have had to manage a number of unprecedented issues faced by the aviation industry. Our Results demonstrate that we have capitalized on the strong fundamentals in our business, but it is regrettable that our growth strategy has been significantly impacted by the grounding of the Boeing 737 MAX."

"Whilst 2019 has seen a return to profitability it does not reflect the loss of market position and the unfilled opportunities flydubai could have exploited."

Ghaith Al-Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer at flydubai, commenting on reaching an interim settlement agreement, said: "We have concluded an interim settlement agreement with Boeing for certain compensation due to flydubai in relation to the grounding of the Boeing 737 MAX. The details of the interim settlement agreement remain confidential. This agreement has contributed towards this year's results, but in no way can it compensate for the loss of business opportunity or market share experienced by the airline. Discussions are continuing between the parties regarding the ongoing impact of the grounding."

Francois Oberholzer, Chief Financial Officer at flydubai, said: "We have had to be even more flexible with the abrupt interruption of our growth and fleet strategy. We have kept a firm grip on the business against the continued uncertainty created by the grounding. Direct operating costs reduced by 17.8 percent, whilst we saw double digit growth in our yields minimizing the reduction in revenue to 2.6 percent compared to a fall in capacity of 15.8 percent. Furthermore, we successfully

refinanced our debut 2014 Sukuk during this financial year."

Cost and revenue performance

- EBITDAR1 was reported at 29.5 percent of annual revenue compared to 21.1 percent in 2018.

- Closing cash and cash equivalents position, including pre-delivery payments for future aircraft deliveries, is AED 2.6 billion compared to AED 2.1 billion last year.

- Fuel costs were 25.8 percent of total annual operating costs mainly due to a drop in the average price of jet fuel by 9 percent. The efficiency gains expected from the Boeing 737 MAX have not been realized with the continued grounding.

- Ancillary revenue comprising baggage, cargo and inflight sales contributed 8.9 percent of revenue compared to 9.4 percent last year.

- Financing: a \$500 million 5-year Term Financing Facility was completed on 14 November. The Facility was used to refinance the carrier's first landmark Sukuk which was issued in 2014 and matured on 26 November.

Operational performance

- Network and new route launches: flydubai started direct flights to Krabi in Thailand on 12 December. The daily flights are operated via a short stop in Yangon, Myanmar and are codeshared with Emirates.

- MAX aircraft: 11 Boeing 737 MAX 8 and 3 Boeing 737 MAX 9 aircraft remain grounded. These aircraft will not rejoin the operating schedule until regulatory approval has been received from the General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) and the regulatory authorities in the jurisdictions where the airline flies.

- Flight cancellations: flydubai continues to ensure that it has optimised its schedule however 19 percent of its flying schedule has been cancelled as a result of the grounding.

- Aircraft leasing: To be able to offer additional capacity during the busy seasonal travel period flydubai arranged Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance & Insurance (ACMI) agreements and three aircraft operated within the fleet between 14 December 2019 and 06 January



2020. Four aircraft operated between 07 January and 25 January 2020 and two aircraft are operating between 26 January and 31 March 2020.

- Fleet size: at year end 45 aircraft were operating on the flydubai network which included its 42 Next-Generation Boeing 737-800 aircraft in addition to three aircraft leased from Smartwings.

- Update on FZ 981: The Final Report was published by the Interstate Aviation Committee on 26 November. A team are working on the implementation of the eight recommendations.

- Headquarters: construction of flydubai's new head office is underway and is due to be completed in 2020.

Outlook statement for 2020

"The preparation for this year's outlook statement is challenging given the uncertainty around the timetable for the return to service of the Boeing 737 MAX aircraft and the subsequent aircraft delivery schedule. With a current fleet size of 42 aircraft our ability to launch new routes and add frequencies will continue to be severely impeded. In order to further minimize disruption to our passengers' travel plans we are currently exploring options to extend the term for the lease of aircraft that were due to leave our fleet in 2021."

KFH offers cardless withdrawal via mobile using QR code

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) provides the service of cardless cash withdrawal without the need for an ATM card, and without touching the keyboard (buttons), via mobile using the QR code.

The cardless cash withdrawal process via QR code, requires the customer to log onto his/her kfhonline account through mobile, and choose the Cardless withdrawal service from the list. Then, selecting the withdrawal via QR code. After that, the customer enters the amount of withdrawal required and heads to the nearest KFH ATM device. Then he/she scans QR code that appears on the screen using his mobile camera. Thus, the customer receives the amount required to withdraw directly from the device, noting that the customer can withdraw from KD 10 to KD 500 per day in this way.

The cardless cash withdrawal list also includes the possibility of withdrawal using a Civil ID or a mobile phone number. KFH continues to develop ATMs that add more convenience to customers, while achieving many of their requirements and practical needs around the hour. This is through a sophisticated set of services, including: Civil ID cash deposit service, with the ability to update Civil ID information, activating services of new and renewed ATM cards, and changing the ATM card password.

It is worth noting that KFH has been pioneer in embracing digital transformation. KFH has succeeded in launching several financial solutions including: KFH Xpress, instant financial transfers service using RippleNet



network, Mobile Deposit of Cheques that enables quick deposit of cheques in a fast and efficient way to customers' accounts, the queuing system Skiplino for booking appointments electronically in bank branches, opening several KFH-Go self-banking stations, cash withdrawals via mobile using QR code, Civil ID or mobile number, KFH Pay service for electronic payments, instant cheques printing, receiving gold biscuits (10 grams), opening Al-Rabeh and savings accounts, Robotics Process Automation, Artificial-Intelligence-driven Chatbot, KFH Pass that allows customers to postpone the one of their installment payments online, and many other digital services.

Have the best of buying & leasing with new offers by Kaico, Al Shaya & Al Sagar



KUWAIT: Kuwait Automotive Imports Company, Kaico Al Shaya & Al Sagar, the authorized distributors of Mazda cars in Kuwait, continues to present exclusive offers on all of its cars during the festive season to give customers the freedom to choose and the ability to enjoy driving Mazda cars on Kuwait roads. The monthly leasing offer at a competitive price includes a package of benefits such as comprehensive insurance and free maintenance during the contract period in addition to the ability to drive with unlimited mileage and all of that to ensure the peace of mind of customers.

The leasing offer includes the most famous Mazda cars, such as CX9, CX5 and Mazda 6, which have won many prizes during the past years. Customers can also buy any of Mazda cars by appraising their cars on top of the trade-in value.

Offers includes the luxurious CX-9 model that displays the power of a 2.5L turbo 231hp engine with SKYACTIV TECHNOLOGY. Athletic proportions are highlighted by the sleek cabin, a strong and stable lower body featuring large 20-inch wheels & a confident stance.

As the flagship of the Mazda Lineup, Mazda6 has always been the most elegant and refined statement of the KODO design language and Mazda6 expresses this with its dynamic design and powerful three-dimensionality in the grille and signature wings. Mazda 6 is the perfect car of the driver, it is a sporty personal car equipped with every-

thing necessary in the cockpit which has been dedicated to help you enjoy the drive.

High-efficiency SKYACTIV-G direct-injection petrol engines are your passport to a world of driving that is both exciting and eco-friendly. The engine delivers a fuel efficiency of up to 15 percent. Safety features include Lane-Keep Assist System, Lane Departure Warning System and Smart Break Support. While the interior is characterized by the MZD CONNECT system, which gives you superior connectivity to the Internet and advanced navigation system.

Ashish Tendon, General Manager of Kaico stated, "Kaico has always been proac-

tive in providing the strongest offers and facilities in the Kuwaiti market, which comes within the company's strategy that the customer comes first."

Nader Salmeh, Sr Divisional Manager, added, "We know that customers have great knowledge of the market and are closely following all offers from different brands, so we made sure to satisfy them by presenting the strongest offers, including lease to own programs for customers looking for a peace of mind." Mazda has a history of 100 years and Kaico has been its successful partner for 50 years. Kaico was established in 1936 and is one of the main pillars of Al Shaya Trading Group.



Health



LONDON: A picture shows empty shelves in the tissue paper aisle in a supermarket in London yesterday. Large UK retailers are suffering supply disruptions because of the coronavirus that are hitting sales, according to a survey yesterday that revealed also the extent of stockpiling by consumers.



HEBEI: This photo taken on February 28, 2020 shows workers producing face masks at a factory in Handan in China's northern Hebei province. — AFP photos

WHO warns of mask shortages as virus cases rise worldwide

Death rate is 3.4%, much higher than seasonal flu at under 1%

BEIJING: Countries rushed to protect their supply of masks yesterday as panic buying, hoarding and theft spread over fears of the deadly coronavirus epidemic, with global health officials warning that stocks of protective gear were rapidly dwindling.

The disease, which first emerged in China, is appearing in new countries almost every day, with Iran, Italy and South Korea facing growing caseloads.

The death toll in Italy soared to 79 on Tuesday, with more than 2,500 people infected. A group of Italian tourists was placed in quarantine in India, with 17 testing positive for the virus.

One bright spot has been China's apparent progress in slowing the epidemic, with official figures yesterday showing new cases falling for a third straight day.

More than 90,000 people have been infected and around 3,200 have died worldwide, with Iraq reporting its first death from the disease yesterday while dozens have died so far in neighbouring Iran.

The death rate is around 3.4 percent, much higher than the seasonal flu at under one per-

cent, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The vast majority of cases and fatalities have been in China where tens of millions of people have been placed under quarantine, but infections are rising faster abroad now, prompting countries to discourage large gatherings and cancel a slew of events.

The death toll in the United States climbed to nine, many linked to a nursing home near Seattle, while the overall number of infections shot past 100.

The WHO voiced concern that masks, goggles and other protective equipment used by health workers were running out due to "rising demand, hoarding and misuse".

"We can't stop COVID-19 without protecting our health workers," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters in Geneva, noting prices of masks have surged sixfold and the cost of ventilators has tripled.

Tedros said the WHO had shipped more than half a million sets of personal protective equipment to 27 countries, but warned that "supplies are being depleted".

Shortages of equipment in China caused

thousands of medical workers to become infected with a dozen dying, prompting the country to step up supplies by repurposing production lines at diaper, coat and smartphone factories to make masks and hazmat suits.

Panic buying

At least 500 people queued up outside a supermarket in Seoul to buy masks yesterday, with President Moon Jae-in apologising for shortages this week.

South Korea makes 10 million masks a day and the government has ordered manufacturers to supply half their output to post offices, pharmacies, and a nationwide agricultural cooperative for sale at a fixed low price, with a five-per-person limit.

The virus has infected more than 5,600 people and killed 32 in South Korea, with more new daily cases there now than in China.

China reported 38 more deaths yesterday but only 119 new cases, its lowest number since January, with most infections in central Hubei province's capital Wuhan, where the virus was first detected in December.

There have now been 2,981 deaths in China and over 80,000 cases.

Indonesian police seized 600,000 face masks from a Jakarta-area warehouse after the country's first confirmed cases of coronavirus sparked panic buying and sent prices for prevention products skyrocketing.

"Mask prices have skyrocketed everywhere and there are shortages, most likely because hoarders are trying to make money at the public's expense," Jakarta police spokesman Yusri Yunus told AFP.

Russia issued a decree Wednesday banning the export of masks, respirators and hazmat suits to ensure access to the items for medics treating coronavirus patients and the public.

In Italy, a top civil protection official told AFP the country, which does not make face masks, is getting 800,000 of them from South Africa but needs at least 10 million more.

Italian hospitals had initial supplies but the rapid spread of the epidemic has put the health system under strain, said Civil Protection Department director Luigi D'Angelo.

French President Emmanuel Macron said Tuesday his government would requisition all face mask stocks and production in the coming months in response to the outbreak, after 2,000 masks were stolen from a hospital.

A Chinese industry ministry official said Wednesday companies are encouraged to export protective gear to meet foreign demand as production now exceeds daily needs in Hubei, the epicentre of the epidemic.

US Fed acts

While shoppers stock up, policymakers are scrambling to prevent a global economic downturn.

The US Federal Reserve's policy-setting committee slashed its key interest rate by half a point to a range of 1.0-1.25 percent — the first between-meeting cut since the height of the global 2008 financial crisis.

But the move failed to impress investors on Wall Street, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average finishing nearly three percent lower.

Most Asian and European equities, however, rose yesterday. — AFP

China's factory workers chafe under quarantine

BEIJING: China's coronavirus epidemic turned a Lunar New Year family reunion into an enforced quarantine for factory worker Hu Aihua, trapping him at home and preventing him from returning to his job.

He is one of China's 290 million rural migrant workers and many like him are mired in uncertainty, confined to their homes since late January, worried about a prolonged absence from work. As new infections fall nationwide authorities are encouraging companies to get back to work, with some local governments even chartering buses, trains and planes to pick up employees.



WENZHOU: This photo taken on February 27, 2020 shows facemask-clad workers applying glue on soles at the Zhejiang Xuda Shoes Co. factory in Wenzhou. 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. — AFP

But many remain stranded. Hu, for one, cannot leave his family's house in Dayan Township in central Hubei province, the virus epicentre that has been under virtual lockdown since late January. He and his family can only buy necessities on designated days by giving orders over the phone to a community representative, he told AFP.

"The choice of goods is much more limited... And it's harder to buy things like English books for my child," added Hu, 39, whose 10-year-old son is now taking classes online. He worries about his prospects if the quarantine is not lifted soon.

"I still receive a full salary now, but it can't go on forever... If our boss lacks income, he won't be able to pay for so many workers." As China reeled under the virus that has now killed more than 2,900 and infected some 80,000 nationwide, online searches for "unemployment" and "lay-offs" spiked from January to February, noted Nomura economist Lu Ting.

He estimates China's business resumption rate to be around 45 percent, if sectors like government, finance, healthcare and residential utilities are excluded.

Only about half of the 600 or so workers at Hu's employer, Jiangxi Jiengeng Group, have resumed work owing to difficulties returning from outside the province.

But this does not mean lower expenses. "There are overheads we have to pay... such as water, electricity and workers' salaries," said general manager Xu Hang. The cost price of non-woven cloth, which the manufacturer uses in the hygiene products it makes, has risen 10 percent.

It also set aside resources for a new mask production line in the battle against the virus. Xu said the firm has taken a 10 million yuan loan (\$1.43 million) to temporarily ease the financial pain.

Even some workers outside Hubei are finding it hard to return to their jobs. Factory worker Liu Zhishuang, 28, has been cooped up at home with his family in eastern Anhui province for almost a month. "We can't leave," he said. "Public transport and railways are not operating."

Since early February, only one person from his family has been allowed to leave their home at a time — and that for only two hours every two days. Zhang Hongwu, 29, who returned to visit his family in Henan province has been unable to return to his job near Shanghai due to travel restrictions.

"I won't be going back (to the company)," he told AFP, adding that he is now looking for work in another city, where restrictions are not as tight.

'Nothing but weight-gain'

Some companies have offered cash incentives to lure local hires, with iPhone-maker Foxconn offering local applicants in Sichuan province a bonus of 3,750 yuan (\$540).

Hu's employer is offering 20 percent more in cash incentives, with up to 2,000 yuan for successful referrals. Binhai New Area in Tianjin municipality arranged for 150 large buses to help staff outside the province return to work, said state news agency Xinhua.

Authorities in the eastern city of Hangzhou paid to send trains to go and pick up workers, while Jianshan county's government forked out for chartered flights, according to state media CCTV.

Not everyone, however, can marshal such resources. Shi Minxin, general manager at Haojun Automation Equipment Technology east of Shanghai said with public transport disrupted, some staff had to drive themselves back to work.

One commuted from as far as Chongqing, which is about 1,600 kilometres (1,000 miles) away. When they arrive, they must self-quarantine for several days, Shi added. Sales at his firm have fallen 80 percent because of the epidemic.

He is not alone: China's manufacturing activity fell to its lowest level on record in February. While the company — which makes moulds — has resumed 80 percent of production since resuming work in February, it has been a slow recovery.

Shi expects operations will only return to normal — at about 95 percent capacity — by March 10. For workers like Liu in Anhui back to normal can't come quickly enough. "I feel very helpless. I want to go out, but I can't," he said. "There's nothing at home except weight-gain." — AFP

Vietnamese COVID-19 safety dance goes viral

HANOI: Home-made videos featuring a catchy Vietnamese song and an accompanying dance about the necessity of hand-washing during the coronavirus crisis have racked up more than 2 million views on video app TikTok.

Cribbing the tune from pop song "Jealous" — or "Ghen" in Vietnamese — by singers Erik and Min, the Ministry of Health released an animated video with lyrics telling its citizens to "push back the virus Corona, Corona".

The unlikely earworm by a usually staid Communist government drew hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube, and was also featured on HBO's comedic news show "Last Week Tonight", with host John Oliver calling it a "genuine club-banger".

In Vietnam, the nation's youth have taken to TikTok performing hand-washing dance moves, making sure to rub in-between their fingers and their fingernails — which health professionals have recommended.

Spin-offs include office workers grooving at their desks and even people dressed in the Hmong ethnic minority outfits dancing in front of a waterfall.

"The remote village also prevents and fights the epidemic," read the caption on a video featuring the Hmong couple. Popularised by dancer and internet personality Qiang Dang, who has nearly 300,000 followers on TikTok and Instagram, he and another dancer performed it with light-hearted swagger on a street with food vendors.

It was tagged with the government-issued hashtag #ghencovchallenge, and Dang's original video has been viewed more than 1.1 million times.

The song provides guidance on how to prevent an infection, such as washing hands by "rub, rub, rubbing evenly" and limiting "visits to crowded places".

"We want the song to give fire and reduce tension for those... leading this fight, including experts, doctors, medical workers and millions of labourers who are on the frontline to fight this epidemic daily," the health ministry posted in the video's description.

"Vietnam is determined to win this epidemic!" Communist-run Vietnam has a booming youth demographic, with two-thirds of its 97 million citizens under the age of 35.

It has 16 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, though it says all patients have recovered and been discharged. The country, which shares a porous border with China, has taken great measures in the fight against the virus, including putting a small village an hour from Hanoi under quarantine after five confirmed cases emerged from there. — AFP



BEIJING: A dog wears a home made cover over its snout, which its owner said was as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus as he stands on a sidewalk in Beijing. — AFP

Pet dog infected with COVID-19

HONG KONG: The pet dog of a coronavirus patient in Hong Kong was confirmed to be infected with the disease, in a likely case of human-to-animal transmission, authorities said yesterday.

The canine, which belongs to a 60-year-old woman patient, had repeatedly tested "weak positive" for the new coronavirus since Friday, when it was quarantined at an animal centre.

The city's Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said repeated tests suggest the dog — a pomeranian — has "a low-level of infection". The AFCD said experts from universities and the World Organisation for Animal Health have unanimously agreed that "it is likely to be a case of human-to-animal transmission".

The pomeranian has not shown any novel coronavirus symptoms the AFCD said. Since last Friday, all pets of people in Hong Kong infected with the coronavirus are to be quarantined for 14 days. Two dogs are already in isolation.

The other dog in quarantine belongs to a second coronavirus patient that tested negative for the virus once and will be tested again before its release. Authorities said it will continue to closely monitor the pomeranian and return it to its owner when it tests negative for the disease.

The financial hub has confirmed 102 cases of the new coronavirus in humans, with two deaths earlier this month. — AFP

EU unveils climate law, Thunberg calls it 'surrender'

2050 will be EU-wide goal, so could be fast and slow lanes

BRUSSELS: The European Commission unveiled a "climate law" yesterday to make the EU's 2050 net zero emissions target legally binding, but Swedish activist Greta Thunberg and NGOs said more urgent action was needed to beat the climate crisis.

The European Union's executive approved the proposed regulation at a meeting attended by Thunberg.

The climate law, which needs the approval of the European Parliament and member states, would commit the 27-nation EU to reducing its net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050. It omits a target that was included in a draft of the law-to achieve net "removals" of greenhouse gases after this date.

According to the regulation, 2050 will be an EU-wide goal, which raises the possibility that some member states could reduce their emissions to net zero at a later date if other countries decarbonise early. Thunberg, 17, said the law fails to address the next 10 years.

"Net zero emissions by 2050' for the EU equals surrender. It means giving up," she and 33 other youth climate activists said in an open letter published on Tuesday. "We don't just need goals for

just 2030 or 2050. We, above all, need them for 2020 and every following month and year to come."

UN summit deadline

Environment groups also objected to the law's plan for the Commission to review the EU 2030 emissions target by September. That is only two months before a deadline at the UN climate summit in November, when all parties to the Paris Agreement on fighting climate change must make more ambitious emissions pledges to put the world on track to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Twelve EU countries - including France, Italy and the Netherlands but not the EU's biggest emitter, Germany - want the Commission to revise the 2030 goal in June. They say that would leave enough time for the EU to adopt the new 2030 target and use it to pressure large emitters such as China to raise their climate pledges before the summit.

"Delaying discussions until September would crush the EU's ability to play a leading role in global climate talks," Greenpeace climate policy adviser Sebastian Mang said.

The NGO projected an image of flames onto the European Commission building in Brussels on Tuesday, urging leaders to tackle climate change as urgently as if a house were on fire. The Commission wants to tighten the EU's 2030 climate target to a 50 percent or 55 percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels, rather than the current minimum of 40 percent. From 2030, the law would give Brussels power to impose tighter EU interim emissions targets every five years to steer the bloc towards its 2050 goal.

The Commission would impose these new targets through a delegated act, whereby a qualified majority of members of the European Parliament or member states could reject the proposal but would not have the power to propose an alternative.

Member states may find this proposal hard to swallow. "One thing that will absolutely not fly is the delegated act. It's dead on arrival," said Michael Bloss, a German member of the European Parliament.

The European Council - grouping EU governments - agrees climate targets now by unanimity. A single country can block a climate aim. Legal experts say the climate



BRUSSELS: European Parliament President David Maria Sassoli (right) welcomes Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg (center) as she arrives at the European Parliament in Brussels yesterday on the day the European Union unveils a landmark law to achieve "climate neutrality" by 2050. — AFP

law would give Brussels extra tools to pressure countries before 2030. Starting in 2023, the Commission will name and

shame member states not complying with EU climate targets and publish recommendations to get on track. — Reuters

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مستشفى رويال حياة

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

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

Dr. Hani Haider
General Surgery Consultant
http://www.international-clinic.com
Tel: 1886677

Scope of Clinical Practice:

- ◆ General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- ◆ Single-Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fistuloscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery

◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

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

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

مستشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa
Email: aalhadad@daralshifa.com

DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

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

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368
Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

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

Academic Certificates – Training

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

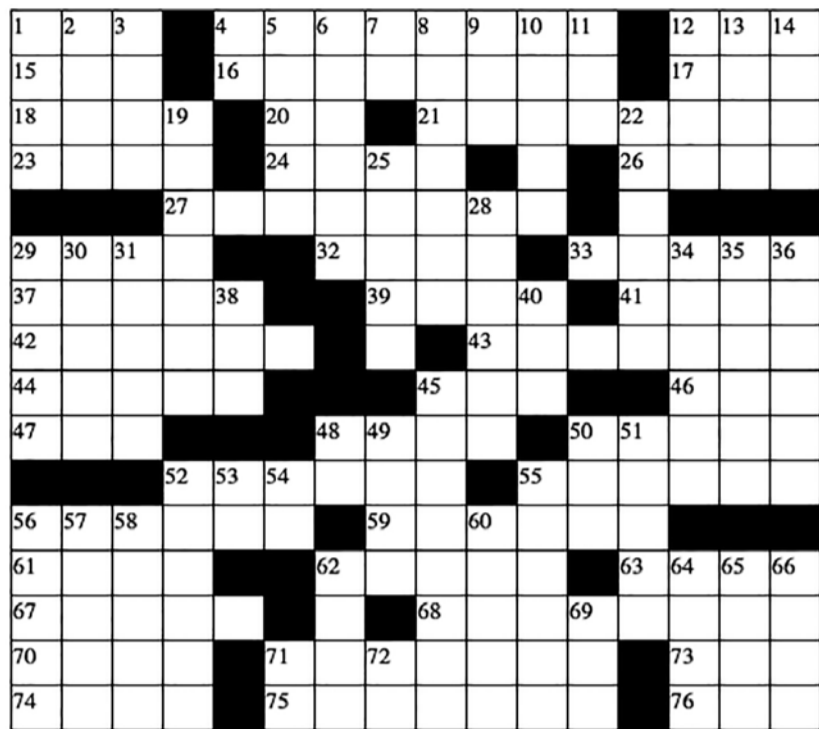
Scope of clinical Practice.

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

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228
Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

Stars

CROSSWORD 2450



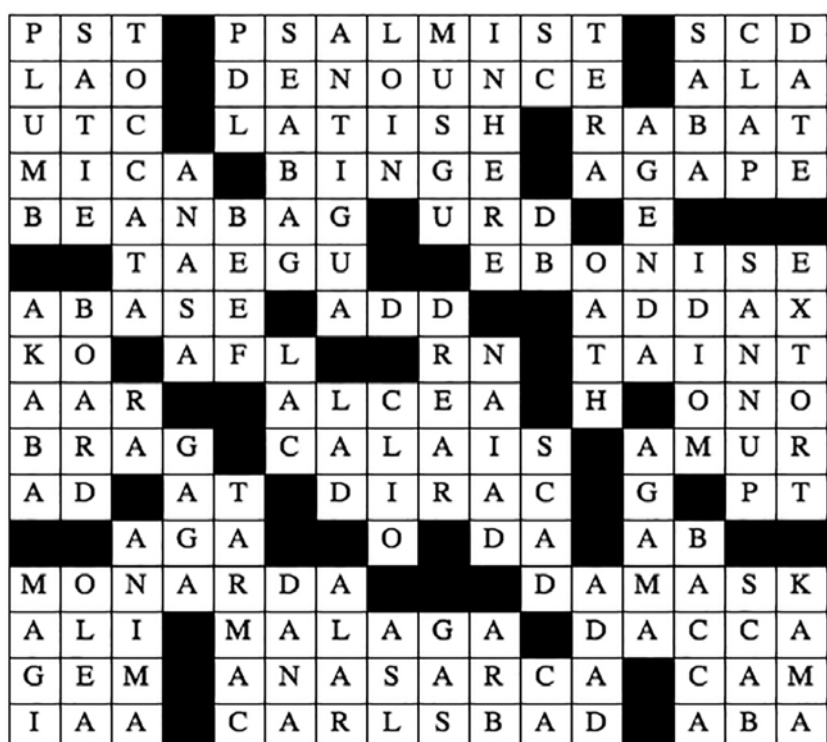
ACROSS

1. The molecular weight of a substance expressed in grams.
4. Somewhat sweet.
12. Botfly larva.
15. Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
16. The capital and chief port and largest city of Liberia.
17. A reptile genus of Iguanidae.
18. A transparent optical device used to converge or diverge transmitted light and to form images.
20. A radioactive gaseous element formed by the disintegration of radium.
21. Myth about the ultimate destruction of the gods in a battle with evil.
23. Singing jazz.
24. A light springing movement upwards or forwards.
26. Any wingless blood-sucking parasitic insect noted for ability to leap.
27. Any amoeba of the genus Endamoeba.
29. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
32. An informal term for a father.
33. Remove gas from.
37. A characteristic language of a particular group (as among thieves).
39. A rapid rise.
41. Mentally healthy.
42. A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
43. Capital and largest city of Iraq.
44. An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
46. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
47. Covered or soaked with a liquid such as water.
56. A republic in central Europe.
59. A republic in southern Europe on the Italian Peninsula.
61. An organic compound that contains a hydroxyl group bonded to a carbon atom which in turn is doubly bonded to another carbon atom.
63. An amino acid that is found in the central nervous system.
67. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
68. A family of Hystricomorpha.
70. Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
73. A dark-skinned member of a race of people living in Australia when Europeans arrived.
74. (used with singular count nouns) Colloquial for 'not a' or 'not one' or 'never a'.
75. Large and brightly colored handkerchief.
76. The habitation of wild animals.

DOWN

1. A master's degree in library science.
2. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
3. A Russian river.
4. A gray lustrous metallic element of the rare earth group.
5. Involving the entire earth.
6. The cardinal number that is the sum of eight and one.
7. A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
8. A professional killer who uses a gun.
9. Any of various coarse shrubby plants of the genus Iva with small greenish flowers.
10. The 18th letter of the Greek alphabet.
11. Imperial dynasty that ruled China (most of the time) from 206 BC to 221 and expanded its boundaries and developed its bureaucracy.
12. The wood cut from a tree burl or outgrowth.
13. A member of the Siouan people inhabiting the valleys of the Platte and Missouri rivers in Nebraska.
14. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
19. (Greek mythology) One of the 7 Pleiades.
22. Again but in a new or different way.
25. Affect with wonder.
28. African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
30. An edible seaweed with a mild flavor.
31. Metal or plastic sheath over the end of a shoelace or ribbon.
34. A member of an agricultural people in southeastern India.
35. (electronics) Of a circuit or device having an output that is proportional to the input.
36. Characterized by dignity and propriety.
38. Any of various dark heavy viscid substances obtained as a residue.
40. (British) A waterproof raincoat made of rubberized fabric.
45. Having a pattern of fretwork or lattice-work.
48. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
49. Precipitation of ice pellets when there are strong rising air currents.
50. Black tropical American cuckoo.
51. (Norse mythology) God of poetry and music.
52. Something that remunerates.
53. An associate degree in nursing.
54. A bachelor's degree in religion.
55. Being one more than ten.
57. Lake in northwestern Russia near the border with Finland.
58. Of or relating to or affecting a lobe.
60. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
62. English essayist (1775-1834).
64. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
65. A very young child (birth to 1 year) who has not yet begun to walk or talk.
66. (in Gnosticism) A divine power or nature emanating from the Supreme Being and playing various roles in the operation of the universe.
69. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
71. A unit of magnetic flux equal to 100,000,000 maxwells.
72. A bluish-white lustrous metallic element.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

There may be a stalemate when you're unwilling to express your feelings. Aries. You might automatically assume that things will go smoothly if you leave the decisions up to someone else. Unfortunately, that plan will likely backfire if the decision is made by someone who doesn't necessarily have your best interests at heart. You may try to go back and reverse what has been done, thus fouling up the plan that has been set in motion.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Decisions don't have to be as hard as you make them. Taurus. You may feel as if a strong force is pulling you in a clear direction, so don't resist it. You'll only drive yourself crazy trying to list all the reasons why you should or shouldn't go the way you're destined to go. Make things easier on yourself by going with the flow instead of letting your mind interfere with constant chatter and resistance.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Look at things from a more philosophical perspective, Gemini. Instead of seeing everything from such an intensely emotional one. You may have a constant fear that everyone is out to get you. More than likely, you're blowing small instances out of proportion in your mind. Use your friends as a sounding board for your thoughts. More than likely, you'll understand the situation better by introducing this fresh perspective.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

This is your day, Cancer, so don't waste it. Being the helpful, friendly person you are, you may find yourself catering to other people's needs and desires. Some could see you as the good Samaritan who can offer advice with a friendly attitude. Be careful of draining away all your energy on others. This day might be better spent by catering to you. Even though this seems selfish, you'll love yourself for it.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Reward yourself for all the great things you've done for you and other people. Leo. You deserve to be treated like royalty, so make sure that you do. There are many times when you get so critical of the things you do that you end up punishing yourself unnecessarily. Give yourself a treat for being good instead of chastising yourself for being bad. At all times, however, you must remember that you're perfect just the way you are.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Put your wisdom into action. Virgo. There is no good in accumulating knowledge and then letting it sit, collecting dust like an old book on a shelf. Put your thoughts into motion and watch as magical things begin to manifest before your eyes. You have incredible opportunities today that only come when you're expressing yourself in your truest form. Wear something outlandish to remind yourself and others what an outrageous person you are.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Enjoying the good times may be fun, but it may also get you into trouble down the road. Libra. Be careful of spending all your resources on pleasure without setting something aside for leaner times. The company you keep could encourage your self-destructive behaviors. Since they know you'll always be in for a good time, you could get swept away by the energy of the crowd. Better to stick close to those who support healthier habits.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

The surge of power within you is going to let others know that you mean business. Scorpio. Make good use of this fantastic boost of energy by conquering your own goals and demons instead of using it to wage war on anyone else. Other people should know to get out of your way when you have your mind set on doing something. If they don't, politely ask them to move instead of steamrolling over them.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Be more adventurous than usual, Sagittarius. Feel free to take a trip somewhere without bringing a map or having any specific destination in mind. The sheer excitement of the unknown should thrill and enthrill you, not frighten and confuse. Your enjoyment of the situation has to do with your attitude toward it. You may not be able to control the hand you're dealt, but you can certainly control how you play it.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You might find yourself in a difficult situation when faced with a person who doesn't necessarily approve of how you're handling yourself. Capricorn. It could be that someone misinterpreted one of your offhand remarks, and now is violently overreacting. Be careful of shooting back caustic remarks that could only aggravate the situation and elevate it to a damaging level. Your words will be taken more seriously than you think.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Your interest in certain off-the-wall topics may be encouraged when you're engaged in a conversation with someone who shares similar thoughts. Aquarius. Perhaps you exchange ideas about UFOs and life on other planets. Suddenly you're looking at your life as if you were a character in a science-fiction novel. Exchange books and other literature with those of a similar mindset. You may not be the only one who thinks there is a conspiracy against them.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Take your leadership abilities to a new level. Pisces. Gather some friends and plan a trip that you've long been considering but were reluctant to act on. People will naturally look to you for leadership and guidance, as you always seem to know how to keep things fun and positive. When it comes to your workplace, this might be a good time to ask for more responsibility - and a raise.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Old TV Shows 3

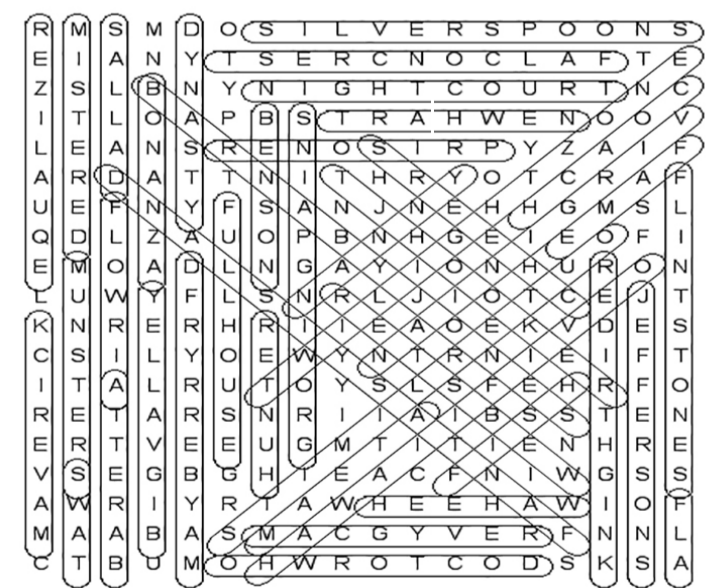
Find and circle all of the old TV shows that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of an additional old TV show.



- | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| ADDAMS FAMILY | FAMILY TIES | KNOTS LANDING | QUANTUM LEAP |
| ALF | GET SMART | KUNG FU | QUINCY |
| AIRWOLF | GOLDEN GIRLS | LONE RANGER | ROCKFORD FILES |
| BARNABY JONES | GUNSMOKE | MAGNUM P.I. | ROSEANNE |
| BARETTA | HAPPY DAYS | MASH | STAR TREK |
| BENSON | HARRY O | MCCLLOUD | THE SAINT |
| BIG VALLEY | HIGHLANDER | MONKEES | TWIN PEAKS |
| BONANZA | HOGAN'S HEROES | NIGHT GALLERY | WINGS |
| CHEERS | HOTEL | NIGHT GALLERY | WONDER YEARS |
| COACH | 1 LOVE LUCY | PRETENDER | X FILES |
| COLUMBO | | | |
| COBY SHOW | | | |
| CYBILL | | | |
| DRAGNET | | | |

Yesterday's Solution

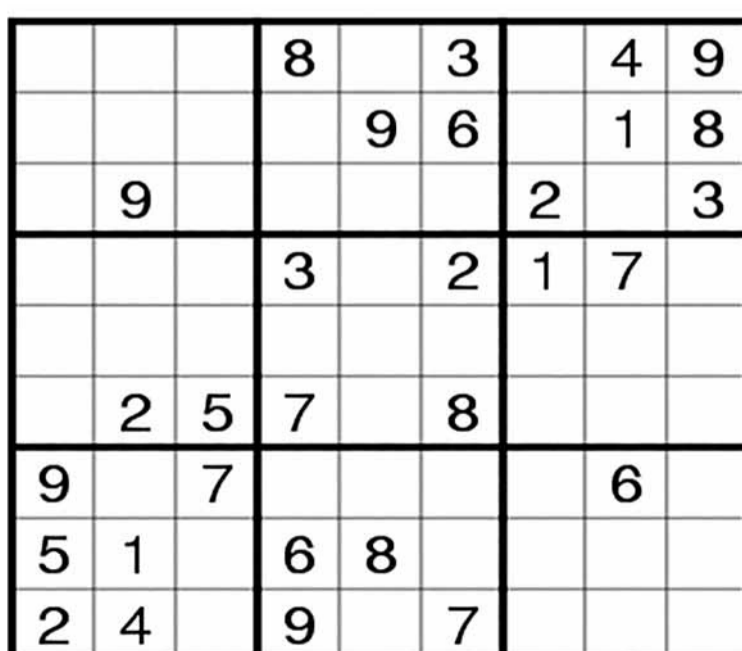
Old TV Shows 2



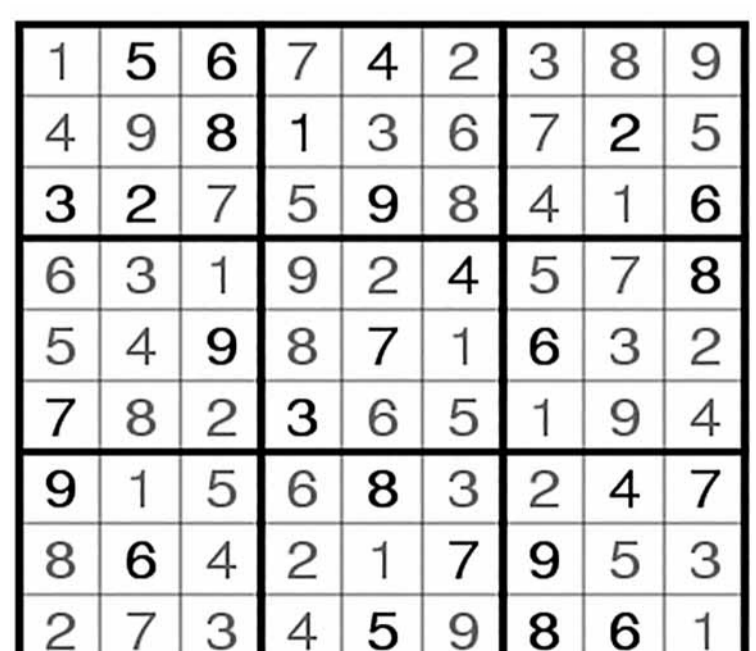
- | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| A-TEAM | DOCTOR WHO | HEE HAW | NEWHART |
| ALF | DYNASTY | HUNTER | NIGHT COURT |
| AIRWOLF | EQUALIZER | JEFFERSONS | OUTER LIMITS |
| BARNABY JONES | FALCON CREST | KNIGHT RIDER | PRISONER |
| BARETTA | FAME | MACGYVER | S.W.A.T. |
| BENSON | FANTASY ISLAND | MAVERICK | SILVER SPOONS |
| BIG VALLEY | FISH | MAYBERRY R.F.D. | T.J. HOOKER |
| BONANZA | FLINTSTONES | MISTER ED | TWILIGHT ZONE |
| CHEERS | FULL HOUSE | MUNSTERS | VIRGINIAN |
| COACH | GROWING PAINS | NANNY | WEBSTER |
| DALLAS | HAWAII FIVE-O | | |

The hidden TV show is: MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS

Daily Sudoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2020



Models present creations by Louis Vuitton at the end of the Women's Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris, on March 3, 2020. AFP

To pursue his dreams, **Mohammed Al-Houli** confronts personal fear of failure

By Sahar Moussa

Mohammed Abdullah Al-Houli is a 40-year-old married Kuwaiti and a government employee since 2002. He also works in the field of media, specifically short films and commercial advertisements. For Houli, working in the government sector provides job security, a chance to pursue higher academic studies, and a chance to work on projects by directing films and commercials. Additionally, the daily work timings in the government sector allows for engaging in freelance projects as they materialize. Houli completed his bachelor's degree from the Higher Institute for Theatrical Arts as a film director, and is planning to continue pursuing master's and doctorate degrees. In a special interview with Kuwait Times, Houli describes his journey in the local media industry in Kuwait. Some excerpts.



Film director Mohammed Abdullah Al-Houli

Kuwait Times: What made you pursue filmmaking or what was your drive behind making films?

Mohammed Al-Houli: Mainly to positively influence people's convictions.

KT: Who or what was your inspiration?

Al-Houli: I don't have specific sources for inspiration, be it principles or people. I consider inspiration a divine fortune.

KT: You won the second prize in the short documentary category at the Third Kuwait Film Festival; can you tell us more about the movie and what is it about?

Al-Houli: I wanted to share valuable information about filmmaking with the public with my documentary. I'm well-versed in the field of cinematography and wanted to present something that would provide valuable content and information for years to come.

KT: What roadblocks did you face when you were starting out?

Al-Houli: My biggest roadblock has been understanding the legal and commercial frameworks of the local media industry.

KT: How many movies have you done till now?

Al-Houli: About 15 to 17 cinematic projects.

KT: How did you come up with the idea for your film?

Al-Houli: It all starts with a certain musical piece or an image that comes across my sight.



A movie poster for the "The Red Box".

KT: What has been your biggest challenge, and how did you overcome it?

Al-Houli: My biggest challenge was to overcome my personal fear of failure. Once I overcame this fear, all other challenges have diminished in comparison.

KT: What, in your opinion, is the most important quality in a film director?

Al-Houli: Storytelling and script. How the story takes shape and how it gets told. Having a well-written script will bridge the gap between the director, the cinematographer and the acting talents.

KT: Which film has inspired you the most?

Al-Houli: The Message.

KT: Which particular filmmaker has influenced you the most?

Al-Houli: I would say Moustapha Akkad.

KT: Which book would you love to make a film out of one day?

Al-Houli: Digital Cinematography by Paul Wheeler.

KT: Your movie 'The Red Box' also got recognition outside Kuwait - can you tell us more about it?

Al-Houli: The events revolve around the arrest of a globally wanted hacker who works for a criminal organization. But instead of working with them again, he works with the army on behalf of the state. When refusing to work again with the criminal organization, they torture him and cut part of his hand.

KT: What do you think about the movie and filmmaking industry in Kuwait? Is it getting adequate support? If not, why?

Al-Houli: As for the local scene, we don't have a shortage in support when it comes to production or funding projects. The shortcomings are instead evident when it comes to distributing finished work. Additionally, local audience perception of local work needs to be more aligned with the general field of cinema.

KT: In your opinion, what does the movie industry need in order to reach a global stage?

Al-Houli: Higher production support as well as stronger distribution efforts as mentioned in the previous question.

KT: Do you agree with the argument that lack of talent in the artistic scene could be one of the reasons that Kuwait is still struggling to reach

the global stage, especially when comparing it to the level of talent during the Golden Age of Kuwait's cinema and theatre?

Al-Houli: I don't agree with the point, as the common public's perception of performance arts is based on the realms of television and theatre. If the public had adequate perception of the cinematic field in addition to the aforementioned fields, the situation would have been vastly different and cinematic production would have been much bigger. Moreover, the audience still lack confidence in local works and favor purchasing a movie ticket of a global release instead of a local film.

KT: Can you tell us more about your upcoming project(s)? Are you working on a new movie? If yes, can you give us a brief about it?

Al-Houli: I'm currently planning to pursue my master's degree in cinematography and filmmaking, as well as receiving and executing advertisement projects. Proceeds from these projects will fund my own cinematic projects.

KT: Do you have any advice for young filmmakers out there?

Al-Houli: My advice for young filmmakers is to participate in advertisement projects, as such projects provide experience in a multitude of techniques.



Film director Mohammed Abdullah Al-Houli is seen behind the camera.



Film director Mohammed Abdullah Al-Houli (right) ,winner of the second prize in the short documentary category at the Third Kuwait Film Festival.

Fashion icon **Gaultier** hands his scissors to **Sacai's Abe**



(Left) Chitose Abe and French designer Jean-Paul Gaultier.

Legendary French designer Jean-Paul Gaultier may have hung up his scissors, but his fashion house will live on under an ever-changing carousel of guest designers, he said yesterday. The flamboyant creator—who bowed out last month after half a century at the top of the fashion tree with a musical spectacular in Paris—said a guest designer will be given the keys to his haute couture studio every season. “I have the pleasure to announce the new concept for my Haute Couture,” 67-year-old Gaultier said.

“Each season, I will invite a designer to interpret the codes of the House and I am doubly pleased that Chitose Abe of Sacai will be the first one.” The two were photographed together on the roof of Gaultier’s Paris headquarters in the famous blue overalls he and his collaborators wear. Abe will show her take on great provocateur’s legacy during the Paris haute couture week in July. “I have long admired Jean-Paul for his originality and

his unique subversive vision of femininity,” she said.

The 48-year-old is one of the most admired Japanese designers, counting Vogue supremo Anna Wintour and the doyenne of fashion critics, Suzi Menkes, among her fans. She was also one of the very rare rivals that the late Karl Lagerfeld showered praise upon, calling her “one of the most interesting designers working today.” Abe’s genius is in her unique cut and in recutting and splicing clothing together, “creating a sum that is greater than its parts”.

She trained with Rei Kawakubo at Comme des Garçons in Tokyo and worked with Junya Watanabe before striking out on her own 20 years ago. The Jean Paul Gaultier label shows a new collection twice a year during Paris haute couture week, the elite club that is regarded as the creme de la creme of fashion. — AFP



Australian thief reels in Versace necklace

A thief has been caught on camera hooking a gold necklace with a fishing rod in a brazen nighttime theft from an Australian designer store. The thief, captured on CCTV, broke the store window in Melbourne’s central business district before using a fishing rod to hook the Versace necklace, local police said yesterday. But it took the inner-city angler nearly three hours to land his catch.

After first attempts with a smaller rod failed, the man decided to

get a bigger rod, eventually snagging the gold \$700 piece from a mannequin’s neck in a crime police described as—until now—unseen.

“It’s fairly blatant and it’s quite bold as well, to have someone attend with a fishing rod in the middle of the night,” Victoria Police Senior Constable Bede Whitty said. Police released the footage as they attempt to net the balding, middle-aged thief. — AFP



Vuitton hits high note with all-singing Paris fashion show



Louis Vuitton ended Paris fashion week Tuesday with one of its most sublime shows, a “clash of epochs” extravaganza at the Louvre museum featuring a 200-person choir in period costumes that went from the 15th century to the 1950s. Designer Nicolas Ghesquiere hired Stanley Kubrick’s multi-Oscar-winning costume ace Milena Canonero—who dressed both “Barry Lyndon” and “A Clockwork Orange”—to put together a five-storey living backdrop to the show, with music exhumed from forgotten 18th-century master Nicolas de Grigny.

“I wanted the ages to regard each other and our own,” the highly-rated French creator said. He described his collection as a “lively and sparky stylistic clash” between the past and the present. And he was as good as his word with sawn-off 19th-century pannier dresses matched with postmodern biker and ski jackets in one of several unlikely combinations that somehow worked. Ghesquiere seemed to revel in putting things together that should not normally share the same wardrobe, with a line of beautiful bull-fighter boleros topping racing driver-style trousers suits, and waistcoats suddenly sprouting leather shoulder pads.

Starry front row

The pin-stripe, which still clings on as the uniform of international finance, was taken and transferred onto leather trousers, dresses, skirts and a waistcoat. The designer said he was trying

to “do everything you can do with clothes, to mix and match them” and find new possibilities without the mental style constraints of what should and should not work. “This collection is the complete opposite of the ‘total look’,”



Ghesquiere declared. “It’s sartorial tuning,” both in the slang sense of flirting and finding the right note, he said.

In front of a typically starry front row that included Hollywood actresses Lea Seydoux, Florence Pugh and Alicia Vikander, he revealed new customized handles for the classic Vuitton Keepall bag as well as new “mini cabas”. Ghesquiere had music for the choir-dressed in costumes that ranged from Versailles in its pomp to the court of the Ming dynasty—put together by Bryce Dessner from the US indie rock band The National and French music video maker Woodkid. He said the piece, called “Three Hundred and Twenty”, was also meant as a tribute to Nicolas de Grigny, on whose work it is based. A contemporary of Bach, his genius was not recognized during his short lifetime, and he never got his music played in front of French royalty at the Louvre. — AFP

Models present creations by Louis Vuitton at the end of the Women’s Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos





HORSEY CHANEL RIDES LAGERFELD'S FOLLIES OUT OF TOWN



Chanel designer Virginie Viard Tuesday signaled she may put an end to the brand's themed Paris fashion week spectacles, a year after the death of her legendary predecessor Karl Lagerfeld. The German showman spent millions turning the vast Grand Palais into his playground, building a Chanel space rocket, a near life-sized ocean liner, the Eiffel Tower, a tropical beach and the Verdun gorges-complete with waterfalls-as a backdrop for his extravagant shows.

house founded by the horse- and polo-mad Gabrielle Chanel, with slashed jodhpurs, folded down calf-length musketeer boots and billowing side-buttoned leather trousers that resembled riding chaps and black suede jockey hats. Skirts were also slashed, sometimes up to the hip with Viard saying she was after movement, "freedom, energy and absolute desire". Her big innovation was putting snap buttons on Chanel jackets for the first time, to free up the wearer and allow "a more lively gesture", she said.



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



'Feminine Amazons'
Viard said the equestrian theme was also partly inspired by a photo of Lagerfeld in a striped suit and riding boots. But she also drew ideas from Claude Chabrol's French film classic, the 1968 chiller "Les Biches", about a love triangle. Indeed the show began with a nod to the movie, with two typically chic Parisian friends walking arm in arm, "as feminine as they were Amazons", Viard insisted.

A video released to tease the show featured the rising US actress Margaret Qualley—daughter of Andie MacDowell and one of the stars of "Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood"—in a homage to the Chabrol film, meeting her secret lover on the Pont des Arts bridge over the River Seine. Qualley was also in the front row for the show with a galaxy of other celebrities including "Avengers" star Pom Klementieff, the British actress Emily Beecham and American singer Janelle Monae.

Having opened with the Paris bourgeoisie, Viard closed at the other end of the social scale, with a trio of more pop looks based around crop tops and hot-pants under long overcoats worn by the supermodel triumvirate of Gigi Hadid, Mona Tougaard and Hyun Ji Shin in spotted tights. While the New York Times critic Vanessa Friedman sounded a note of skepticism, tweeting that the three looked like they were off to get some chips after a night on the town, Viard insisted the collection was about "a very simple, very pure momentum. "Romanticism but without any flourishes, emotions but without any frills," she added. While fears of the coronavirus prompted one fashionista to wear a customised camelia face mask—the flower was Coco Chanel's favorite—masks have been a rarer sight in Paris than during the Milan fashion week that preceded it.

But the more understated Viard, his former right hand woman, strongly suggested on Tuesday that that era may be over. "There is no frame for the show," she said. "I don't like that which is framed." Instead she had her army of models walk through an icy abstract landscape of stepped curving waves of black and white, swept by the odd puff of dry ice. The French creator, who took over from Lagerfeld shortly after his death aged 85, sent out a mostly black and white collection, thin on the traditional tweeds that Lagerfeld relied on.

They were also very few dresses, with jewelry riffing off a square cross reminiscent of Madonna's glory days, making the big glamour statements. Instead Viard returned to the roots of the Paris fashion



That said, one Asian influencer was taking no chances, wearing both a branded Chanel face mask as well as full face visor. Light relief was provided by striking French lawyers who, dressed for court, staged their own alternative runway show outside the Grand Palais carrying placards declaring, "The only black gown you will ever need"—a cheeky reference to Chanel's iconic little black dress.

Both Hadid sisters, Bella and Gigi, by far the busiest supermodels in Paris this week, also turned up later on the Miu Miu runway. Bella told AFP that the secret to her stamina was nothing stronger than "my morning ginger tea". Miu Miu, an offshoot of the Italian brand Prada, went heavily retro with a paean to plaid and the glamour of fur and leopard skin, although the latter were both fake, the label having just gone fur free. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo Daryl Stuermer, Mike Rutherford and Phil Collins of British prog rock band Genesis perform at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. — AFP photos

Rock band Genesis reunites for UK tour

British rock band Genesis, known for hits such as "Land of Confusion" and "I Can't Dance", announced plans yesterday for their first tour in 13 years. Phil Collins, the lead singer and drummer who went on to have a successful solo career, will join guitarist Mike Rutherford and keyboard player Tony Banks for the UK tour dubbed "The Last Domino?"

The trio, all aged 69, will be joined by Collins' son Nicholas, 18, who will take over from his father on drums, and longtime sideman Daryl Stuermer on guitar and bass. Appearing with Rutherford and Banks on BBC radio, Collins said they would be playing a mix of big hits and some of their older songs. "There are songs that you feel

you have to play because the audience, you know, will feel cheated if you didn't," he said. "And then it's a question of putting the rest of the stuff together from songs that maybe we haven't played for a long time."

Genesis has sold more than 100 million albums since its formation in 1966 by school friends Banks and Rutherford together with Peter Gabriel, who left in 1975. He was replaced on vocals by drummer Collins, who himself left in 1996 to go it alone. Tickets for the tour go on sale on Friday, with eight UK dates so far listed on their website in November and December.—AFP



In this file photo Phil Collins, lead singer of British pop band Genesis, performs at the Live Earth concert at Wembley stadium in London.

Spike Lee boycotting Knicks over access row

Movie director and New York Knicks fan Spike Lee says he will not attend any more games at Madison Square Garden this season after a row with the team over what entrance he can use. Lee, 62, is one of the Knicks' most



In this file photo Director Spike Lee attends the premiere of Universal Pictures' "Glass" at SVA Theatre in New York City. — AFP

famous celebrity superfans, faithfully sitting at courtside despite the team's struggles in recent seasons. However Lee told ESPN on Tuesday he would no longer attend games at Madison Square Garden this season. "I'm coming back next year, but I'm done for the season," Lee said. "I'm done." Lee's comments came after video footage circulated on social media on Monday appearing to show the director in

a confrontation with security at the venue. Lee told ESPN he had been unfairly treated by security staff who objected to him using the wrong entrance. "I've been using the same entrance for 20-plus years," Lee said. Lee eventually arrived in his seat to watch the Knicks defeat the Houston Rockets 125-123 in an upset on Monday.

Lee was later seen exchanging words with Knicks owner James Dolan during the game. The Knicks on Tuesday pushed back at the suggestion Lee had been unfairly treated. "The idea that Spike Lee is a victim because we have repeatedly asked him to not use our employee entrance and instead use a dedicated VIP entrance—which is used by every other celebrity who enters The Garden—is laughable," the team said in a statement. "It's disappointing that Spike would create this false controversy to perpetuate drama. He is welcome to come to The Garden anytime via the VIP or general entrance: just not through our employee entrance, which is what he and Jim agreed to last night when they shook hands." The Knicks have not posted a winning season since 2013 and this year are languishing near the foot of the Eastern Conference once again with a 19-42 record.—AFP

Grieving families in Philippine drugs war turn to theatre for healing, therapy

Relatives of some of the thousands killed in the Philippines' war on drugs acted out their journey of loss and healing in a theatre performance in Manila yesterday, capping a month-long therapy program for grieving urban poor families. Bereaved mothers, wives and children took to the stage at a high school in the business center of the capital in front of a crowd of 500, most of them students. They danced to pop songs, and performed monologues and political sketches.

"If you would look at the performers, there are so many smiles. They were dancing in joy,"

said organizer Flavie Villanueva, a former drug user-turned-priest who is critical of President Rodrigo Duterte's anti-narcotics campaign. "The first time they came to me, there was nothing but tears, anguish and anger," said Villanueva, who launched 'Paghilom' - 'healing' in Tagalog - in 2016 to comfort grieving families.

More than 5,600 suspected drug dealers and users have been killed in police anti-narcotics operations since Duterte took office in July 2016, according to government data. Thousands more died in mysterious circumstances, some

shot dead by masked gunmen riding pillion on motorcycles.

Rights group said the police summarily executed suspects. But police said they acted in self defence after suspects violently resisted arrest. "Through 'Paghilom,' I let out all my tears," said Analyn Mamot, 33, whose husband, an illegal drugs user, was killed by unidentified gunmen two years ago. "Now I feel new, like a new personality is alive in me." — Reuters



Relatives of victims killed in the Philippines' drug war act a scene during their theatre performance on their journey of loss and healing in a Catholic school in Makati City, Philippines. — Reuters

#MeToo author slams publisher for estranged father Woody Allen's memoir

An investigative journalist who chronicled Hollywood sex abuse claims that implicated his estranged father Woody Allen has parted ways with his publisher over his decision to release the director's memoirs. The filmmaker behind "Annie Hall" and "Manhattan" has long been accused of molesting his adoptive daughter Dylan Farrow when she was seven years old in the early 1990s. The 84-year-old was cleared of the charges, first leveled by his then-partner Mia Farrow, after two separate months-long investigations, and has steadfastly denied the abuse. But

Dylan, now an adult, maintains she was molested. Her brother Ronan Farrow revived the allegations in 2016 and lashed out at the media for failing to ask hard questions about the director. Farrow later helped spark the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment with his reporting on disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, who was convicted of rape and sexual assault



Woody Allen

by a New York court last month. His book-length account of that investigation, "Catch and Kill," was released last year by publisher Hachette and became an overnight bestseller. But Farrow said Monday he was dismayed to learn that a subsidiary of the company had acquired the rights to Allen's memoirs, which it will release next month. "Hachette did not fact check the Woody Allen book," said Farrow in a statement posted on Twitter. He alleged that the publisher was "wildly unprofessional" for never contacting his sister for her side of the story. "It also shows a lack of ethics and compassion for victims of sexual abuse," said Farrow.

"I've also told Hachette that a publisher that would conduct itself in this way is one I can't work with in good conscience," Hachette chief executive Michael Pietsch defended the decision to release Allen's memoirs in a phone interview with the New York Times. "We do not allow anyone's publishing program to interfere with anyone else's," Pietsch told the newspaper. — AFP

French 'Spiderman' climbs Barcelona skyscraper to protest virus panic

A daredevil French climber scaled one of the tallest skyscrapers in Barcelona without a harness in what he said was a protest against panic over the deadly coronavirus epidemic. Bystanders and police watched as Alain Robert, dubbed the French "Spiderman" for his exploits in climbing buildings around the world, climbed up and then descended the 145-metre (475 foot) Torre Agbar, a glass-covered office building known for its night-time illuminations, completing the feat in 47 minutes.

Police detained the 57-year-old when he reached the ground while onlookers applauded his feat. "What is more contagious today is not the coronavirus, it is fear. There are probably some three billion people who are scared because of this disease, which after all, we can't control," he told AFP TV before starting his climb.

"There is a certain analogy between

what I do, climbing without a rope, which can cause some fear. And the same happens with coronavirus. In my case, we can talk about a fear that is controlled, domesticated." Robert is famous for his daredevil approach to scuttling up buildings with nothing more than some chalk on his hands and climbing shoes on his feet, often to promote a political message. He has conquered more than 100 structures worldwide including Dubai's Burj Khalifa complex, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Malaysia's iconic Petronas Twin Towers, and the Sydney Opera House without safety equipment. Worldwide around 3,200 people have died from COVID-19, with more than 90,000 infections with China, South Korea, Italy, Iran and Japan the worst affected.—AFP



French skyscraper climber Alain Robert, known as the French Spiderman, climbs the Agbar Tower in Barcelona. — AFP

Streaming titans seek passage to India for new growth

Netflix and Amazon are battling a dizzying array of homegrown outfits, from Bollywood producers to broadcasters, for dominance of India's streaming market, a key target as growth in Western countries slows. As more Indians shift to viewing movies and shows online, industry revenues from streaming in the country are set to jump from \$500 million in 2018 to as much as \$5 billion in 2023, according to Boston Consulting Group.

With many Western markets saturated and Asia's top economy China effectively closed off to foreign streamers, a nation of 1.3 billion where phone ownership is forecast to rocket makes for a tantalizing prize. "India is super important, for both Netflix and Amazon," Tony Gunnarsson, a streaming analyst from consultancy Ovum, told AFP at the recent Asia TV Forum in Singapore.

"Netflix... need to continue to generate new subscribers, and there is no better place than India." But the US giants face tough competition in the vast, ethnically and religiously diverse country where the streaming scene is rapidly evolving. There are dozens of subscription streaming services in India, according to Ovum, and some domestic outfits have more experience in producing content tailored for local audiences and in the country's myriad languages. A major player is Hotstar—originally a homegrown outfit which later became part of the Disney empire—which has attracted an army of followers in part by streaming Indian Premier League cricket matches live.

Other Indian rivals include ZEE5, run by major broadcaster Zee Entertainment, and ALTBalaji, the video-streaming service of Bollywood producers Balaji Telefilms. As well as offering their services direct to consumers, streamers are bundling their content with mobile phone services in a bid to broaden their reach.

'Golden age'

Netflix, the world's biggest subscription streaming service, has made expanding in India a priority and aims to attract 100 million subscribers in the country—an ambitious goal given analysts estimate it will only reach about seven million this year. The company made a mark with its first Indian original "Sacred Games", a hugely

popular series about a troubled police officer starring top Bollywood actors, and has a slate of new productions in the works.

They plan to invest 30 billion rupees (\$420 million) in Indian content in 2019 and 2020. "This is India's golden age of entertainment," Srishti Arya, Netflix India's director of international original film, told AFP. "There are so many opportunities in streaming, creators are not restricted by length, duration." Fellow US titan Amazon also has a strong foothold in India with its Prime Video service and, like Netflix, typically appeals to wealthier urbanites who want to see Western as well as Indian content. It is planning to release around one Indian original production a month over the coming year, and is ramping up its production of shows in regional Indian languages.

Netflix has been lagging behind Amazon in terms of subscriber numbers but looks set to move ahead from 2021, according to Ovum. Nevertheless both will likely struggle to catch up to Hotstar, which reached 300 million active monthly users last year, although the Indian streamer works on a different model, offering some content for free and other shows only to subscribers.

To compete in a crowded market, the US titans are offering their services for less than in the West—Netflix introduced a package for India priced at only 199 rupees (\$2.80) a month, which allows consumers to watch only on a phone or tablet, and Amazon Prime is 999 rupees (\$14) for a year. And the scene is about to get even more competitive with the launch of the Disney+ streaming service in India next month via Hotstar.

Entertainment shake-up

The streaming boom has also shaken up India's massive entertainment industry, generating new business opportunities. Reliance Entertainment—which produced "Sacred Games" for Netflix—has 40 to 45 series in development for streaming platforms, including Hotstar. Amazon, and Hong Kong-based Viu, said Group CEO Shibasish Sarkar. Two years ago their business was about 90 percent making films but work for streamers "is the fastest-growing space right now", he told AFP.—AFP

Classifieds

Thursday, March 5, 2020



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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 40 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to wind, with speed of 08 - 28 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 04/03/2020 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	24 °C	16 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	25 °C	10 °C			
ABDALY	24 °C	10 °C			
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C			
JAHRA	25 °C	12 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	23 °C	13 °C			
SALMIYAH	20 °C	16 °C			
AHMADI	21 °C	16 °C			
NUWAISIB	24 °C	12 °C			
WAFRA	25 °C	10 °C			
SALMY	23 °C	08 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	03/05	Warm	28 °C	13 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Friday	03/06	Warm and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain later on with a chance for	29 °C	11 °C	SE	12 - 42 km/h
Saturday	03/07	Warm and Partly cloudy and rising dust with a chance for scattered light rain	28 °C	15 °C	SE-NW	20 - 50 km/h
Sunday	03/08	Warm	27 °C	12 °C	NW	12 - 35 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:52
Sunrise	06:11
Zuhr	12:00
Asr	15:20
Sunset	17:49
Isha	19:06

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	24 °C
MIN. Temp.	13 °C
MAX. RH	67 %
MIN. RH	21 %
MAX. Wind	N 50 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

I Prashanth Karivellur, father of Aditya Prashanth holder of Indian Passport No. R2310839 issued at Kuwait on 05.03.2017, permanent address of Flat No. 103 Providence Abode 1 Bejai new Road Mangalore Karnataka and presently residing in Kuwait do hereby change my son's name as follows: Given Name: Aditya and Surname: Prashanth. Objections if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India, Diplomatic Enclave Safat, Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015 (C 5702)

T8196510 issued at Kuwait hereby declare that my name is changed to Given name: HAFSA Surname: SHAIK ANNWAR BASHA. (C 5701)

I, ZAINAB, with Indian PP No. M7066951 issued at Kuwait hereby declare that my name is changed to Given name: ZAINAB Surname: SHAIK ANNWAR BASHA. (C 5701)

I, HAMZA, with Indian PP No. M7067076 issued at Kuwait hereby declare that my name is changed to Given name: HAMZA Surname: SHAIK ANNWAR BASHA. (C 5701)

I Prashanth Karivellur holder of Indian Passport No P6278035 issued at Kuwait on 16.10.2016, permanent address of Flat No 103 Providence Abode 1 Bejai new Road Mangalore Karnataka and presently residing in Kuwait do hereby change my name as follows: Given Name: Prashanth and Surname: Karivellur. Objections if any may be forwarded to Embassy of India Diplomatic Enclave Safat Arabian Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015 (C 5702)

I, FATHIMA, with Indian PP No. M5456712 issued at Kuwait hereby declare that my name is changed to Given name: FATHI-MA Surname: SHAIK ANNWAR BASHA. (C 5701) 5-3-2020

This is to inform that, I Gireeshkrishnan Oonnikrishnan, holder of Indian Passport Number H9245077 do hereby change my name format to Surname: Oonnikrishnan, Given name: Gireesh Krishnan. (C 5650) 4-3-2020

I, HAFSA, with Indian PP No.



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

URGENTLY REQUIRED FOR SAHARA AIR CONDITIONING KOC SOUTH EAST AREA CONTRACT

Safety Engineer: Engineering Degree with 1 year of HSE course. Minimum 6 years working experience.
A/C Engineer: Mechanical Engineering Degree with 10 Years experience in Maintenance in AC & R.
Safety Officer: Science Degree with 1 year of HSE course. Minimum 6 years working experience.

AC Foreman: Diploma or ITI in Air-Conditioning Trade with 5 years of experience as A/C Foreman.
Chiller Plant Foreman: Diploma or ITI in Air-Conditioning Trade with 5 years of experience as A/C Chiller Plant Foreman.

AC Mechanic: Diploma or ITI in Air-Conditioning Trade with 5 years of experience as A/C Mechanic.

All above are required with Kuwait Driving License
AC Electrician: Diploma or ITI in Air-Conditioning Trade with 5 years of experience as A/C Electrician.

BMS/Instrument Control Technician: Secondary Education, 2 years Diploma or ITI Certificate in Electronics Trade. Minimum 5 years experience as BMS/Instrument Control Technician.

Electronic Control Technician: Secondary Education, 2 years Diploma or ITI Certificate in Electronics Trade. Minimum 5 years experience as Electronics Control Technician.

AC Assistant: Secondary Education. Minimum 2 years experience. Age under 40 years.

Preference for Candidates fluent in English speaking. New visa can be given if required. Good Salary based on Good Experience. Interested Candidates may contact on Mobile # 99765183 & send CVs to Fax no: 23981916 or E-mail to: contact@saharaac.com

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is **1889988**

EMERGENCY ☎ 112

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

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Thursday 5/3/2020				Departure Flights on Thursday 5/3/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	MSC	402	Alexandria	00:15
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	JZR	409	Delhi	00:50
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
KAC	102	London	00:55	JZR	111	Doha	01:55
KAC	504	Beirut	01:05	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	KAC	677	Dubai	02:10
RJA	642	Amman	01:40	THY	773	Istanbul	02:20
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	417	Jeddah	02:30
PGT	828	Istanbul	01:50	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	PGT	829	Istanbul	02:50
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	KAC	621	Doha	04:05
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	JZR	713	Sohag	04:30
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
KAC	796	Madinah	04:40	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	JZR	251	Amman	06:40
JZR	702	Asyut	04:50	RJA	643	Amman	06:55
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
KAC	382	Delhi	05:00	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	KAC	167	Paris	07:35
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	KAC	173	Munich	08:20
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	JZR	001	LGW	08:35
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:55	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
KAC	106	London	06:00	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
KAC	332	Trivandrum	06:05	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	BAW	156	London	09:10
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	JZR	601	Baku	09:30
KAC	362	Colombo	06:30	QTR	1085	Doha	09:30
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	545	Cairo	09:30
BAW	157	London	07:05	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	KAC	561	Amman	09:45
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:10	KAC	101	London	09:45
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	157	Istanbul	09:50
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
QTR	8511	Doha	08:00	KAC	791	Madinah	10:00
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:10	QTR	8512	Doha	10:00
KAC	622	Doha	08:30	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	117	New York	10:00
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
KAC	384	Delhi	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	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	JZR	305	Istanbul	11:10
JZR	714	Sohag	10:50	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
KAC	352	Kochi	11:35	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
SYR	341	Damascus	12:00	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	SYR	342	Damascus	13:00
JZR	252	Amman	12:05	JZR	115	Doha	13:00
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25	GFA	210	Bahrain	13:05
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	MSR	611	Cairo	13:25
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	KAC	781	Jeddah	13:30
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:50	KAC	541	Cairo	13:45
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20	AIC	976	Dubai	14:25
KAC	672	Dubai	14:25	MSC	402	Goa/Chennai	14:35
KAC	742	Dammam	14:35	FDB	072	Dubai	14:40
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40	JZR	409	Delhi	14:40
FDB	8065	Dubai	14:40	AIC	990	Mumbai	14:45
KAC	774	Riyadh	14:40	IGO	1758	Kochi	14:50
SVA	500	Jeddah	14:45	JZR	111	Doha	15:00
KAC	118	New York	14:50	PGT	859	Istanbul	15:10
KAC	618	Doha	15:00	KAC	677	Dubai	15:10
JZR	602	Baku	15:10	THY	773	Istanbul	15:15
KAC	792	Madinah	15:10	KAC	417	Jeddah	15:25
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15	DLH	625	Frankfurt	15:30
KAC	788	Jeddah	15:25	PGT	829	Istanbul	15:35
JZR	222	Riyadh	15:30	IGO	1765	Delhi	15:45
OMA	645	Muscat	15:35	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	15:50
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45	UAE	854	Dubai	15:50
JZR	732	Cairo	15:50	KLM	446	Amsterdam	15:55
KAC	562	Amman	15:50	OMA	644	Muscat	16:35
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:55	THY	765	Istanbul	16:35
FEG	241	Alexandria	16:35	QTR	1087	Doha	16:40
QTR	1072	Doha	16:35	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	16:45
JZR	116	Doha	16:40	KAC	621	Doha	16:45
FDB	051	Dubai	16:45	MSR	613	Cairo	17:00
KAC	546	Cairo	16:45	PGT	861	Istanbul	17:20
SAW	705	Damascus	17:00	JZR	713	Sohag	17:25
FEG	341	Sohag	17:20	LMU	511	Cairo	17:30
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:25	IGO	1752	Chennai	17:45
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30	QTR	1077	Doha	17:45
JZR	214	Jeddah	17:45	OHY	351	Istanbul	18:15
UAE	875	Dubai	18:00	JZR	121	Dubai	18:15
JZR	302	Istanbul	18:15	JZR	251	Amman	18:20
FDB	063	Dubai	18:15	RJA	643	Amman	18:20
JZR	124	Dubai	18:20	FDB	070	Dubai	18:30
KAC	158	Istanbul	18:20	GFA	212	Bahrain	18:30
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30	KAC	167	Paris	18:55
QTR	1080	Doha	18:30	IGO	1767	Mumbai	19:10
JZR	306	Istanbul	18:55	KAC	173	Munich	19:20
RJA	640	Amman	19:10	JZR	001	LGW	19:25
KAC	156	Istanbul	19:20	FDB	054	Dubai	

Erdogan demands EU help in Syria to end migrant crisis

ANKARA: Turkey's president warned yesterday that a fresh migrant crisis could be resolved only if Europe supports its efforts in Syria, as violent clashes broke out between refugees and police on the Greek border. Thousands of migrants have massed at the Greek frontier with Turkey since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced last week that they would no longer be prevented from trying to enter Europe. Erdogan's move came after Russian-backed Syrian forces killed 34 Turkish troops in northern Syria, prompting him to seek greater assistance from the international community.

But EU leaders now fear a repeat of the migrant crisis of 2015-16, when more than one million migrants crossed into the EU, and have decried Turkish "blackmail". With mounting tensions around the border crossing at Pazarkule, a Turkish official claimed one migrant had been killed and five injured by live fire from the Greek side. Athens strongly denied the claim, but an AFP photographer earlier saw a migrant shot in the leg - it was not clear whether by a live round or a rubber bullet - as a group of refugees tried to cut their way through fencing.

The group then threw stones at the Greek police, who responded with tear gas, while multiple shots and cries could be heard. Athens released a video apparently showing Turkish police firing tear gas at Greek border guards, which could not be immediately confirmed. Speaking in Ankara, Erdogan said Europe had to support Turkey's "political and humanitarian solutions in Syria" if it wanted to resolve the situation.

Turkey already hosts nearly four million refugees, most of them Syrians, and has been fighting the Syrian government in a bid to prevent another influx from Idlib, the region that has been under attack by Damascus since December. Close to one million people in Idlib have been displaced by the government assault, which is backed by Russian air power, though they are currently blocked from entering Turkey.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and Council President Charles Michel met with Erdogan in Ankara yesterday, pledging an additional €170 million (\$189 million) in aid for vulnerable groups in Syria. Borrell said the EU recognized the "difficult situation Turkey is facing" but that Turkey's green light to migrants could "only make the situation worse". France took a firmer line. Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the EU would not give into "blackmail" and that the borders of the continent were "closed, and we will ensure they stay closed".

Ceasefire?

Despite being on opposing sides of the nine-year war in Syria, NATO-member Turkey and Russia have kept lines of communication open. But the relationship has been heavily strained, with more than 50 Turkish soldiers killed in Idlib in recent weeks, and three more reported deaths on Tuesday and yesterday. Erdogan said he hoped a ceasefire would be "swiftly established" when he meets his counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow today.

Ankara officially announced an offensive against Syrian forces over the weekend, demanding they pull



IDLIB, Syria: Members of Syria's opposition National Liberation Front fire a 130 mm cannon during fighting with Syrian government forces yesterday. — AFP

back behind lines agreed under the 2018 Sochi deal with Russia. It killed nine government troops in drone strikes, a monitor said yesterday. "We expect Russia to fulfill its promises as a guarantor country and stop the regime's attacks and to use its influence to ensure the regime adheres to the Sochi deal's borders," Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said, according to broadcaster NTV. But many say Russia is determined to see the Syrian government regain full control of its territory. "There might be a ceasefire announced after the talks between Putin and Erdogan but it'll be for show," a Western diplomat told AFP.

The EU has scrambled to respond to the surge of migrants at the Greek border, where authorities say some 24,000 were stopped from entering between Saturday and Monday. Turkey agreed in 2016 to stop the flow of refugees in exchange for billions of euros, but says the EU failed to honor other parts of the deal, such as visa liberalization and an improved customs agreement. Erdogan criticized the Greek response, saying: "The Greeks - who are resorting to any means to stop refugees coming into their country, even drowning them or killing them with live ammunition - they shouldn't forget they might need this same mercy one day." Meanwhile, Greece sent a navy ship to the island of Lesbos to house some 500 people, many of them families with small children, who managed to reach its shores over the weekend. — AFP

Responding to yesterday's death, Sulaimaniyah Governor Haval Abu Bakr told reporters that all rallies in the province will be banned and that all football matches will now be held behind closed doors. Local religious authorities for their part announced a ban on mass prayers, including on Fridays, until further notice.

The coronavirus has killed 92 people in Iran, officials said yesterday, as the world's deadliest outbreak outside China spread to all but one of the country's provinces. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani meanwhile dismissed a US offer to help it fight the novel coronavirus outbreak, charging that Washington hides behind a "mask of sympathy" while sanctions are depriving the country of medicine. The Islamic republic reported 15 new deaths from COVID-19 and 586 additional cases, bringing the overall toll to 92 dead and 2,922 infected.

"This virus doesn't have wings to fly. We're the ones spreading it," health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour, who gave the latest figures, told a televised news conference. "We have to cut down on unnecessary interactions. We have to be extra careful in the coming weeks," he added, calling on the public to refrain from travelling and gathering at events such as weddings.

The provinces of Tehran and Qom were the worst-hit with 253 and 101 new cases of COVID-19 respectively, according to the spokesman. The Shiite holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, is the epicentre of Iran's coronavirus outbreak and where its first deaths were reported on Feb 19. Authorities have since scrambled to halt its rapid spread. Schools have been shut, major cultural and sporting events suspended, and working hours reduced.

Despite the preventive measures, the novel coronavirus is now present in all but one of Iran's 31 provinces, according to the latest figures. The provinces of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, North Khorasan and Zanjan were added to the list yesterday, leaving only Bushehr in the south unaffected. US President Donald Trump said Saturday he was ready to aid Iran with the virus outbreak. "If we can help the Iranians with this problem, we are certainly willing to do so... All they have to do is ask. We will have great professionals over there," he said.

His counterpart in Tehran dismissed the offer, saying "our people know well that you are lying" with American sanctions still in place that block Iran's access to medicine. "Those who have deprived the people of even medicine and food through sanctions, who have done the most vicious things... they appear with a mask of sympathy and say that we want to help the nation of Iran," Rouhani said, in a clear reference to the United States.

Rouhani said the US must lift sanctions blocking medicine purchases to prove its honest intent to help. "This is the first step... to free banking relations for purchasing medicine, transferring medicine and shipping medicine and food," he said. The novel coronavirus has so far infected some high-profile Iranian officials. The national emergency services chief Pirhossein Kolivand was the latest such infection announced on Tuesday.

Girl who laughed off shelling starts new life in Turkey



SARMADA, Syria: In this file photo taken on Feb 19, 2020, Syrian father Abdullah Al-Mohammed gestures with his three-year-old daughter Salwa at their home in Syria's last rebel pocket in the Idlib province. — AFP

BEIRUT: A three-year-old girl taught to laugh off the sound of shelling in war-torn Syria has left with her family and started a new life in neighboring Turkey, her father said yesterday. Salwa crossed the border with her parents last week at the invitation of the Turkish state, her father Abdullah Al-Mohammed said. The little girl rose to fame last month after a video was circulated on social media of her and her father laughing at bombardment in embattled northwest Syria.

Her father said he was delighted Salwa would now be able to lead a quiet life in Turkey, away from the "disturbing sounds". "Her future here - after she starts kindergarten and then school - will definitely be better than if she had stayed somewhere at war," the 32-year-old said. In the video widely shared last month, he asks his only daughter if the whizzing sound they can hear outside is a plane or a mortar. "A mortar," the three-year-old answers.

"When it comes, we will laugh," she says before - at the sound of a blast outside - breaking into a giggle that endeared her to millions. Mohammed says he is

happy he will no longer have to invent games to gloss over the horrors of Syria's nine-year civil war. "At least now I won't have to lie to her," he told AFP by telephone from the border region of Hatay, where he is now looking for a job.

A Russia-backed military offensive on Syria's last major opposition bastion of Idlib since December has forced almost a million people - more than 60 percent of them children - out of their homes and shelters. Many have sought refuge in areas along the Turkish border, but Turkey - already hosting 3.6 million Syrian refugees on its soil - has been reluctant to allow any more through. Though he is one of the lucky ones, Salwa's father said the departure was bittersweet.

"I'm happy we are in a safe place and that we managed to flee the bombardment, but I'm also annoyed and sad that I had to leave my country," he said. Mohammed escaped his hometown of Saraqeb late last year as regime forces approached. He and his family then found refuge in the town of Sarmada further north, where an AFP correspondent met them in February. — AFP

Kuwait cuts discount rate over coronavirus...

Continued from Page 1

World Health Organization. The ministry also said that the health condition of two Kuwaiti women, in their 70s, deteriorated and they were admitted to the intensive care unit. The condition of one of them is stable but remains in the ICU, while the condition of the other woman is critical. The two suffer from acute pneumonia. The ministry also said two cases have been allowed to leave the quarantine after spending 14 days and after their tests were negative. That leaves only 54 coronavirus cases in quarantine.

Meanwhile, the premises of the oil ministry and Kuwait Petroleum Corp was evacuated yesterday after a female employee returned to office after three days of sick leave and was in bad condition. The employee was taken to hospital and the ministry building was sterilized. Oil Minister Khaled Al-Fadhel later confirmed tests concluded the woman, who suffered from high temperature, only had regular seasonal flu. The employee was given a two-day rest, said Fadhel, reiterating the ministry of oil and KPC applied preventive health measures to ensure the safety of all employees at the seaside Shuwaik complex.

Fadhel, also acting minister of electricity and water, said in a statement to KUNA the employee was taken to the clinic in the oil complex and then sent to Jaber Hospital for further tests. Management of the oil complex, he said, evacuated the ninth floor of the oil ministry building and applied all health measures for the safety of all employees. The ministry of health meanwhile will start from Sunday distributing thermal screening devices to schools.

Saudi Arabia yesterday suspended the year-round umrah pilgrimage over fears of the new coronavirus spreading to Islam's holiest cities, an unprecedented move that raises fresh uncertainty over the annual hajj. The kingdom said the suspension was provisional, but with the umrah attracting millions of people annually, the decision has a huge potential impact. The Gulf state has decided "to suspend umrah temporarily for citizens and residents in the kingdom", the interior ministry said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency. They were also barred from "visits to the Prophet's (PBUH) mosque in Madinah", according to a foreign ministry tweet.

Iraq said a 70-year-old Muslim cleric died yesterday from the novel coronavirus, the first death from the outbreak in a country where 31 people have been infected. The Iraqi preacher had been quarantined in the northeastern city of Sulaimaniyah before his death, a spokesman for the Kurdish autonomous region's health authority said. According to local sources, he had recently met with Iraqis returning from neighboring Iran.

Biden leads Sanders in White House...

Continued from Page 1

But Biden, powered by strong support among African-Americans and women, swept the seven southern states at play including Texas, where Sanders had been expected to attract strong Latino support.

Bloomberg, also 78, said that while he was leaving the race, he remained committed to beating Trump in November. "I've always believed that defeating Donald Trump starts with uniting behind the candidate with the best shot to do it," Bloomberg said in a statement. "After yesterday's vote, it is clear that candidate is my friend and a great American, Joe Biden."

Bloomberg skipped the first four nominating contests and spent hundreds of millions of dollars of his own money on advertising to make a splash on Super Tuesday but he walked away with just a handful of delegates from the tiny US territory of American Samoa. The other remaining major Democratic candidate, Senator Elizabeth Warren, 70, was reported to be meeting with her advisors after failing to make an impact on Tuesday, even finishing third in her home state of Massachusetts.

Biden notched up victories in Virginia, Texas, North Carolina, Alabama, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Arkansas, Massachusetts and even Minnesota - a state where Sanders had been expected to win handily. With three-quarters of the vote counted, Biden had a narrow lead in Maine, where Sanders had been polling ahead. "We

expected a surge. We got a tsunami," tweeted analyst David Axelrod, chief strategist for Barack Obama's two successful presidential campaigns. "New race. Completely."

A defiant Sanders celebrated his own wins by tearing into Trump, calling him "the most dangerous president in the history of this country". But he also attacked Biden for having voted for the invasion of Iraq and painted him as tarnished by billionaire contributors. "We're taking on the political establishment," he said. "You cannot beat Trump with the same-old, same-old kind of politics."

Biden saw the results as proof that his bid to bring American politics back to the center, after four years of Trump's rightwing populism, is on a roll. "We are very much alive," he told the crowd in Los Angeles. A key takeaway from Biden's long list of wins was his strong support among African Americans - a vital piece in any Democratic presidential candidate's coalition.

He seemed to fare less well with the large Hispanic electorate, which in California reportedly went heavily for Sanders. But a victory in Texas, which also has a diverse population, suggests Biden has the capacity to build a broad coalition. Trump tweeted his customary insults at the Democrats, deriding Warren for losing Massachusetts and Bloomberg for his failed campaign.

"I could have told him long ago that he didn't have what it takes, and he would have saved himself a billion dollars, the real cost," Trump said of Bloomberg. "Now he will pour money into Sleepy Joe's campaign, hoping to save face. It won't work!" Many in the Democratic Party establishment have been desperate to stop Sanders, claiming he would be destroyed in an election where Trump would brand him a socialist bent on ending the American way of life. — AFP

Sports

Forty years on, 'Ringer's match' remains a byword for violence

Wales had been dominant force in the then Five Nations

LONDON: Rugby Union internationals between England and Wales are often passionate and fiercely-contested affairs. But Saturday's Six Nations match between the old rivals at Twickenham will have to go some way to match the excess of emotion that marred their 1980 encounter at 'headquarters' and ensured lasting infamy for Paul Ringer after the Wales back-row was sent off.

Wales had been the dominant force in the then Five Nations during the 1970s, a largely miserable decade for England.

As the 1980s dawned, a generation of English forwards were determined to avoid fresh humiliation while Welsh resentment at their treatment by the UK government led by Margaret Thatcher spilled onto the rugby pitch.

"The atmosphere was evil," Eddie Butler, Wales' No 8 at Twickenham that day, told the Mail on Sunday. "There was the Welsh steelworkers' strike which made it more of a social crusade than a game."

Both sides had won their opening fixtures and right from the start there were

incidents of stamping which in the modern professional era of television match officials would no doubt have led to immediate red cards.

As it was David Burnett, who would recall the game as the "dirtiest match I ever refereed", warned England captain Bill Beaumont and Wales skipper Jeff Squire that the next act of foul play would see a player sent off.

So it was that, with just 13 minutes played, Ringer became only the second Welsh player to be ordered from the field after bowling over John Horton as the England fly-half cleared from his 22.

It was a relatively innocuous clash by the standards of what had gone before, but Irish referee Burnett was as good as his word.

'BAT OUT OF HELL'

"I was going like a bat out of hell and attempting to charge down the ball," Ringer told the Western Mail last year.

"I had my hands up, but he (Horton) was too quick for me. I could not stop.

"It was nothing — he did not even go down. But there had been a warning and, I suppose, someone had to be sent off.

"It was (England's) Peter Wheeler who got me sent off. He came over (after the incident) and said: 'Ref, there's going to be a bloodbath here if you don't sort him out! That made up his mind for him.'"

Wales still scored two tries to none, yet lost 9-8, with England full-back Dusty Hare kicking three penalties — the last in stoppage-time.

It was a win that formed part of a Grand Slam for Beaumont's men, England's first Championship clean sweep since 1957.

The following day an international disciplinary committee banned Ringer for eight weeks and he only played one more game for Wales.

Meanwhile Butler reckoned the incident led to Wales losing a vital edge at the start of a decade far removed from their glory days of the 1970s.

"It was like we were being told to get back on the horse but they'd taken away our spurs," he said. — AFP



Paul Ringer (right) only became the second player in Wales ever to be broadcast on a day of shame.

GAZOO Racing celebrates victory at Rally Sweden

The GAZOO Racing (GR) World Rally Team (WRT) continued its outstanding start to the season with a dominant performance at the recent Rally Sweden. Elfyn Evans took the top spot during his second time behind the wheel of the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC. He was joined on the podium by 19-year-old rookie sensation Kalle Rovanpera, who came out ahead in the No. 69 Toyota Yaris WRC to claim third place following a thrilling battle with his world champion team-mate Sebastian Ogier in the No. 17 Toyota Yaris WRC.

Together, the all-new driver line-up built on their successful GR debut at last month's Rallye Monte-Carlo to take Toyota into pole position in the manufacturers' championship, while Evans now jointly leads the drivers' championship for the first time in his career. Evans led the event from start to finish to record his second FIA WRC victory, having previously won on home soil at Wales Rally GB in 2017. It was the first-ever WRC win for co-driver Scott Martin, and together they are the first British competitors to ever win Rally Sweden, which was a founding round of the WRC in 1973.

Having won five of the previous eight stages, Evans had built up a cushion of 17.2 seconds going into the final day in the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC. This allowed him to take a relatively cautious approach through the tricky deciding test and still secure the win by 12.7 seconds. Already impressive on his debut at rallying's top level during Rallye Monte-Carlo, Rovanpera reached another

level at Rally Sweden, climbing as high as second overall at one point on the second day in the No. 69 Toyota Yaris WRC. He and Ogier traded third place several times during day three, but it was Ogier who went into the fourth and final day with an advantage of half a second in the No. 17 Toyota Yaris WRC.

In the tricky conditions of the 21.19-kilometer Liken as stage, Rovanpera was 3.7 seconds faster than anybody else, taking his first-ever WRC stage win and the maximum five bonus points on offer in the Power Stage. This makes him the youngest ever podium finisher during a WRC round, more than two years younger than the previous record holder. Ogier still managed to achieve the third-fastest time during the stage to claim fourth position overall, collecting a strong points haul towards the driver's championship, where he is currently in third place - five points behind Evans.

"Evans and Martin brought the first victory of the season to our new-look team. Elfyn and Scott, congratulations! I am really happy that such a new team member is already achieving great results together with the team," said Akio Toyoda, Team Chairman. "Kalle and Jonne climbed on the third step of the podium after a big fight, with only a three-second gap, against Seb and Julien. I also appreciate these four guys for scoring great points and making the fans excited. My team-mates of GR, let's keep winning! I feel our drivers are enjoying to drive the Yaris WRC more and more round-by-round. I believe they will show us more exciting drives in the next round and beyond. Thank you in advance to our fans for supporting us this season."

Tommi Makinen, Team Principal at GAZOO Racing, commented: "It is an absolutely brilliant finish for us here. Elfyn has been so good this weekend, and he and Scott have made history today as the first British winners in Sweden. And it's incredible what Kalle did in the final stage. It was his first time on that stage in these vehicles. Everybody else has been



doing it many times before and he was just flying away from the rest. I think we have a 'dream team' at the moment. There is such a good feeling and the team spirit is the highest it's ever been. I can only smile and be proud of them."

Elfyn Evans, Driver of the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC, said: "I feel really good to have my first win with GR in our second event together. I have to give a lot of credit to the team for not only giving me a great vehicle, but also giving me the support and help in testing for me to get the vehicle to where I wanted it. The vehicle is giving me great confidence, and in changeable conditions like we've had here, that's really worth a lot. It has been very enjoyable to drive so far and hopefully we can carry this feeling onto gravel in the events to come. A big thanks to Martin too, he's been very good since he's been alongside me and I'm very happy to finally be with him for his first win."

The season continues next month with Rally Mexico from 12 - 15 March, which features rough gravel roads and tempera-

tures in the region of 30°C. High altitude is also a major factor, with a route that peaks at 2,737 meters above sea level, starving engines of air and cutting power by as much as 20 percent.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nurburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.



Tokyo Olympics rugby test cancelled over virus

TOKYO: Japan cancelled the Tokyo Olympics' rugby test event yesterday in the latest disruption caused by the new coronavirus, which has raised concerns over whether the Games will go ahead on time.

Organisers said they couldn't guarantee a safe running of the Asia Sevens Invitational, scheduled for

April 25-26.

"As the impact of the novel coronavirus spreads across the world, we are not able to guarantee that the tournament will be held safely at this point," Japan Rugby Football Union said in a statement.

The tournament's demise comes after the Hong Kong and Singapore Sevens were postponed as chaos caused by the virus sweeps through the sporting calendar.

More than 90,000 people have been infected and 3,100 killed since COVID-19 emerged in China late last year, before spreading to over 70 countries.

In Japan, a wheelchair rugby test event for the Paralympics was cancelled this week, while training for Olympics volunteers was postponed and the nationwide torch relay looks set to be scaled back.

Japan's prime minister has called for schools to close and for major events to be cancelled, while several Olympic qualifying tournaments around the world have been delayed, cancelled or moved.

The JRFU said the sevens tournament had been cancelled before teams arrange flights and make other plans.

Olympics organisers said they would carry out a rugby test event "in some form" after "confirming it is safe to do so".

Officials have repeatedly stressed that they're committed to holding the Olympics as scheduled from July 24 to August 9.

On Tuesday, Japan's Olympic minister told parliament that the hosting agreement appeared to allow postponing the Games until later in the year. — AFP

Virus may force Olympic torch relay changes

TOKYO: Japan will adjust the Olympic torch relay set to begin this month "as necessary" to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus, organisers said yesterday, giving few specifics.

The Olympic flame is set to arrive in Japan on March 20 and depart less than a week later on a nationwide relay that will begin in Fukushima. But with the spread of COVID-19, which has infected over 90,000 people and killed around 3,200 worldwide, questions have been raised about whether the Games can go ahead as planned.

Tokyo 2020 organisers insisted again yesterday that they have no plans to cancel the Games, but acknowledged the relay may have to be adjusted — particularly after a call from the Japanese government for the cancellation, delay or downsizing of major events.

"The Organising Committee will take all necessary and appropriate measures to prevent the spread of infection among runners, spectators, and operational staff," the organisers said in a statement.

Runners and spectators will be asked to "refrain from participation" if they feel unwell and the organising committee will "thoroughly monitor the health of runners and staff, including conducting temperature measurements and health checks", the statement added.

The organisers also raised the possibility that audiences for parts of the relay could be limited, but said that specifics were still being worked out. "Measures such as limiting the number of entrants to celebration venues and requesting the cooperation of spectators lining the relay route may be taken as necessary," the statement said.

Tokyo 2020 chief executive Toshio Muto said decisions would be made on a case-by-case basis as "situations differ from community to community." "Concrete measures to conduct the torch relay will be decided in consultation with prefectures at least one week before (the torch arrives)," he added.

He declined to give specifics on measures, repeating only that entry to some venues could be limited and spectators on the route asked "for their help in curbing the spread of infections".

Local media reported earlier yesterday that a welcome event for the flame in north-east Japan's Miyagi would be scaled back from around 1,000 people to just 250. Reports also said the public might be asked to view the start of the relay on March 26 on screens and televisions at home rather than at the site, a sports complex that was a staging ground for operations during the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Tokyo 2020 organisers have been at pains to insist they have no plans to cancel the Games, and Muto said nothing had changed. Organisers have been forced to adjust their test event schedule, postpone volunteer training and deal with rescheduling and cancellation of qualifying events.

Muto said the IOC had expressed "confidence" that the Games will start on July 25 and there had been no discussions about cancelling the Games. "We are working to deliver a safe Games and devoting all of our efforts to do that."

Organising committee president Yoshiro Mori put it more bluntly when asked how long Japan has to decide on any adjustments to hosting the Games. "I am not a god, so I don't know that," he said. — AFP

Sports

DeBrusk, Bruins edge Lightning

Lehner, Golden Knights shut out Devils

TAMPA BAY: Boston's Jake DeBrusk scored the game-winning goal in his 200th NHL game Tuesday night, sending the Bruins to a 2-1 win over the host Tampa Bay Lightning in a matchup of the Eastern Conference's top two clubs. Brad Marchand notched his 28th marker, and Torey Krug, David Pastrnak and Charlie Coyle assisted on goals for Boston, which earned its league-best 42nd victory and has won 14 of 17, including three in a row. Tuukka Rask stopped 20 of 21 shots to go to 12-3-1 in his last 16 games. Tampa Bay's Mitchell Stephens scored, and Tyler Johnson and Barclay Goodrow recorded helpers. Goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy posted 33 saves for the Lightning, who fell to 1-5-1 in their past six games since an 11-game win streak.

CANADIENS 6, ISLANDERS 2

Brendan Gallagher scored to start a first-period flurry for visiting Montreal, which cruised past New York. Jeff Petry and Charles Hudon also scored in the first period, and Paul Byron scored in the second. Jordan Weal and Joel Armia added goals late in the third for the Canadiens, who have won two straight and four of six (4-1-1). Goalie Carey Price made 20 saves. Brock Nelson and Ryan Pulock scored in the third period for the Islanders, who have lost four straight (0-2-2) and eight of 10 (2-6-2).

BLUES 3, RANGERS 1

Brayden Schenn scored the tiebreaking goal with 10:04 remaining in the third period, and surging St. Louis extended its winning streak to eight games with a win over host New York. Schenn scored for the fifth straight game and reached 25 goals for the fourth time in his career by scoring on a fluky play. Colton Parayko had a power-play goal in the second period and an assist for St. Louis. Schwartz added an empty-net goal with six seconds left. Mika Zibanejad scored a power-play goal in the first period for the Rangers, who dropped their third straight game.

PENGUINS 7, SENATORS 3

Bryan Rust had a hat trick as Pittsburgh topped visiting Ottawa to end a six-game losing streak. Pittsburgh's top line combined for eight points: Sidney Crosby and Jason Zucker each had a goal and two assists, and Conor Sheary had a goal and an assist. Crosby's second assist made him the sixth fastest in NHL history to 800, in 980 games. John Marino also

scored and Evgeni Malkin had four assists for Pittsburgh. Goaltender Matt Murray made 23 saves. Jayce Hawryluk, Brady Tkachuk and Connor Brown scored, and Craig Anderson made 28 saves for Ottawa, which had won two straight.

GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3, DEVILS 0

Robin Lehner notched his first shutout of the season, and William Karlsson and Max Pacioretty each had a goal and an assist to lead Vegas to a victory over New Jersey in Las Vegas. Ryan Reaves also scored a goal for Vegas. It was the ninth win in the past 10 games for the Golden Knights. Lehner, playing in his 300th career NHL game and second with Vegas after being acquired from Chicago at the trade deadline, finished with 27 saves for his 15th career shutout. Mackenzie Blackwood made 29 saves for the Devils, who had a six-game point streak snapped, tied for their longest of the season.

BLACKHAWKS 6, DUCKS 2

Dylan Strome had two goals and an assist, and Patrick Kane and Alex Nylander each had a goal and an assist as host Chicago earned its third straight victory with a rout of Anaheim. David Kampf and Drake Caggiola also scored for the Blackhawks, who got two assists from Adam Boqvist. Corey Crawford, who has allowed two goals or fewer in 11 of his past 16 starts for Chicago, made 37 saves for the win. Anaheim's John Gibson stopped 19 of 24 shots before Ryan Miller entered in relief and stopped 15 of 16 shots. The Ducks started a two-game road back-to-back with their sixth loss in eight games.

JETS 3, SABRES 1

Kyle Connor recorded two goals and an assist to lead Winnipeg over visiting Buffalo. Connor's 34th and 35th goals of the season set a career high for the Winnipeg forward, who has scored in each of his past four games. Tucker Poolman scored a short-handed goal for the Jets, and Connor Hellebuyck saved 25 of 26 shots to earn the win. The Sabres, who got a goal from Rasmus Ristolainen, have lost four consecutive games, all during a nightmarish road trip. Buffalo has been outscored 15-7 over that 0-4-0 stretch.

WILD 3, PREDATORS 1

Kevin Fiala had a goal and an assist for his fifth straight multi-point game, and Zach Parise scored in his third straight as Minnesota beat Nashville in Saint



NEW YORK: Jordan Eberle #7 of the New York Islanders skates against the Montreal Canadiens at the Barclays Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. The Canadiens defeated the Islanders 6-2. — AFP

Paul. Minn. Luke Kunin returned from a five-game injury absence to score his 14th of the season for the Wild, who have won six of eight and are amid a 10-4-1 stretch while moving one point ahead of the Predators in the race for playoff position in the Western Conference. Alex Stalock made 37 saves for his fifth victory in his last six starts for Minnesota. The Predators have dropped three straight following a 6-1-1 stretch since last March. Craig Smith scored for Nashville.

OILERS 2, STARS 1 (OT)

Alex Chiasson scored 1:08 into overtime to lift visiting Edmonton to a victory over Dallas. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins celebrated his 600th NHL game by scoring a power-play goal, and Mikko Koskinen made 42 saves

for the Oilers, who have won three in a row. Defenseman John Klingberg scored a power-play goal and Anton Khudobin finished with 25 saves to fall to 6-1-1 at home this season for the Stars, who have dropped three in a row following a 7-1-1 stretch.

SHARKS 5, MAPLE LEAFS 2

Evander Kane scored two goals, and San Jose stretched its winning streak to three games with a victory over visiting Toronto. Antti Suomela and Stefan Noesen each had a goal and an assist, and Martin Jones made 25 saves for the Sharks, who have won three in a row for the first time since November. Radim Simek contributed an empty-net goal. The Maple Leafs got a goal and an assist from Auston Matthews plus a goal from Mitchell Marner. Jack Campbell stopped 33 shots. — Reuters

Melbourne confident F1 season-opener will go ahead

MELBOURNE: Melbourne's major events chief is confident the Australian Formula One Grand Prix will go ahead as scheduled next week but said he could offer no firm guarantees because of the dynamic nature of the coronavirus epidemic.

Albert Park is already undergoing its annual transformation from inner city oasis to racetrack for the March 15 season-opener despite the health crisis that has caused the cancellation of scores of events around the Asia-Pacific.

"All of the indications from Formula One management are that they are planning for the Grand Prix to go ahead," Martin Pakula, minister for tourism, sport and major events in the Victoria state government, told reporters yesterday.

"The set-up is already occurring, we would be

expecting machinery and teams to be arriving from today through to the end of the weekend. So we are almost at the point where everybody is going to be here within the next few days.

"But having said that, I recognise the situation is extremely dynamic and to some extent there are matters that are out of control. There are decisions made by the (government) or might be made overseas.

"I'm very hopeful and confident but I can't say anything about it with absolute certainty." The Chinese Grand Prix scheduled for Shanghai on April 19 has been called off as a result of the virus, which emerged in the central Chinese province of Hubei late last year.

MotoGP cancelled its opening round in Qatar after the Gulf state imposed quarantine on visitors arriving from Italy. The inaugural Vietnam round of the championship, scheduled for April 5, is under threat after it imposed quarantine periods on anyone who has come from, or been in, Italy during a two-week period prior to entry.

Italy, home to Formula One powerhouse Ferrari, is one of the countries most affected by the epidemic with more than 50 deaths and more than 2,000 confirmed cases. Formula One's motorsport managing director, Ross Brawn, told Reuters on Tuesday that a world championship race would not go ahead in a country that denies access to any team due to coronavirus restrictions.



Martin Pakula

Australia has reported 42 cases of the coronavirus - the bulk of those evacuees from a cruise ship docked in Japan - and just three cases of local transmission, where people who had not left the country were infected.

Australia has imposed border controls on visitors from China and anyone who has been to Iran in the previous two weeks, but there are no restrictions on those travelling from Italy. — Reuters

French cycling team Cofidis quarantined in UAE until March 14

PARIS: The two French cycling teams kept in the United Arab Emirates following the outbreak of coronavirus that ended the UAE Tour, will be quarantined for 10 more days, team officials said yesterday.

"We have just learned that we are officially quarantined, in theory until March 14," Thierry Vittu, the president of Cofidis' competition team, posted on Facebook. The 12-member Groupama squad, which includes four riders, also remains under quarantine.

"We're officially in quarantine with a probable return on March 14," said Arnaud Demare, a one of the Groupama-FDJ riders. "We've learnt that some people who tested positive for coronavirus were occupying the same floor as us".

He said he has not ridden since Thursday evening and that would have an impact on his racing. "Still waiting for a bike, sixth day without being able to train. However, the priority for us now is no longer to resume training but to be quarantined on a different floor."

There was no immediate comment from the other two teams which were in lockdown, UAE Team and Russian-backed Gazprom. The UAE Tour was abandoned last Thursday after two Italian staff members with one of the teams tested positive for the disease.

On Tuesday the UAE announced six more related cases, saying that two Russians, two Italians, one German and a Colombian had been infected. On Monday, Vittu had tweeted that the team was being "held hostage". Yesterday he said the news of a definite date was welcome.

"Of course the deadline is far away (although it's only 10 days) but in a way, it's a kind of relief," he said. "What has been difficult to live with so far has been the absence of a deadline and the constant expectation of a close outcome that never came.

"Now we know where we stand, and even if the confinement to our rooms continues, everyone will manage to find occupations, distractions, activities..."

Demare said he hoped the Groupama team could be repatriated to France so they could be quarantined "at home". After the initial cases, cyclists, team staff and some media were put under lockdown at hotels in Abu Dhabi where they underwent screening, with most cleared to leave over the past few days. — AFP

Jamieson makes NZ ODI squad for Australia

WELLINGTON: New Zealand named rookie pacer Kyle Jamieson yesterday in a 15-man squad for the upcoming one-day series against Australia and kept faith with underperforming seamer Tim Southee.

Jamieson shone in the recent ODI and Test series sweeps over India, including a five-wicket haul in the second Test against Virat Kohli's men.

"He's had a great start to his international career and will be a real asset for us in Australia," coach Gary Stead said. Southee retained his spot despite struggling for wickets in the one-day format, in contrast to his strong Test form.

The Black Caps' bowling attack has been bolstered by the return of Trent Boult, Matt Henry and Lockie Ferguson, who all missed the ODI series against India with injury.

New Zealand have not won an ODI series in Australia in 14 attempts and Stead said they would need all their experience to threaten the hosts.

"Playing Australia in Australia is one of the great challenges in world cricket," he said.

"We know they'll severely test us in all areas of the game." The three-match series begins in Sydney on March 13.

New Zealand: Kane Williamson (capt), Tom Blundell, Trent Boult, Colin de Grandhomme, Lockie Ferguson, Martin Gumpill, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Tom Latham, Jimmy Neesham, Henry Nicholls, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor. — AFP

India's teen cricket sensation tops women's rankings

NEW DELHI: India's 16-year-old women's cricket sensation Shafali Verma shot to the top of the ICC's T20 batting rankings yesterday after several match winning performances at the T20 World Cup in Australia.

Verma, who has only played 18 internationals since her debut last year, is touted by many experts as a major long term star for women's cricket in India. The International Cricket Council (ICC) called her 19-place rise "remarkable" as it released

the new rankings.

She is only the second Indian after Mithali Raj to top the women's T20 batting rankings and pushed New Zealand's veteran Suzie Bates down to second on the list. Verma is the third highest scorer at the World Cup where India play England in the semi-finals tomorrow.

She has hit nine sixes in the competition so far - more than anyone else. Verma will face-off in the game against left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone of England who has just taken over as the world's leading T20 bowler.

She made headlines with her battle to get into cricket, cutting her hair like a boy so she could get into the local academy to train. "At eight or nine, all kids look the same. After the haircut, most didn't even notice she was a girl and she started playing regularly at weekends," her father Sanjeev told AFP last October after she made her India debut. — AFP



MELBOURNE: File photo shows India's Shafali Verma (L) plays a shot for four runs during the Twenty20 women's World Cup cricket match between New Zealand and India in Melbourne. — AFP

Sports

Liverpool beaten again as Chelsea ease into FA Cup quarters

Liverpool remain well on course for first league title in 30 years

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp insisted the best of Liverpool's season may still be to come despite a third defeat in four games saw them crash out of the FA Cup 2-0 at the hands of Chelsea on Tuesday. Klopp made seven changes to the side beaten for the first time in 45 Premier League games at Walford on Saturday, but still named a far stronger XI than the youthful teams that had seen off Everton and Shrewsbury to reach the fifth round.

However, goals from Willian and Ross Barkley gave Frank Lampard's men a much-needed lift at Stamford Bridge. "Losing 2-0 is not good, but it is relatively easy to explain. We made two massive mistakes around the goals," said Klopp.

Liverpool remain well on course for a first league title in 30 years with a 22-point lead at the top of the Premier League, but run the risk of their competitive campaign coming to an early end once the title is sewn up unless they can overturn a 1-0 first leg deficit against Atletico Madrid in the Champions League next week.

"It is not the best three weeks of the whole season but it is a chance to make it the best three weeks now and that is the plan," added Klopp. "Nobody has to feel sorry for us, we will win football games and that is what we want to do on Saturday."

A run of five wins in 16 league games and a 3-0 thrashing at home by Bayern Munich in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie last week meant the pressure was on Chelsea to keep their hopes of silverware this season alive. "We are not the Chelsea of different eras gone by with (Eden) Hazard and (Diego) Costa, (John) Terry and (Didier) Drogba, we've got younger players but

we are trying to bridge the gap upwards," said Lampard. "I can't ask for any more in the spirit, work ethic and quality. You have got to defend very well to keep a clean sheet against them." Chelsea got the lift they needed from the opening goal as Liverpool's understudy goalkeeper Adrian undid the good work of a brilliant save from Willian within a minute.

The Brazilian was gifted possession again just outside the Liverpool box and this time Adrian could only turn his powerful drive into the bottom corner. At the other end, Kepa Arrizabalaga, who had been dropped for the previous five games, showed why Chelsea spent £72 million (\$92 million) on him just over 18 months ago as he made three reaction saves in a matter of seconds to deny Mane, Divock Origi and Takumi Minamino what seemed a certain equaliser.

Chelsea then lost Mateo Kovacic and Willian to injury either side of half-time to further deplete Lampard's mid-field options. But that may provide the opportunity Barkley needs to kickstart his flagging career at the Bridge. The England international doubled Chelsea's lead in spectacular style midway through the second half as he galloped forward from inside his own half before smashing past Adrian from outside the area. Newcastle and Sheffield United also booked their place in the quarter-finals on Tuesday.

A double from Miguel Almiron helped Newcastle to a 3-2 win at West Brom to reach the last eight for the first time in 14 years. Sheffield United needed extra-time to see off Reading 2-1, but the Blades' brilliant campaign continued thanks to a winner from captain Billy Sharp. — AFP



LONDON: Chelsea's French striker Olivier Giroud (C) shoots but fails to score during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Chelsea and Liverpool at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

White eyes WCup revenge vs US in SheBelieves Cup

ORLANDO: England striker Ellen White is determined to prove the Lionesses are worthy rivals to the United States today as the SheBelieves Cup kicks off in Florida. The four-nation tournament gets under way in Orlando with Spain taking on Japan before England face the USA in a rematch of last year's World Cup semi-final.

For White, today represents a chance for revenge against the Americans, who won the World Cup semi-final 2-1 before going on to win a fourth title. White, who bagged six goals in France to finish joint top-scorer alongside the USA's Alex Morgan and Megan Rapinoe, says the English women are striving for the consistency of the Americans.

"They've always been that team that have gone on to consistently win and win major tournaments," the Manchester City forward told reporters on Tuesday.

"It's unbelievable for them and we want to strive to do that. It's exciting to face them and put ourselves against them, especially with a new squad and the youngsters coming in for this camp.

"It's an exciting time for us and we've got the belief that on any given day that we can beat the best in the world." White, however, admits she is still haunted by the VAR decision in the semi-final which allowed the United States to complete a 2-1 victory.

Her second-half effort which was ruled offside would have pulled England level and White added: "I do sit at home at night and say 'ahhh, I just can't stand VAR'. My husband will say the same thing! It's frustrating. I still get a lot of people saying stuff about VAR.

"It really irritates me but it is what it is - that's just football. Playing the USA is always so exciting though.

"They have some unbelievable players and it's so competitive now. (The rivalry) has got bigger and bigger each time we have played them." For England defender Rachel Daly, who plays her club soccer for the Houston Dash, the agony inflicted in the Lyon semi-final was long-lasting.

"It was really frustrating because everything everywhere was about them winning," she said. "There were billboards everywhere, walking into the airport the first thing I see is welcome home USA, World Cup champi-

ons and then they do parades.

"It was quite hard. But it was quite good for me to be able to see that and see how I want to move forward and I want to be on the receiving end of what they are receiving next time around."

The US women meanwhile will head into the SheBelieves tournament brimming with confidence as they prepare for this summer's Olympics. USA coach Vlatko Andonovski has included 10 of the 11 players who started the World Cup final in his 23-strong squad, with Alex Morgan — who is preparing for the birth of her first child — the only key absentee. England meanwhile head into Thursday's opener on the back of several lacklustre results which have left manager Phil Neville under pressure. England have won just two of their last seven games.

"We have been disappointed with our performances since the World Cup," said White. "We've got a new group, it's a fresher group, a younger group and we want to show it's a new start for us."

After today's opening fixtures in Florida, the teams head to New Jersey with Japan facing England and the United States playing Spain on Sunday. The tournament concludes in Frisco, Texas on March 11 with England playing Spain, and the USA meeting Japan in a rematch of the 2015 World Cup final. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ITALIAN CUP		
SSC Napoli v Internazionale Milano		22:45
beIN Sports		
ENGLAND FA CUP		
Derby County FC v Manchester United		22:45
beIN Sports		
SPAIN COPA DEL REY		
Granada CF v Athletic de Bilbao		23:00
beIN Sports		
FRENCH CUP		
Saint Etienne v Stade Rennais		22:55
beIN Sports		

Juve, AC Milan cup semi postponed amid coronavirus chaos

ROME: The Italian Cup semi-final clash between Juventus and AC Milan has been postponed as fears mount over the coronavirus epidemic in northern Italy, local authorities in Turin announced on Tuesday.

The match was due to take place on Wednesday night at Juve's Allianz Stadium with fans from most of Italy able to attend but Claudio Palomba, the prefect of the Turin province, said that the government's restrictions on who could attend sporting events weren't enough to guarantee safety.

The decision, said Palomba, was made on the basis of "assessments made by the Piedmont region's crisis unit" and regional health councillor Luigi Icardi, who insisted on "avoiding large public gatherings".

No new date has yet been fixed for the second leg of the last four tie, which is level at 1-1 following the first match at the San Siro last month. News agency Ansa reports that the Milan players were told of the news while in their hotel in Turin ahead of the match.

On Tuesday the number of deaths in Italy caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus jumped to 79 with more than 2,500 people infected — the most of any country in Europe.

Fifty-five of those deaths have been recorded in the northern Lombardy region, with Emilia-Romagna reporting 18 deaths and Veneto also hard hit. The match had been scheduled to take place behind closed doors, but then a government decree enabled fans who did not live in those three regions and two other provinces in Liguria and Le Marche to attend the match.

The announcement by the prefect, who in Italy is the state's representative within a particular province, ended that loosening of restrictions. Italian media reports on Tuesday said that a scientific committee advising the government has suggested spectators should be banned from attending sporting events for a month. — AFP

UEFA 'confident' virus outbreak will not derail Euro 2020 plans

AMSTERDAM: UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said Tuesday he was confident European football's governing body could deal with any worst-case scenario in relation to the upcoming Euro 2020 as the continent battles to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

COVID-19 has been detected in 76 countries worldwide, killing over 3,000 people with Italy the worst-hit nation in Europe.

The Italian capital Rome is one of 12 venues across the continent set to host matches at the European Championship in June and July. A long list of sports events around the world have been cancelled or postponed in recent days to avoid spreading the virus, including games in Italy's Serie A. The top two divisions of Swiss football have been postponed until the end of March.

"You don't know how many concerns we have when we organise a big competition," Ceferin said at a press conference after the UEFA Congress in Amsterdam.

"We have security concerns, we have political instability concerns, and one of the concerns is also the virus, and we are dealing with it and we are confident we can deal with it." This week marks 100 days until the start of the 24-team European Championship, and Ceferin called on organisers to "not just think about dark scenarios, there will be time for that later."

His comments came after FIFA president Gianni Infantino, addressing the Congress, urged authorities "not to panic".

UEFA General Secretary Theodore Theodoridis said European football's governing body "do not want to over-react" and was dealing with the situation "case by case". However, Champions League fixtures are a more pressing concern.

'PREPARED FOR EVERY EVENTUALITY'

On Tuesday evening Spain's health minister, Salvador Illa, said Valencia's Champions League last 16, second leg at home to Italian side Atalanta next Tuesday, March 10, should be played behind closed doors.

In Italy, Juventus had their Serie A game called off at the weekend, while Inter Milan played a Europa League home game behind closed doors last Thursday with the north of the country particularly badly hit by the outbreak.

Juventus are due to host Lyon in Turin in the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on March 17 and that game could also be played behind closed doors, chiefly because there is little room in a crowded calendar to allow for postponements.

Inter are also due to host Spanish side Getafe on March 12 in the Europa League.

Theodoridis said: "Inter already have two matches postponed, and they still play in the Italian Cup and the Europa



AMSTERDAM: UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin speaks during the 44th Ordinary UEFA Congress, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. — AFP

League, so this makes it almost impossible to find dates if we don't coordinate between the European leagues."

Concerns about the outbreak impacted on the draw for the next UEFA Nations League tournament in Amsterdam on Tuesday evening.

Scotland manager Steve Clarke was not present at the draw, with the Scottish FA telling the BBC that decision was made in order to avoid an "unnecessary risk" before his team play Israel in a key Euro 2020 qualifying play-off later this month.

Meanwhile, Spain coach Luis Enrique did not travel to Amsterdam due to illness, the Spanish Football Federation said. Asked about the possibility of his team's scheduled friendly against Italy in London on March 27 being cancelled, England manager Gareth Southgate said it was not the time to speculate.

"I think we have to be adaptable and have to make sure that we are prepared for every eventuality, but as we stand we are trying not to get too worried by all the hype, make sensible decisions on hygiene and go from there," he said.

"I don't want to make light of it, but equally there are dangers everywhere in life that you are aware of and conscious of." — AFP

Sydney stunned by 10-man Jeonbuk

SYDNEY: Sydney FC ended a three-game goal drought but failed to secure a first home AFC Champions League win in four years yesterday as 10-man Jeonbuk Motors snatched a dramatic 2-2 draw.

The Group H clash at Jubilee Stadium was only the second fixture this week to survive the havoc caused to Asia's top club competition by the coronavirus which saw 14 group stage matches postponed.

The game sprung to life five minutes after half-time when the South Korean two-time former continental champions took the lead as Luke Brattan poked an attempted clearance into his own net.

The Australian side levelled six minutes later when Trent Buhagiar finished coolly inside the near post after a mazy run. And it looked as if they had sealed their first home win since beating South Korea's Pohang Steelers in the 2016 group stages with a controversial penalty 15 minutes from time.

Choi Bo-kyung was ruled to have handled, though the ball appeared to strike the defender's ribs on the ground as he attempted to block a goalbound shot. Choi's agony was compounded as he was shown a red card and Adam Le Fondre smacked home from the spot for a 2-1 lead.

It was the ill-disciplined Jeonbuk's third red card in two Champions League outings, having been reduced to nine men in their 2-1 home defeat to Yokohama last month. Jeonbuk's Portuguese manager Jose Morais threw on striker Murilo Henrique in search of an equaliser with seven minutes to go and the bold move paid off.

The Brazilian rattled the post with a rasping right-foot shot in the 89th minute and Cho Gue-sung gratefully slotted home the rebound to secure a share of the points. On Tuesday, Johor Darul Ta'zim of Malaysia had enjoyed a 2-1 Group G win over South Korea's Suwon Bluewings in the week's only other match to survive the coronavirus chaos as travel restrictions forced most continental fixtures to be postponed.

Extra dates for group games have been pencilled in for April, May and June to clear the backlog, but it means last-16 games not beginning until August, two months later than normal. "These are challenging and unprecedented times," said Asian Football Confederation (AFC) general Windsor John after emergency talks in Kuala Lumpur with East Asia club representatives on Monday.

Delegates for the West Asia clubs, whose entire Champions League programme was postponed this week, will hold emergency talks with the AFC at the weekend in the United Arab Emirates.

The West and East competitions are played separately until the final. — AFP

Sport Times

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2020

25 Forty years on, 'Ringer's match' remains a byword for violence



26 India's teen cricket sensation tops women's rankings



27 Liverpool beaten again as Chelsea ease into FA Cup quarters



LeVert scores 51 as Nets top Celts in OT

BOSTON: Caris LeVert scored a career-high 51 points, 37 from the fourth quarter on, as the Brooklyn Nets rallied from 21 points down to stun the host Boston Celtics 129-120 in overtime Tuesday. LeVert shot 17 of 26 from the field and scored all 11 of the Nets' points in the extra period as they overcame 21 turnovers to snap a four-game losing streak. Timothe Luwawu-Cabarrot added 16 points off the bench for Brooklyn. Jaylen Brown had 22 points, and Kemba Walker scored 21 in his return from five games missed with a knee injury for the Celtics, who have lost back-to-back games for the first time since Jan. 16-18. The Nets scored a franchise-record 51 points in the fourth quarter to overcome a 71-50 deficit with 6:28 left in the third quarter. They entered the fourth down 84-67.

LOS ANGELES LAKERS 120 - PHILADELPHIA 76ERS 107
Anthony Davis had 37 points, 13 rebounds and four steals as Los Angeles defeated Philadelphia, who lost its ninth consecutive road game. Davis converted 13 of 19 shots from the floor, including 4 of 5 from 3-point range. LeBron James contributed 22 points for the Lakers, who have won nine of their last 10 games. The 76ers lost their ninth straight road game. Glenn Robinson III scored 25 points to lead the 76ers, and Tobias Harris added 18. The Lakers outshot the Sixers 53.5 percent to 44.7 percent from the floor.

LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS 109 - OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER 94
Kawhi Leonard scored 25 points to lift Los Angeles to a win at Oklahoma City. The victory was the fifth consecutive for the Clippers, their second-longest winning streak

of the season. During the streak, Los Angeles has averaged 120.6 points per game. The Thunder have dropped back-to-back games. Dennis Schroder led Oklahoma City with 24 points, including 13 in the first half.

MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES 139 - NEW ORLEANS PELICANS 134
Malik Beasley scored 28 points and D'Angelo Russell added 23 to lead eight Minnesota players in double figures during a win at New Orleans. James Johnson scored 19. Juancho Hernangomez had 16, rookie Naz Reid had his first double-double with 13 points and a career-high 14 rebounds for Minnesota, which made 14 of 34 3-point attempts and shot 55.7 percent from the floor. Jordan McLaughlin scored 13 points, and Jarrett Culver and Josh Okogie had 11 each. Jrue Holiday had 27 points and 12 assists. Lonzo Ball scored 26, rookie Zion Williamson scored 25. Brandon Ingram had 24. Josh Hart 11 and Derrick Favors contributed 10 apiece for the Pelicans.

SAN ANTONIO SPURS 104 - CHARLOTTE HORNETS 103
San Antonio overcame a horrid beginning without its coach and then held on without scoring in the final two minutes of a narrow victory over host Charlotte. With Spurs coach Gregg Popovich missing the game, the Spurs received 21 points from Dejounte Murray to win a night after a home loss to Indiana. Terry Rozier topped the Hornets with 20 points. Popovich was absent from the game due to what the team termed as personal business. Assistant coach Tim Duncan, a legendary former player for San Antonio, directed the Spurs.

TORONTO RAPTORS 123 - PHOENIX SUNS 114
Pascal Siakam scored 33 points, and visiting Toronto rallied past Phoenix to end a three-game losing streak. The Raptors trailed by 17 points during the second quarter and were behind by seven at halftime before taking a one-point lead into the fourth quarter. Kyle Lowry added 28 points for the Raptors, who have won six straight meetings with the Suns. Devin Booker scored 22 points for Phoenix, who have lost four straight.

GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS 116 - DENVER NUGGETS 110
Andrew Wiggins had 22 points and 10 assists as visiting Golden State beat Denver. Eric Paschall also scored 22 while Marquese Chriss scored 16 points. Mychal Mulder and Jordan Poole had 15 apiece, and Dragan Bender added 14 for Golden State. The Warriors outscored Denver 67-36 to end the game to get just their seventh road win of the season. Denver's Paul Millsap had 18 points and nine rebounds in his return to the lineup after sitting out one game due to an ankle injury. Will Barton also had 18 points. Nikola Jokic finished with 16 points and 13 rebounds.

SACRAMENTO KINGS 133 - WASHINGTON WIZARDS 126
Harry Giles III broke a late tie with consecutive baskets as host Sacramento beat Washington. De'Aaron Fox had a team-high 31 points for the Kings, who led by as many as 28 points in the second quarter before blowing it in a third period that saw Sacramento head coach Luke Walton ejected. The Wizards used a 46-point third-quarter explosion to rally into a 95-all tie and the game was deadlocked at 97 and 99 before Giles' two big baskets gave the Kings the lead for good. Washington's Bradley Beal finished with 35 points and eight assists. — Reuters



BOSTON: Javonte Green #43 of the Boston Celtics shoots the ball against the Brooklyn Nets at the TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP



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