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Flights suspended from 7 nations amid 3 new cases of coronavirus

Worldwide cases hit 100,000 • Saudi limits arrivals, reopens Kaaba area • Iran MP dies

Eight children killed in horrific house fire

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Eight children died of suffocation after a fire gutted a house in Sabah Al-Ahmad

yesterday. Firemen rushed to the scene after receiving an emergency call at 5:05 pm and rescued the children aged between 14 years and eight months - from inside the house. They were all in very critical condition, and later died in hospital, the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate said in a statement. An investigation has been opened into the incident.



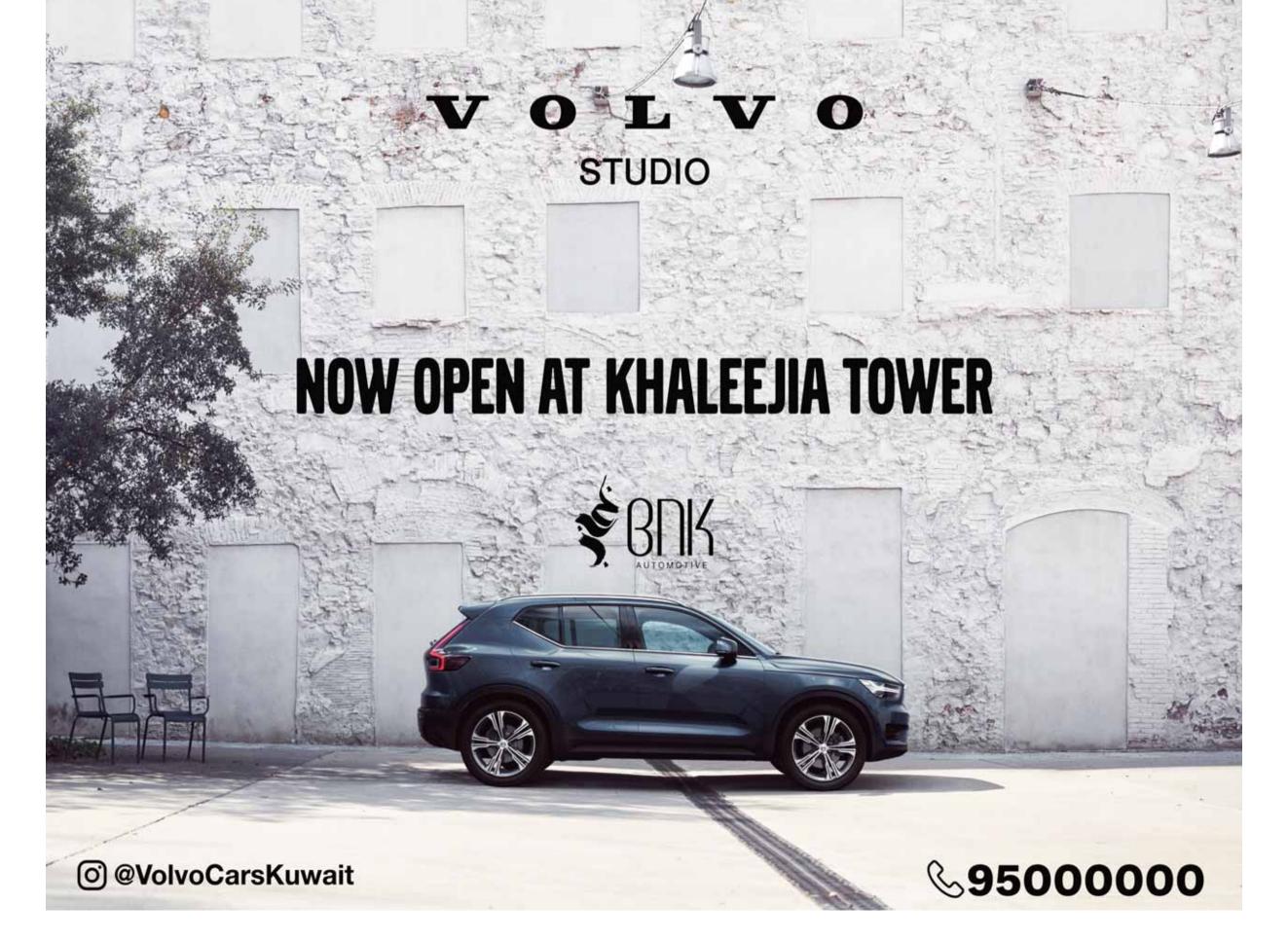
KUWAIT: Video grab shows flames shooting out of the window of a house in Sabah Al-Ahmad yesterday. **KUWAIT:** The health ministry announced yesterday the discovery of three new cases of coronavirus in the last 24 hours, as the number of COVID-19 cases topped 100,000 worldwide. Health Ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad indicated that all of the previously announced cases were in compulsory quarantine, adding that all of them recently returned from Iran. The number of those infected with the virus has reached 61 with one case of recovery thus far. The health ministry denied rumors that one of the critical cases had died.

Kuwait also suspended all flights to and from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Bangladesh, Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka for a week starting yesterday, the civil aviation directorate announced. Kuwait also banned the entry of anyone who has been in the seven countries in the last two weeks except for Kuwaitis coming from the seven countries, who will be allowed entry but will have to submit to quarantine procedures, the civil aviation directorate added.

Saudi Arabia limited yesterday land crossings with the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain to commercial trucks only, with arrivals from the three countries temporarily limited to three airports as a precaution taken over the spread of the coronavirus, Saudi news agency SPA reported. The three airports are King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, and King Fahd International Airport in Dammam, SPA added.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia reopened yesterday the area around the sacred Kaaba in Makkah's Grand Continued on Page 24

MAKKAH: Worshippers circumambulate the sacred Kaaba in the Grand Mosque yesterday. - AFP





Kuwait Fights Coronavirus

Polyclinic requests backup to test expats returning to Kuwait for COVID-19 infection

Search for unidentified shooter who targeted cop in Kabd

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Subhan polyclinic recently called for backup to help control crowds of recent expat returnees wishing to undergo precautionary medical tests, the Health Ministry said yesterday. This came in response to inquiries that many expats made after being told when they returned to Kuwait from abroad that they had to undergo tests to confirm they are free from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infection. "Expatriates were transferred to the Subhan polyclinic after they initially went to the Rabiya and Ishbiliya polyclinics to undergo necessary medical tests as a precautionary measure related to travel," the ministry wrote on its social media accounts. Photos and video footage showing large crowds of people waiting in line outside the Subhan polyclinic circulated on social media yesterday, as hundreds of expats, mostly Egyptians, returned to Kuwait before a one-week ban on flights from their countries kicked in yesterday. Kuwait suspended all flights to and from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Bangladesh, Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka for a week starting yesterday, and that two days after it suspended a decision which required travelers from said countries to conduct Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests at certified clinics before coming to Kuwait.

highway, said security sources, noting that the unidentified shooter was chasing the policeman's vehicle when he pointed a gun at him and fired a few shots, including one that hit the driver's seat without injuring the policeman. The policeman filed a complaint providing detectives with the shooter's vehicle license plate number. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Booths regulation

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) vesterday issued a decision organizing temporary sale outlets (booths) in the terms of the conditions needed to get related licenses. According to the new regulations, no booths will be allowed without prior licenses from MoCI's concerned department. The new regulations said only companies and individuals already licensed by MoCI to practice certain commercial activities will be licensed to have their own temporary booths.

MoCI added that interested licensees will apply with full data including copies of their commercial licenses, layout of the location and the approvals of the complex and the municipality. MoCI also noted that licenses would be valid for a maximum 12 renewable months according to what the ministry deems fit and warned that the outlet or booth will be immediately closed in case of violating the abovementioned regulations and conditions.



KUWAIT: A photo which circulated on social media yesterday shows a large crowd standing in line outside the Subhan polyclinic for precautionary medical tests.

A policeman was shot at while driving along Kabd

Unidentified shooter

local spotlight



Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

KUWAIT: Kuwait has so far recorded 61 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), all of which are 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 people have been discharged after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, a 34-year-old Kuwaiti man has recovered completely after previously been infected with the virus, the ministry said. Kuwait is taking measures to test Kuwaitis coming from infected areas for potential infec tion, as it has already tested over 3,100 people, the overwhelming majority of them have returned from 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 suspended all flights for a week starting March 7 to and from the following countries:

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 staffs). 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: 970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.

ast week, I like many others was calling on the government to take all necessary measures to protect the population in Kuwait from the risk of the spread of the coronavirus. One of those popular demands was the closure of air links with countries where there are cases of persons infected with the coronavirus. I think this procedure is important for the entire population, whether citizens or expatriates, because the risk of transmission of the virus from one person to another has no limits.

So keeping the ports open in a country like Kuwait, where the number of resident expatriates exceeds three million versus a million citizens means that there is a high possibility of transmitting the infection. Not only this, but it also means providing administrative and medical procedures, suitable quarantine, medical and nursing staff and equipment too.

The civil aviation authority issued a circular last week (which was later rescinded by the Kuwaiti Cabinet) for all foreign travelers coming from Egypt, the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Georgia, and Lebanon, to conduct a medical examination to confirm that they are free of the coronavirus before they enter Kuwait, and the examination must be conducted by health centers accredited by the Kuwaiti embassy or local authorities in countries where Kuwait does not have embassies

The announcement stated that in the event that a virusfree certificate is not carried, the passenger would be prevented from entering Kuwait and deported on the same carrier without the state bearing any financial costs, and the airline would be fined for violating this circular. As for the citizens of Kuwait coming from these countries, they will be allowed entry, provided that the necessary quarantine procedures are applied.

Flights to and from China, Hong Kong, Iran, South Korea, Thailand, Italy, Singapore, Japan and Iraq have been suspended temporarily. However, on Thursday, the Council of Ministers issued a decision to suspend the precautionary measures that were intended to be applied to Egyptians heading to Kuwait, which includes a certified examination to confirm being free of the coronavirus.

I think that the Kuwaiti government may have justifications for this step, as the Egyptian community in Kuwait is the largest Arab community, most of whom work in jobs in the government and private sector, including teachers, judges and engineers. In light of the decision to return to work after the national holidays, it is natural that there is a need for employment, but this does not mean ignoring the obligation to carry out mandatory testing for the coronavirus and not allowing any person to continue work without that certificate and presenting it to their supervisors at their workplaces, because the presence of an infected person means that many people may contract the disease, especially teachers who are likely to mix with children and other teachers. A compulsory medical examination is required and should not be ignored.

As fears rise of the proliferation of coronavirus around the world, scientists warn that the new virus may become "permanent" or "seasonal", meaning that it will not disappear at all. Some experts have warned that it could turn into a permanent disease like the cold and seasonal flu. Coronavirus is a threat to the general public, therefore, most countries have formed plans and strategies to reduce and confront it to limit its spread, and control it as much as possible and protect societies from it according to studied mechanisms.

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

- Lebanon - Syria
- Bangladesh
- Philippines
- India
- Sri Lanka

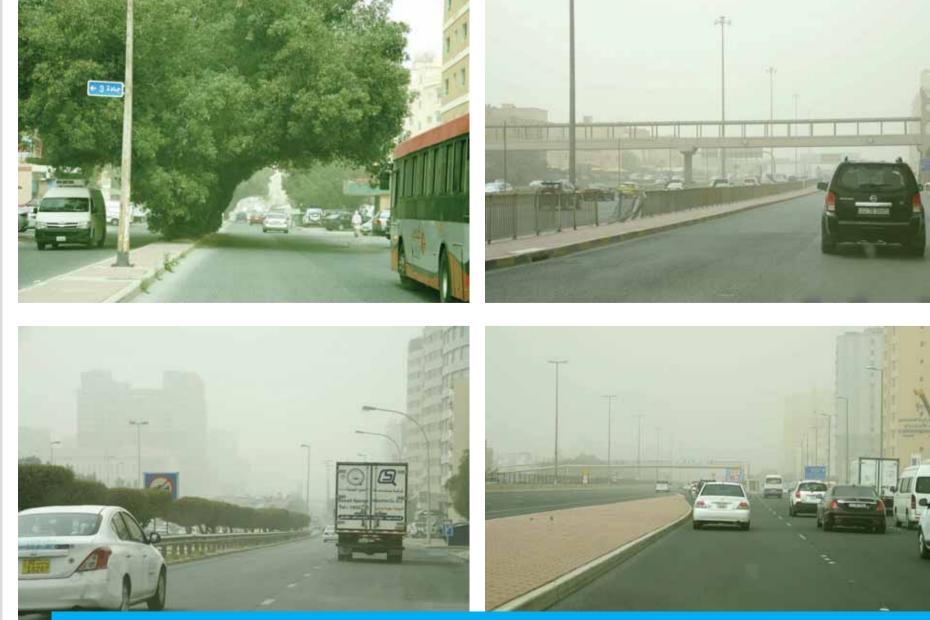
This came two days after Kuwait suspended a decision which required travelers to conduct Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests at certified clinics before coming to Kuwait from the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Georgia, and Lebanon.

Precautions

State departments have been on high alert to take

The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anticoronavirus 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)



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Interior Ministry yesterday called on motorists to exercise caution due to dusty weather and strong wind which hit Kuwait and caused low visibility in some areas. —Photos by Fouad AI-Shaikh



Local

Kuwait tightens curbs on coronavirus spread

Govt keen on citizens' safety: Speaker Ghanem



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's emergency meeting on Friday. — KUNA photos



(From left) Ministers of Commerce Khaled Al-Roudhan, Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti government decided to tighten controls on flights to and from countries hit by novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreaks. During its emergency meeting, held at Al-Seif Palace on Friday night under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Cabinet reviewed the measures adopted to stem the spread of COVID-19 and protect the safety of public health. His Highness the Prime Minister briefed the Cabinet members on the efforts to provide the competent authorities with all resources necessary for protecting the safety of the health of citizens and expatriates in Kuwait, said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh following the meeting.

Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah, who leads the interagency taskforce on COVID-19, briefed the meeting on latest figures of global outbreak of the epidemic and the related reports on its impact worldwide. The Cabinet members appreciated the selfless efforts being made by the frontline medical workers who pursue their humanitari-

an mission restlessly. They reviewed the precautions relating to the airlines working in the country adopted since the emergence of the epidemic in January, including the suspension of flights to and from China, Hong Kong, Iran, South Korea, Thailand, Italy, Singapore, Japan and Iraq.

In light of the Cabinet decree, adopted on Thursday, March 5, regarding the safety of foreign communities in Kuwait from the virus, they decided to suspend for one week all flights to and from Bangladesh, the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. All arrivals in Kuwait from any other nationality or via airports other than those of the above-mentioned countries will be denied entry if they travelled to these countries in the last couple of weeks even if they have valid residency or visas. Only Kuwaiti nationals living in those countries will be allowed in after undergoing the necessary quarantine measures, according to tonight's decree. The Cabinet stressed that the new measures are meant to protect the safety of the health of the citizens and expatriate residents in Kuwait, asking everybody to understand the urgency of these measures.

Citizens' safety

Earlier on Friday, Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem expressed confidence in the government's keenness on making decisions that preserve the health and safety of citizens. Ghanem, in a series of posts on Twitter, called on the government to "take decisions that protect the country's health security in their emergency meeting." He stressed that the health and safety of citizens in Kuwait is above any other considerations, urging the Cabinet to take decisions that protect the health security of the country. "I spoke to His Highness the Prime Minister, and I am confident that they are (the ministers) keen to take decisions that preserve the health and safety of citizens," he added. Ghanem called for holding a press conference at the ministerial level to clarify some of the issues that were marred by ambiguity for the citizens in all transparency and clarity. He expressed thanks, appreciation and support for all national cadres working in all the concerned authorities.

The Kuwaiti Health Ministry had announced vesterday the discovery of three new cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the previous 24 hours. Health Ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad indicated that all of the previously announced cases were in compulsory quarantine, adding that all of them have recently returned from Iran. The number of those infected with the virus reached 61 with one case of recovery thus far. On Friday, the ministry said that no new COVID-19 were recorded in the previous 24 hours. — KUNA





(From left) Ministers of public works Dr Rana Al-Fares, Social Affairs Mariam Aldeel and justice Fahad Al-Afasi.

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Amir directs standing by Iran in face of COVID-19

KUWAIT: Wishing its friendly people of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Alutmost safety while overcoming the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Friday expressed Kuwait's empathy towards what the Islamic Republic is facing, to his Iranian counterpart. In a phone call with its top diplomat Javad Zarif, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser also conveyed His Highness the Amir

Jaber Al-Sabah's directives to stand by Iran in this "difficult" health situation, as well as providing all that is needed to help limit the spread of the novel virus, said a foreign ministry statement. Meanwhile, Minister Zarif expressed the Islamic Republic's sincerest appreciation; both to the Kuwaiti leadership and people, for the benevolent gesture. — KUNA

Kuwait condemns terrorist attack in Tunisia

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences on Friday to Tunisian President Kais Saied, expressing condolences over the suicide attack that targeted the US embassy in Tunis and resulted in a casualty and injuries. His Highness the Amir expressed sorrow over the loss of life, hoping for a speedy recovery to those injured, as well as voicing the State of Kuwait's utter condemnation for such terrorist attack that goes counter to all human values and religious beliefs. His Highness the Amir also sent a cable to US President Donald Trump, where His Highness reiterated utmost denouncement for the attack. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables on the incident to both presidents.

Kuwait strongly condemned the "terrorist" bombing attack that targeted a security patrol in the Tunisian capital Friday, killing a security man and wounding others. A source from the Foreign Ministry affirmed on the principled position of Kuwait in rejecting all forms of terrorism and violence, stressing that the state of Kuwait is firmly supporting Tunisia in all measures needed to protect its security and stability. The source also expressed sincere condolences to the victim's family and wishes for a speedy recovery to all injured. - KUNA



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Local

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Photo of the Day



ACK students succeed in technological project competition at Maker Faire









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P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621 E: info@kuwaittimes.net **KUWAIT:** Two groups of engineering students from the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) were awarded for winning first and third place at the Maker Faire for 'Best Technological Project.' Maker Faire is an annual event for makers to showcase their inventions and designs, and it also includes competitions for makers to compete their creations with others in various fields. This year's Maker Faire is the fourth in the series, and included many different projects from over 12 countries.

Two groups of ACK students took part in the competition and they managed to secure first and third place while competing with 30 other projects. The project that managed to achieve first place for best technological project was "Super Capacitor Assisted Solar Hot Water System." The project was created by students from the ACK Electrical

KFAS co-organizes conference on 'War and Peace'

PARIS: The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) organized a conference on 'War and Peace' in Paris in cooperation with Science Po University to discuss topics on the role of diplomacy, the dangers of wars, conflicts, anthropology, and climate change. The permanent representative of Kuwait to the UN, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, participated in the conference held on the fourth and fifth of March to discuss the issue of war and diplomacy with a number of lecturers, most notably the former UN envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura.

Ambassador Otaibi stressed the importance of the role of the UN, in particular the Security Council assigned under the UN Charter in the service of international peace and security. He underlined the most prominent challenges facing the Council to carry out its tasks and responsibilities, including differences between the five permanent members and the increase in the use of the veto, in addition to other factors. Otaibi stressed on the importance of the UN, which celebrates the 75th anniversary of its establishment as the most important international multilateral body, and the need to preserve it and enhance its role. Engineering department, and was supervised by Dr Alireza Gheitasi, Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering. The students who worked on the project were Fatemah Al-Huli, Meshal Muzaiel, and Yaqoub Al-Bassam.

As for the project which received third place, it was titled "RF Controlled Robotic Vehicle with Metal Detection." It was designed by a group of Mechanical Engineering students under the supervision of Dr Adel Younes, Assistant Professor of Mechanical Engineering. The students that completed the project were Ala Omar, Faisal Al Mutairi, and Emad Nuaman. ACK is very proud of its students' achievements and would like to thank Maker Faire for giving its students such a wonderful opportunity to challenge themselves and demonstrate their skills and abilities.



PARIS: Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi (second from left) speaks during a seminar organized as part of the conference. — KUNA

Meanwhile, KFAS Member of the Board of Directors, Advisor at the Amiri Diwan, Dr Youssef Al-Ibrahim, affirmed the importance of this conference to generate solidarity for peace in the world. Ibrahim said that the joint program between the KFAS and the University of Science Po, which lasts for more than ten years, aims to organize activities and seminars related to the region and the State of Kuwait. The participating Kuwaiti delegation included KFAS Director-General, Dr Adnan Shihab Al-Deen, and the Deputy Director General for Supportive Programs Dr Amani Al-Baddah, Director of International Relations Youssef Al-Mazidi, Senior Officer of the International Relations Office Dalal Al-Hashash and the Board Member Khaled Al-Khudair. — KUNA



Local

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Kuwait Humanitarian aid continues despite coronavirus outbreak



aiti Humanitarian Relief Society team pose for group pictures with Syrian refugees. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait endeavors to aid all societies experiencing tough situations through financial and other means of support to alleviate them from further suffering. Kuwaitbased charity 'Al-Rahma International' initiated a comprehensive humanitarian program geared towards Syrian refugees residing in Jordan, with university students taking part in the endeavor. The five-day program mainly deals with providing healthcare for widows and orphans and conducting intricate surgical procedures on refugees suffering from a wide array of ailments, according to the

director of the charity's office in Syria and Jordan Waleed Al-Suwailem, who pointed out that volunteers doled out aid across camps housing the refugees. Following the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak - which has infected more than tens of thousands of people since it began last December in Wuhan, China - and continues to spread worldwide, the Kuwaiti Cabinet decided to dispatch medical supplies to China to back up the nation's efforts. Kuwait's Ambassador to China Sameh Hayat said in a statement to the press that \$3 million donation would be in

the form of urgent medical aid, to be delivered in coordination with the Chinese government.

charitable program that included the distribution of material aid to support the humanitarian situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan in which 42 young Kuwaiti men and women participated. The general manager of the society, Khaled Al-Shemmari, said at the end of the charity program in Jordan that the society distributed 500 baskets of basic foodstuffs to Syrian refugee families, 300 heating

devices and 600 blankets, in addition to providing material support to 50 families and scholarships to three University students and surgery for ten cases. He pointed out that the association's delegation prepared a course in relief and volunteer work through a visit to orphanages in Irbid governorate, northern Amman, and distributed aid to needy families. He also added that the trip included a visit to the schools affiliated with the association, where they held a recreational celebration for 200 Syrian children as part of three celebrations held during the trip. --- KUNA



ef aid part of a humanitarian program initiated by Al-Rahma International for Syrians in Jordan.





Narcotics control priority for Kuwait's **Interior Ministry**

VIENNA: A Kuwaiti security official affirmed, on Friday, that his country was keen on cooperating with regional and international bodies in the field of narcotics control, reiterating commitment to implement all global agreements concerning this matter. This came in a statement by the director of international control at the drug control department Colonel Fahad Al-Bader after the conclusion of the 63rd session of

Commission on Narcotics Drugs (CND). He stated that, during the meeting, most prominent activities and efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) in the drug control were highlighted, praising the role played by the CND in

the United Nations

Colonel Fahad Al-Bader

strengthening the capabilities against drugs. The CND was established in February 15, 1946, as an international organization dedicated to the fight against Narcotics. — KUNA





KUWAIT: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) CEO Hashem Hashem visited yesterday the site of the heavy fuel project which is carried out by Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) at Al-Ratqa oilfield north of the country. Hashem oversaw the process of work at the project which is eyed to boost Kuwait's oil production. — KUNA photos



DIRECTOR OF THE **COUNSELING** CENTER

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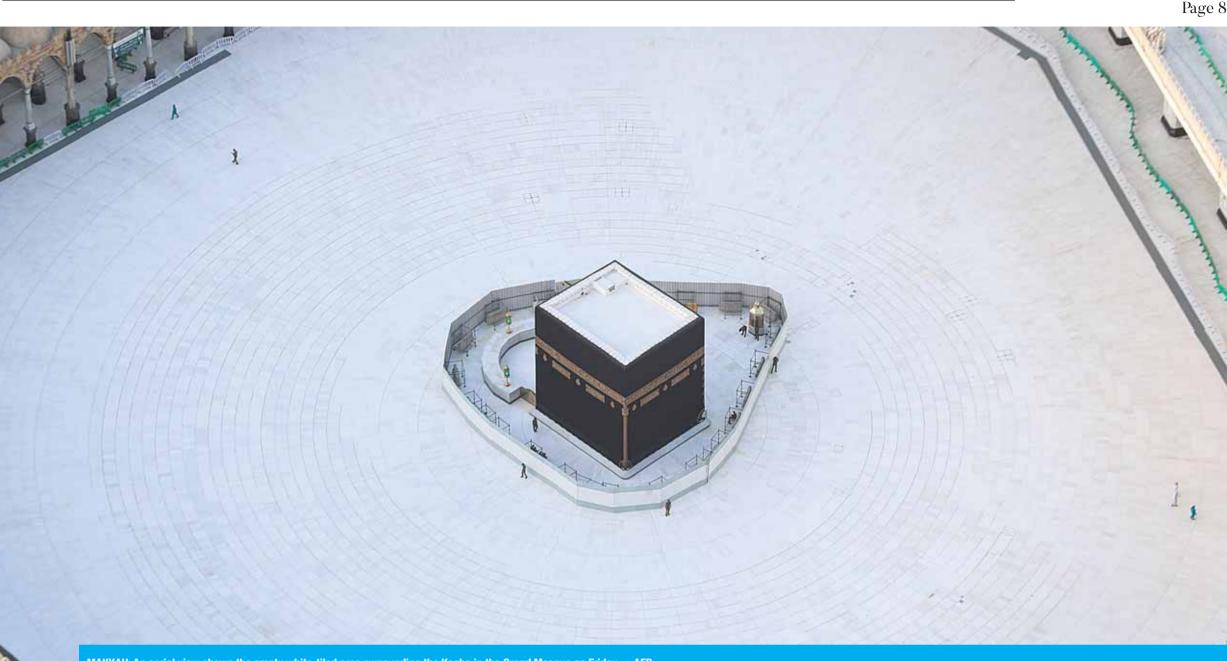
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Viruses: Ancient, tiny and amazing

Pakistan's 'biggest feminist' under fire after sexist tirade

Page 9



MAKKAH: An aerial view shows the empty white-tiled area surrounding the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque on Friday.—AFP

Prayers overshadowed by virus fears

Imam prays for an end to the epidemic during sermon

JERUSALEM: From Jerusalem to Makkah, Muslims across the Middle East held Friday prayers under the during his sermon, while praising Saudi Arabia's decicancelled and others subdued because of the deadly outbreak. The highly contagious disease is believed to be transmitted through close contact and authorities globally have moved to restrict large gatherings, including public prayers. In Makkah, Islam's holiest site was uncrowded after reopening on Friday following disinfection. "The fact that it is empty is very scary," an Egyptian worshipper who has lived in Makkah for more than 20 years said. "I had a very strange and difficult feeling as I was headed to the mosque. I felt deprived of the Kaaba," he said. The area around the Kaaba - a large black cube structure inside Makkah's Grand Mosque - was closed Thursday for sterilization. Friday prayers at the Grand Mosque normally attract hundreds of thousands of worshippers, while this week only tens of thousands attended. The

shadow of the new coronavirus, with some gatherings sion to suspend the year-round umrah pilgrimage soleum, which had been closed for disinfection. The the number of worshippers is less than last week first new coronavirus case in Iraq was identified in Najaf, which attracts millions of Iranian pilgrims annually.

over fears of the new coronavirus. "God, I seek refuge in you from the calamity and the epidemic," said Sheikh Abdullah Awad Al-Juhani.

Regional epicenter

In Iran, which has the most COVID-19 cases in the region, authorities have faced accusations of mismanaging the response to the outbreak. In total 4,747 cases have been reported in the country, with 124 deaths. Authorities cancelled weekly prayers in Tehran and provincial capitals. In Iraq, prayers were cancelled in the holy Shiite city of Karbala, home of the mausoleum of the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed.

For the first time since 2003 no one delivered the sermon of Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the highest authority for millions of Shiite Muslims. In the city of Najaf,

The Holy Land

In the Palestinian territories, the first seven COVID-19 cases were confirmed Thursday, with a further 19 reported so far in Israel. At Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam, weekly prayers proceeded despite the Palestinian government announcing a state of emergency Thursday evening. The mosque is managed by the Jordan Waqf (religious organization), but entrances are controlled by Israel - which has banned gatherings of more than 5,000 people.

An AFP photographer said inside the mosque was full but the large open spaces outside - usually filled

Pope goes livestream to fight viral epidemic

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis decided to deliver Sunday's prayer by livestream and Italy called in retired doctors as the new coronavirus epidemic gathered strength and emptied streets in Europe's worst affected country. The 83-year-old pontiff broke with centuries of tradition by enlisting the help of technology to keep crowds from descending on Saint Peter's Square for the traditional Angelus Prayer.

"The prayer will be broadcast via livestream by Vatican News and on screens in Saint Peter's Square," the Vatican said in a statement. It had originally promised to review the Argentine-born pope's schedule "to avoid the dissemination" of the new COVID-19 disease. The Vatican appears to believe that the pope's absence from his traditional spot at the window will keep the crowds on the vast square down and the threat of contagion low. The pope himself has been out of action for more than a week with a cold.

The Vatican is in the process of unrolling unprecedented health precautions designed to keep the city state's 450 mostly elderly residents safe. It recorded its first COVID-19 infection on Thursday and was awaiting the results of a test on another person who appeared at a Vatican-organized event last month. That conference was also attended by Microsoft President Brad Smith and European Parliament President David Sassoli. The Vatican said all those present were being notified about the test as a precaution.

Coalition leader gets virus

The Italian government finds itself at the forefront of the global fight against an epidemic that has convulsed the markets and paralyzed global supply chains since first emerging in China late last year. Ministers decided at an all-night emergency meeting to call in retired doctors as part of an effort to bolster the strained healthcare system with 20,000 additional staff.

Italy's death toll ballooned by a single-day record of 49 on Friday and now stands at 197 - the most outside China itself. The head of the Italian ruling coalition's junior partner became the latest high-profile figure to confirm coming down with the new disease. "I am fine," the Democratic Party's Nicola Zingaretti said on Facebook. "I will have to stay home for the next few days."

The accelerating spread of the illness emptied Italian train stations and turned usually thronged parts of Rome into a ghost town. Many of the city's outdoor restaurants and cafes were either closed on Friday night or had free tables overseen by forlorn staff with little to do but chat. The expansive street that runs from Rome's Colosseum along the Forum was deserted and the magnificent ruins stood in their natural splendor - and without being swarmed by tourists - on a sunny Saturday afternoon.

'Focus on containment'

The sharp drop in visitor numbers is wreaking havoc with the Italian tourism industry and contributing to fears that the anemic economy is about to tip back into recession. But the government's most immediate concern is the threat of infections that had been largely contained to pockets of the richer north spreading to the poorer and the south where medical services are weaker.

The World Health Organization urged the Italian government on Friday to keep "a strong focus on containment measures". The government said its medical recruitment drive should increase the number of intensive care beds from 5,000 to 7,500 in the coming days. The number of Italians receiving intensive care treatment for COVID-19 reached 462 on Friday. The total number of coronavirus infections grew to 4,636. —AFP

Worshippers avoid Madrid ritual after statue-kissing banned

MADRID: Was it fear of coronavirus? Or disappointment at not being able to kiss the feet of a wooden statue of Christ with a reputation for working miracles? At Madrid's Medinaceli Basilica, worshippers were scarce on Friday for an annual ritual that normally draws thousands. Earlier this week, the Catholic order in charge of this church in the heart of the Spanish capital said pilgrims would be allowed neither to "kiss nor touch the statue of Jesus of Medinaceli" to avoid coronavirus infections which by Friday had reached 365 cases and caused five deaths in Spain. Such restrictions have never been imposed in nearly a century of the tradition which takes place every first Friday in March. Pilgrims come from across Spain to kiss the feet of the life-size 17thcentury statue of Christ and make three wishes, with tradition holding that at least one is granted. Popular devotion to the rite is such that some of the faithful even begin queuing a week before the date, camping in the nearby streets, with the entry line on the day itself stretching for many hundreds of metres.

But on Friday morning, only a few dozen people could be seen waiting in the icy wind behind lines of metal barriers erected to corral the non-existent crowds. "You can normally wait here up to 12 or 14 hours," said Amparo Garcia, looking amazed as she gazed at the largely-empty streets that she said would normally be packed out with pilgrims. "You have to take precautions, for sure," this 61-year-old Madrid resident said. "It's fine not to touch (the statue). But the fact that no-one's here? That I've never seen." As usual, she had come down to the basilica before dawn in the expectation she would have to wait until 6:00 pm to get in. But in the end, she only had to wait a few minutes before entering the baroque sanctuary to kneel before the wooden icon and petition him for good health after recovering from cancer.

Inside the church, worshippers - the vast majority older women - take turns to pause before the statue

said Ammar Juwalis after praying. "It is required of us to pray each Friday. We are trying to be careful about corona," the 35-year-old said. Jerusalem's Old City was unusually quiet at Friday lunchtime, an AFP journalist said, with only a few tourists wandering around, some wearing masks.

In Bethlehem, a Palestinian city about 10 kilometers south of Jerusalem, authorities closed the Church of the Nativity, built on the site where Christians believe Jesus was born. The Palestinian territories' first COVID-19 cases were confirmed in a Bethlehem hotel Thursday, after a group of Greek tourists visited. Israeli authorities have banned tourist buses and visitors from Bethlehem from entering Jerusalem. At Jerusalem's Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray, new restrictions mean than only 5,000 people can visit at a time. —AFP



MADRID: Women wearing protective masks chat after a tradi-tional visit to the Jesus of Medinaceli Church on Friday, days after the church warned against kissing or touching its famous statue of Jesus in light of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. —AFP

whose feet are hidden behind a floor-length purple velvet robe, making the sign of the cross or blowing a kiss before moving on. One or two were wearing facemasks. "The reason fewer people are coming is the panic that has been created about coronavirus," said Benjamin Echevarria, the Capuchin friar who runs the church, saying they had repeatedly made clear there were "many ways to express devotion, not just with a kiss". But for Belen Ibanez, a journalist covering the event for radio Cope, it was more than just virus fears, "It's the end of a tradition that they loved - which is in some part devotion but also fetishism," she told AFP. "And I think part of that tradition is that if you don't kiss the statue, it doesn't work.'

Those who are there insist they're not afraid and are not disappointed about being unable to touch the statue that looms over the altar. "We have come with much faith, we have prayed and we have kissed him symbolically," said Maricarmen Perez Martin, a 54-year-old worshipper who has come from Toledo, a city about 75 kilometers south of Madrid. "Jesus will certainly stop the virus." Among the visitors were Spain's former Queen Sofia, mother of King Felipe VI, as well as the mayor of Madrid. With the coronavirus epidemic causing mounting infections every day, it is likely there will further bans imposed in the run up to Easter when there are a string of ceremonies involving the faithful kissing the feet or hands of statues during Catholic rituals. -- AFP



International

Bethlehem under lockdown after virus cases confirmed

Palestinians record first cases of the deadly coronavirus

BETHLEHEM: The city of Bethlehem was under lockdown yesterday after the first Palestinian cases of the deadly coronavirus were discovered there and authorities announced a state of emergency. Palestinian Health Minister Mai al-Kaila said a total of 16 cases of the COVID-19 illness had been detected in the Israelioccupied West Bank after nine new cases were discov-ered in Bethlehem, official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported Friday evening.

The Palestinian government announced a month-long state of emergency late Thursday after the first seven cases were identified, while the Israeli defense ministry said it had imposed emergency measures on Bethlehem, with everybody "forbidden from entering or leaving the city". It added that the lockdown had been imposed "in coordination with the Palestinian Authority"

The Church of the Nativity, built on the site Christians believe was the birthplace of Jesus, was closed on Thursday and along with other sites is expected to be shuttered for a month. All tourist buses to and from Bethlehem were banned until further notice, Israeli police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said. An AFP journalist saw around 20 buses stuck at a checkpoint run by Israeli personnel at the entrance to the Palestinian city, which is around 10 kilometers south of Israeli-controlled Jerusalem.

Witnesses said some tourists in Bethlehem were trying to bypass military controls in order to reach Jerusalem. The streets of Bethlehem and Ramallah, where the Palestinian government is based, were nearempty on Friday morning, with most shops closed, AFP journalists said. Israel controls all entrances to the West Bank from the Jewish state but the Palestinian govern-

Caught up in Sahel war, Mali villagers flee to uncertainty

SEVARE: Two months ago, all 400 inhabitants of the Malian village Toou grabbed a few belongings and fled fighting between armed groups, leaving their homes behind among the ghosts of the country's war. Today, they sleep in an abandoned school in Sevare near the regional capital Mopti, packed into two buildings among vacant lots and a dirt road. The men live in the building to the right; the women and children in the one to the left. Toou's residents have joined a mass of more than a million people displaced by the violence in the centre of the Sahel, in particular in Mali and neighboring Burkina Faso.

"The day is fine, but in the evening, there are people everywhere: here, there, over there and there. There are 10 of us sleeping in the same room," says Housseini Karembe, 65, waving his hand over the cramped living space. Karembe and the others left Toou on January 5 when months of tension between traditional Dogon hunters and jihadists finally reached the village, spelling its doom. Summoned by the jihadists and ordered to leave, the entire village's population - 400 men, women and children-fled with almost nothing, and walked the 26 kilometers to

ment has limited autonomy in cities.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh made a special broadcast late Thursday to announce the 30-day lockdown, saying the measures were essential to contain the disease. All but essential travel between Palestinian governorates was now prohibited, while all schools and educational facilities would close, he said. Public parks and tourist sites would close while large sporting events, conferences and other major gatherings were cancelled, Shtayyeh added. The Palestinian health ministry said the cases had first been detected at a hotel in the Bethlehem area.

Church of Nativity disinfected

The emergency measures came after the first Palestinian cases were confirmed Thursday afternoon. The seven people initially found to be infected were being treated in quarantine, the Palestinian health ministry had said. The head of the local health directorate, Imad Shahadeh, told AFP that a group of Greek tourists had visited the hotel in late February, with two later diagnosed with the virus. A number of suspected cases have since been identified among hotel workers, he said.

Asbed Balian, senior cleric of the Armenian Church at the Church of the Nativity, said infected visitors had entered the site. "People affected by corona visited the church," he said. Workmen began spraying disinfectant inside the church on Thursday evening, an AFP photographer said. COGAT, the Israeli body responsible for civilian activities in the Palestinian Territories, said it was "working closely with the Palestinian Authority" to stem the spread of the virus.

Israel, which so far has 21 confirmed cases, has

Sevare through the bush and blazing sun.

Karembe sits, leaning against the wall, in an old classroom where the chalk-marked blackboard is a reminder of the children who once studied there. Beside him crackles an old radio. "We need tents, we can't stay like this in a school," said Karembe, a marabout or village elder, who taught young people the Koran before they fled. After escaping with little more than cooking pots, some are embarrassed about their situation. "We have a roof over our heads and we have something to eat," said one resident. "We mustn't complain too much."

The growing war

Mali's war erupted in 2012 when Tuareg rebels supported by armed Islamists took over the desert north of the country. The rebels were then outmanoeuvred by their Islamist allies and the French military intervened to push them back. The conflict has since swept into the centre of Mali and spilled into neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger, inflaming ethnic tensions



coronavirus. —AFP

in a bid to contain the virus. It has also scrapped joint military exercises with the United States in Germany.

imposed stringent measures on many European nations The Israeli army announced that from noon Friday all forces would be prevented from leaving Israel, whether "on personal trips or on duty". —AFP



SEVARE, Mali: Children play in a camp for IDPs on Feb 28, 2020. —AFP

Telemo Sombor Ga, 55, the brother of the village chief.

For months, Toou had been caught between the jihadists and the dozos, the traditional Dogon hunters

Mexico men confront machismo culture in therapy to combat women violence

MEXICO CITY: In an improvised therapy room in a large house in the center of Mexico City, a group of men aged between 20 and 70 close their eves, inhale and exhale. Each places his hand on his heart and - in a moment of honest reflection - takes time to think about the violence he inflicted on women and the consequences of those actions. "I'm Jaime. This week I committed

along the way.

More than 5,000 French troops, a regional G5 Sahel military cooperation deal and a UN peacekeeper mission in Mali have not been enough to contain the violence. For Toou's 400 residents, that meant leaving their lives and homes behind. Toou inhabitants receive coupons from the World Food Program each month to buy food. A few pots the group use to cook sit in the school courtyard. "These are the only objects we were able to take when we fled. Things to cook with," says

who have united into a militia claiming to defend the population against jihadists in the absence of the state. The dozo militia has styled itself as the bulwark against the jihadists led by Amadou Koufa, a Fulani imam who took up arms in 2015 and trained hundreds of young people under the banner of Al-Qaeda. Direct clashes, sporadic in the past, have become more frequent. Before, jihadists often passed through Toou to preach, but "they left us alone," says Telemo Sombor Ga. —AFP

Sea of meth as Myanmar army smashes drug labs

KAWANGHKA: Sacks of heroin and methamphetamine are laid out in endless rows in a remote Myanmar border zone during a rare raid in the heart of Southeast Asia's infamous 'Golden Triangle'. The seizure in one of the world's biggest narcotics-producing regions put three major laboratories out of business this week and hauled in 43 million meth tablets.

Record amounts of drugs continue to be churned out of the lawless forest areas by rebel groups and shadowy organised crime networks making billions of dollars each year from the trade. Army operations around the Kutkai area of Myanmar's Shan State found the factories producing millions of "yaba" pills - cheap, caffeine-cut meth tablets - as well as heroin and the more addictive crystal meth, known as "Ice".

"Our soldiers are on the ground in areas of the forest the police cannot reach," Major General Tun

Suicide attackers hit outside US embassy

TUNIS: Suicide attackers struck outside the US embassy in the Tunisian capital on Friday, killing a police officer, wounding six other people and once again shaking a city repeatedly hit by jihadist violence. The latest attack came despite a state of emergency imposed in the North African nation in 2015 following a string of bloody assaults claimed by the Islamic State group. The noon explosion rocked the Berges du Lac district hosting the highly fortified embassy, causing panic among pedestrians and motorists. "Two individuals targeted a security patrol... in the street leading to the American embassy," the interior ministry said in a statement.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Police at the scene said the assailants drove to the area on a motorcycle and detonated their explosive devices as they were approached by officers at a roundabout near the embassy. The two attackers died and one officer, 52-year-old father of three Lieutenant Taoufik Mohammed El Nissaoui, died of his wounds. Five more injured officers and a lightly wounded female civilian were in a stable state, Interior Minister Hichem Mechichi told journalists.

Tun Nyi, a spokesman for the commander-in-chief's office, told reporters on Friday in a rare press tour to a murky zone of drug production and rebel wars. Myanmar is under pressure to stem the deluge of drugs from its freewheeling border regions. Shan State is part of the Golden Triangle - a rugged wedge of land cutting into Myanmar, Laos, China and Thailand that is virtually untroubled by authorities despite its prolific production. "This is the biggest seizure of the year... the whole world is fighting drugs," Tun Tun Nyi added.

The haul was worth nearly \$100 million in Myanmar, the army said. But the price of yaba -Southeast Asia's favourite high - triples as it crosses borders into Thailand and Malaysia. Made-in-Myanmar Ice goes for around \$150,000 a kilo by the time it hits Australia's streets. Drugs are trafficked south through Thailand, north into China and west towards Bangladesh - a cascade of stimulants that has overwhelmed regional policing efforts and seeded a crisis of addiction, corruption and money laundering.

A crackdown in the same area last year was met with heavy artillery fire by the rebel groups believed to be running the labs. "This area is very dangerous," an anti-drugs police officer in Kawangkha told AFP, requesting anonymity. "The local people are innocent, but there are some busi-

"It was a homemade explosive device and we are looking for those who helped make it," he said. Local media reported police raids on two working-class neighborhoods in northern Tunis. Anti-terrorism prosecutors have opened an enquiry, spokesman Sofiene Sliti said, but no arrests had yet been made. DNA tests were underway to identify the attackers, he said, adding that a large quantity of explosives was used. "All security units are on high alert," the interior ministry said.

After Friday's blast, police sent reinforcements and forensic experts to the area, where body parts were strewn across the ground. A helicopter buzzed over the Berges du Lac, a district protected round-the-clock by security forces. "It's tough to have to go on working when your colleagues have been wounded," said one police officer at the scene. Office worker Haykel Boukraa spoke of widespread panic. "Our office is 300 meters from (the blast scene), but the explosion was so loud that the windows in our building shook," the 49-year-old told AFP. "There was total panic."

Earlier police had said one of the two assailants had tried to enter the embassy but was prevented by police. But interior ministry spokesman Khaled Ayouni said that "the police patrol was targeted, rather than the embassy". He noted that the attack took place the day before the fourth anniversary of a 2016 attack in the town of Ben Guerdane,



KAWNGHKA, Myanmar: Seized drugs, vehicles, laboratory accessories and precursor chemicals are displayed in a foot ball ground to be witnessed by invited military attaches and ournalists in Shan state on Friday. —AFP

nessmen and ethnic armed groups using the area to produce drugs." The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime says that without tough action against dirty money coupled with better drug rehabilitation programs, the power of organized crime will become unmanageable for some Southeast Asian states. —AFP



TUNIS: Police and forensic experts inspect the scene of an explosion near the US embassy in the Tunisian capital on Friday. —AFP

which killed 13 security forces and seven civilians. US ambassador to Tunisia Donald Blome praised authorities for their "immediate protection" of the embassy. A senior State Department official who returned from Tunisia to the US on Thursday said that despite the attack, the country has been increasingly effective in fighting violent extremism. —AFP

verbal and emotional violence against my partner. I'm here to help and be helped," said a 63year-old before a dozen other men replied in unison: "I will help you."

Mexico is suffering from a femicide crisis, with 10 women murdered every day, and increasingly men are questioning the prevalent male chauvinism - or machismo - deeply entrenched in society. "I've never been physically violent with a woman, but yes I've done it in other forms: emotionally, verbally and sexually because several times I was unfaithful," said Jaime, who withheld his surname to protect his family. "I recognize that and I want to change."

Jaime approached Gendes, a gender and development center, a couple of years ago on his partner's advice as they struggled with relationship problems. Founded in 2009, Gendes conducts studies about social inequality and supports activism in a bid to rehabilitate male chauvinists.

'Violence, domination and force'

"Masculinity has always been associated with violence, domination and force, but now that's changing. New (perceptions of) masculinity propose the idea of promoting equal treatment of men and women," said psychotherapist and Gendes director Mauro Vargas. He aims to teach the 1,200 men per year who attend his meetings to understand and confront the different types of violence against women: sexual, physical, economic, verbal and cyber.

Mexico has long faced governmental indifference and ineffective policies when it comes to tackling violence against women. Women have begun to take to the streets to demand immediate action to reduce the number of femicides, which grew by 136 percent between 2015 and 2019. Two brutal murders last month, including that of a seven-year-old girl, highlighted the issue ahead of International Women's Day March 8 and ignited protests.

Vargas says daily occurrences such as wolf whistling, sharing photos of naked women or sexist comments about female colleagues perpetuate an inequality that results in violence against women. The therapy at Gendes helps men "unlearn what society has taught them within a macho and misogynistic environment," said Vargas. - AFP



MEXICO CITY: Men participate in a therapy to reflect on male chauvinism in Mexico City's neighborhood of La Roma on Feb 25, 2020. — AFP



International

Migrant crisis at Greek-Turkish border in second week as EU mulls more aid

Tear gas, water cannon deployed again

KASTANIES: The European Union has pleaded with most number of refugees in the best possible way of migrants on the Turkish border to stop trying to cross into Greece but dangled the prospect of more aid for Ankara as a standoff between Greek riot police and refugees entered a second week. Tens of thousands of migrants have been trying to get into Greece, an EU member state, since Turkey said on Feb. 28 it would no longer try to keep them on its territory as agreed in 2016 with the EU in return for billions of euros in aid.

Greek and Turkish security forces again deployed tear gas on Friday, witnesses said, sending plumes of smoke above the Kastanies-Pazarkule border crossing. Some migrants dabbed stinging eyes with water. Other trekked through fields probing for chinks in the wellguarded frontier. "The news about the alleged openness (of the Greek-Turkish border) is false and people should not try to move there," the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, told reporters during a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Croatia.

The EU could offer more money beyond the 6 billion euros (\$6.79 billion) pledged in 2016 to help the refugees but Turkey must first stop using them as a "bargaining chip", he said. Turkey, which hosts nearly 4 million Syrian war refugees, says the EU has failed to honor earlier promises. It also wants more European support in Syria, where its troops are facing off against Russian-backed Syrian government forces.

In a sign of the EU's hardening stance since the 2015 migration crisis, when more than a million migrants entered Europe from Turkey, the ministers in Zagreb said they were ready to take "all necessary measures" to stop illegal crossings into Greece, without elaborating. Turkey's foreign ministry slammed the statement, saying it showed EU countries were using migrants as political tools, and that they were allowing international law to be "trampled". It said EU support for Greece showed the bloc was allowing its own values and laws to be disregarded.

"EU countries, including Greece, must abide by their international responsibilities and accept the applications of refugees," the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement, adding that the comments showed the EU did not understand the burden Turkey had to carry in hosting the migrants. "Accusing a country that hosts the

using migration for political aims is another indication of the two-faced approach we have been subjected to for years. With this statement, the EU is itself using this issue as a political tool," it said.

'At Europe's mercy'

Migrants such as 18-year-old Ahmad Al-Sadeq, from Syria's war-ravaged Idlib province, are unlikely to heed such warnings. "We will stay here for months. We hope that public pressure will grow and force the Greek government to change its mind. The situation requires some heart, not tear gas and fences," said Sadeq, who got into Greece on Thursday but was then sent back. "We left Syria to escape a government that murders women and children ... and now we are here at Europe's mercy." But Fawzi Uzbek, 37, an Afghan national who wants to reach Germany, said he would probably soon head back to Istanbul, where he has been working in a factorv for about 18 months. "The Greeks know that if they open the gates they will get many more people (arriving) on this side of the border," said Uzbek, sitting in a makeshift tent he had constructed near the border for himself, his wife and four children. About a quarter of the migrants at the border are Syrian and most of the rest are Afghans, Pakistanis, Iranians and Africans, according to Turkish estimates.

Greece says it has repulsed around 35,000 migrants trying to cross its border in the past week. Turkey has deployed 1,000 special police to the area to halt the pushback of migrants onto its territory. Athens plans to extend its border fence by a further 40 km, sources with knowledge of the matter said. It has also stepped up naval patrols in the Aegean to deter migrants trying to reach Greek islands such as Lesbos by dinghy.

All at sea

Turkey's coastguard rescued about 120 migrants, including small children, early on Friday. The migrants said the Greek coastguard had disconnected their boats' motors, leaving them adrift in the Aegean. On Lesbos, just a few miles from the Turkish coast, fishermen, hoteliers and shopkeepers expressed concern that more migrant arrivals would further harm their island's

Haiti's vicious cycle of humanitarian, political crises

Guinea 'opposition wounded' turn to clandestine clinic

CONAKRY: In a dingy room reeking of blood and sweat in Guinea's capital Conakry, a volunteer doctor treats a man with bullet wounds in his legs as he tries to suppress his groans. Hidden inside a gated compound a stone's throw from the city centre, supporters of the West African state's beleaguered political opposition treat men and boys they say were injured during raids by security forces. Guinea has been rocked by huge protests since mid-October over fears that President Alpha Conde is seeking to use a referendum for a new constitution to stay in power. Protests have often turned violent, drawing rebukes for security forces from human rights groups over their use of force and alleged abuses. At least 31 people have died in the unrest to date, according to an AFP tally, including one gendarme.



EDIRNE, Turkey: Migrants run away from teargas at the Turkey-Greece border buffer zone near Pazarkule crossing gate yesterday during clashes between Greek police and migrants trying to cross to the Greek side. —AFI

reputation as a dream holiday destination.

"Most businesses, at least tourism businesses, are going to hell," said Vangelis Papastavros, whose wife owns a hotel in Mytilene, the largest town on an island which already houses some 20,000 migrants in camps in mostly squalid conditions. Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan discussed the crisis with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Friday, saying migration regulations between Ankara and the EU were not working and needed to be revised, the Turkish presidency said.

The EU's Borrell said a new ceasefire deal brokered by the presidents of Turkey and Russia for Syria's Idlib province could facilitate increased humanitarian help to

the deaths are thought to have occurred in Conakry opposition strongholds, where residents complain of routine harassment from security forces. "Some of the wounded are afraid to go to the hospitals," said a doctor working in the makeshift clinic, whom AFP is not naming for security reasons. Residents of the wrong neighborhoods fear they will be turned away from hospitals, or that security forces will pursue them there.

So many of the injured attend the hidden clinic run by the FNDC, an alliance of opposition civil-society groups which rejects the new constitution. The clinic itself is rudi mentary, consisting of one small, hot room run by volunteer medics. It treats about 50 people after every protest, leading FNDC member Ibrahima Diallo said. Outside the room, about a dozen mostly teenagers - wearing bandages and splints, some barely able to talk — sit on upholstered chairs on a shaded terrace. AFP spoke to 12 men and boys receiving treatment at the clinic last week. All said they came from known opposition districts in Conakry and that they were targeted despite not taking part in protests. The interviews took place on March 1, two days after Conde postponed a referendum on his reforms after domestic and international criticism about the fairness of the vote. Following the post-

Syria and for the refugees housed in Turkey. He said the EU would host a donor conference on June 29-30. But such news provides scant comfort for the migrants stranded at the Greek-Turkish border.

On Friday night, the occasional pop of teargas was permeated by Christian hymns on a loudspeaker from a small chapel on the border, a service common during a period of abstinence observed before Easter in Greece. Sawsan Al-Musawa, who travelled 1,300 km with her four children from a Syrian refugee camp in southeast Turkey to the Greek border, said she had all but given up hope of ever reaching Europe. "We are left to the dogs," she said. —Reuters



PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haiti finally has a new government, but without a parliament capable of giving it legitimacy and without electoral prospects, the country remains paralyzed by a political crisis with potentially devastating social, economic and security consequences. It's been more than a year since the Caribbean nation has been led by an interim government. Joseph Jouthe, nominated Monday, is the fifth prime minister chosen by embattled President Jovenel Moise since the latter came to power in February 2017.

But neither Jouthe's general policy nor his cabinet, which was announced Wednesday, can get the approval of deputies and senators: since no legislative elections were held in the fall, Haiti's parliament has been inoperative since January. "Haiti has neither an electoral law nor an electoral budget. President Moise could pass an electoral law and budget by decree, but popular protests and dissent make clear this would not be seen as legitimate," Ellie Happel, a lawyer and the Haiti program director for Global Justice Clinic, testified Wednesday to the US Congress's Commission on Human Rights.

Moise - who took office after an election process that lasted nearly two years and in which barely 20 percent of the electorate participated - was relatively unknown to the public until he announced his presidential bid. Criticized from the get-go by his main opponents, the Haitian leader has quickly attracted public anger, as demonstrations demanding his resignation have proliferated across the island.

Corruption and poverty

In a nation where more than 60 percent of the population lives under the poverty line (less than \$2.41 per day, according to the World Bank), protests against Moise increased in May 2019 when the High Court of Accounts announced he was suspected of involvement in a huge corruption scandal that stretches back a decade.

This came amid security troubles in the country, with violence and unrest spreading beyond the shantytowns of the capital, which have been controlled by armed gangs for years. In the fall of 2019, repeated protests and barricades erected on the country's main roads blocked almost all activities, prompting a majority of schools to shut down for more than two months. Moise told his cabinet that restoring security, by guaranteeing free movement for people and goods throughout the country, was a priority. But the government's ability to intervene appears slim. "A new government in such a complex context, without adequate budgetary resources, without a peaceful climate, without a real national dialogue, without a real desire to separate from corrupt practices will not work miracles," said Haitian economist Etzer Emile.

Low investment

In addition to the political impasse, Haiti has seen a surge in kidnappings for ransom in recent weeks that is a major blow to hopes for economic recovery. "Misery is increasing. Investments, domestic and foreign, have never been as weak as they have in the past few years," said Emile. - AFP

Underscoring Guinea's political polarization, many of

Viruses: Ancient, tiny and amazing

PARIS: They're as old as life itself but scientists can't say for sure if they're alive. They're written into our DNA, shaping the human saga through mutation and resilience. We touch hundreds of millions of them every day. As the novel coronavirus outbreak disrupts global markets and prompts unprecedented containment measures, it is worth asking a very basic question: what, precisely, is a virus? What are they made of? Where did they come from? And, perhaps most importantly, why are they trying to kill us?

Unimaginable numbers

The story of viruses is perhaps best told through mind-bending figures. According to Curtis Suttle, a virologist at the University of British Columbia, the physical properties of viruses make them hard for us to comprehend. Their tiny size, for starters. If each virus in a human body grew to the size of a pinhead, the average adult would become 150 kilometers tall. In a 2018 study, Suttle found more than 800 million viruses settle on each square meter of Earth every single day.

In a tablespoon of seawater there are typically more viruses than there are people in Europe. "Most of us will swallow more than a billion viruses every time we go swimming," said Suttle. "We are inundated by viruses." A 2011 paper published in Nature Microbiology estimated that there are 1010 to the power 31 (more than one quintillion, or 1 followed by 31 zeros) viruses on Earth. Lay them all end to end and they'd stretch 100 million light years, or 1,000 times the breadth of the Milky Way.

The virus as concept

Viruses are best thought of as "molecular packages", accord-

Women account for quarter of world MPs, but progress slowing

GENEVA: A quarter of all lawmakers serving in national parliaments worldwide are women, the International Parliamentary Union said Friday, warning though that progress towards gender parity was slowing amid significant "pushback". In 2019, women accounted for 24.9 percent of parliamentarians worldwide, the IPU, which

ing to Teri Shors, professor of biology at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and author of several books on the subject. "These packages have to be small enough to fit inside of a cell to cause infection," she told AFP. Essentially strings of genetic material contained by a few protein molecules, viruses occupy a strange middle ground between the living and the inert. Since they don't have cells and do not produce energy through respiration - a key definition of living organisms - many scientists don't consider them to be alive. Yet, as soon as they enter their host, viruses spring into activity in ways rarely seen in nature, hacking cells with new genetic instructions to replicate at dizzying speed.

Ed Rybicki, a virologist at the University of Cape Town, said viruses were "as much a concept as a thing". "I consider viruses to be alive, because when they are in a cell, they ARE the cell," he said. Shors said that viruses were "metabolically inactive". "Unless they can enter a warm body and get inside of a cell, viruses are inert," she said. But once it infects its host, "the entire cellular machinery is entirely devoted to making viral progeny", said Suttle. "This is the living virus."

Origins

While their beginnings are uncertain, viruses have left their imprint on nearly all life on Earth, including humans. Around eight percent of the human genome is of viral origin - that is, the remnants of ancient viruses that have infected us, developing species-wide tolerance. But their story begins aeons before humans. "We think that viruses were there at the very beginning," said Suttle. "Whatever primordial soup gave rise to cellular life, likely gave rise to viral 'life' at the same time."

Are all viruses bad?

Most viruses come to our attention because they make us sick. Recent years have seen widespread outbreaks of viral infectious diseases, from the coronavirus epidemic today to SARS in the early 2000s and Ebola in western and central Africa.

was founded in 1889 and is one of the world's oldest international organizations, said in a fresh report.

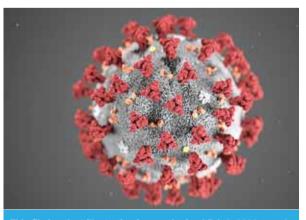
There has been considerable progress" in recent vears, IPU Secretary-General Martin Chungong told reporters in Geneva, pointing out that the percentage back in 1995 stood at just 11.3 percent. "There has been a shift in the way people think," he said, pointing out that a quarter century ago the ambition was to get women to the 30-percent mark, while today "the idea of having 50-50 in parliament is the norm."

Four countries have reached full gender parity: Rwanda, Cuba, Bolivia and the United Arab Emirates. Today, the Americas has the best gender balance in parliament, counting 31.3 percent women MPs across

CONAKRY: A man recovers from a gunshot wound to the hand inside a hidden makeshift hospital on March 1, 2020. —AFP

ponement, on February 29, protests broke out in opposition districts along one of the city's main thoroughfares, where from sidestreets, youths hurled rocks at riot-gearclad security forces.

It is unclear when the constitutional referendum will be held, although Conde has promised it will take place within two weeks of the original date of March 1. —AFP



This file handout illustration image obtained Feb 3, 2020 reveals ultrastructural morphology exhibited by the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. —AFP

But there are virtuous viruses too. "Nearly all viruses are in fact harmless to humans," said Rybicki. Indeed, many viruses benefit human health, infecting other organisms that would otherwise do us harm. Another benefit: the carbon uptake of ocean algae, which helps purify the air we breathe, is greatly accelerated by viruses. And they have widespread healthcare applications.

Besides vaccines derived from weakened viruses, an emerging area of treatment known as virology is developing new ways to treat chronic diseases such as cancer. "These viruses replicate in cancer cells but not healthy cells, so this treatment is not as toxic as classic cancer therapies," said Shors. For Rybicki, who has spent most of his professional life trying to unlock their secrets, the most remarkable thing about viruses is how many more mysteries they still hold. "They are the most diverse organisms on our planet, and there are more of them than anything else - and we still know hardly anything about them." - AFP

the region, ahead of Europe which counts just under 30 percent. The Pacific has the worst record on female representation in parliament, with only 19.4 percent, and three countries in this region - Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu - have no women members of parliament at all.

Chungong warned that worldwide there was now clearly "a slowdown in the growth of women's parliamentary participation." Last year, women's global representation in parliament grew by only 0.6 percent, after an already modest increase of 0.9 percent a year earlier. "There seems to be pushback when it comes to women's political participation, and it is important that we push back against pushback," he said. —AFP



International

'China is not immigrant country': A draft law sparks online racism

Foreigners may gain permanent residency

BEIJING: A new draft law that could make it easier for foreigners to gain permanent residency in China has stirred up a torrent of xenophobia online. The proposal, released by the justice ministry last week, has been gathering billions of views and a flood of angry posts on social media, targeting Africans in particular. "China's forty years of family planning policy does not make it a place for foreign trash to soar," wrote one user on the Twitter-like platform Weibo, referring to the one-child birth limit China imposed between 1980 and 2016.

The person went on to use racist language against black people, saying: "Our common Chinese ancestry

will not be tainted by Africans." Some Weibo-users posted videos of black people apparently committing crimes in China, while a campaign to encourage Chinese women to date Chinese men, under the hashtag "China girl", had 240 million views as of Thursday afternoon. Another widely-shared post on Weibo read: "China is not an immigrant country." A hashtag related to the law has gained more than 4.8 billion views.

The law — open to suggestions from the public until March 27 - proposes allowing foreigners' dependants to apply simultaneously for permanent residency, as well as relaxing education and salary requirements. State media said less than one percent of foreigners in China have permanent residency. The draft bill comes at a time when China is seeking to expand its global influence and attract foreign exchange and investment. Its massive Belt and Road infrastructure investment project has funded thousands of lucrative scholarships for students from developing countries.

But there have been points of tension, including a crackdown on illegal immigrants in commercial hub Guangzhou's "Little Africa" which left many complaining of hard treatment from authorities. There are also longstanding anxieties about perceived preferential treatment for foreigners in China, especially international students. "For a long time, some foreigners in China have secretly received 'superior treatment' as citizens," wrote Hu Xijin, editor of the nationalistic Global Times. Last July, Shandong University apologized after a backlash over a policy that introduced foreign students to local students of the opposite sex. Heather Li, a China-Africa business consultant, said she was "really shocked" by the extent of the online racism. She used to tell her African friends that many Chinese people were friendly and curious about their culture, despite their occasional encounters with prejudice. "But after seeing it on Weibo, I realized there was so much more to it, because people were using very strong language and really disrespecting people from other races," she said. —AFP

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Dozens killed as gunmen attack Afghan rally

KABUL: Dozens of people were killed when gunmen opened fire at a political rally in Kabul on Friday, the deadliest assault in Afghanistan since the US signed a withdrawal deal with the Taleban. The attack, claimed by the Islamic State group, highlights a glaring lack of security in the Afghan capital just 14 months ahead of the scheduled withdrawal of all foreign forces.

It also calls into question a key element of the US-Taleban deal signed February 29 - whether the Taleban can stop jihadists such as IS from running amok in Afghanistan after US forces pull out. In a statement, IS said two brothers had targeted a "gathering of apostates" with machine guns and grenades. The gunmen inflicted devastating carnage at the crowded event in west Kabul, killing 32 people and wounding 58 others, health ministry spokesman Wahidullah Mayar said.

Interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi put the toll at 29 dead, with an additional 61 wounded. He said special forces units eventually killed the two gunmen. The assault occurred at a commemoration ceremony for Abdul Ali Mazari - a politician from the Hazara ethnic group, most of whom are Shiite Muslims. The Sunni-extremist IS had claimed an attack on the same ceremony last year, when a barrage of mortar fire killed at least 11 people. Rahimi said gunfire had erupted from a construction site near the event.

Several top political officials were at the ceremony, including Afghanistan's chief executive Abdullah Abdullah. The interior ministry later confirmed that all the high-ranking officials had been "safely evacuated." "We left the ceremony following the gunfire, and a number of people were wounded, but I do not have any reports of martyred people for now," Hazara leader Mohammad Mohaqiq told Tolo News. President Ashraf Ghani condemned the massacre as a "crime against humanity".

Taleban violence down

The attack came less than a week after the US and Taleban signed a deal that would result in the complete withdrawal of foreign troops in 14 months. The withdrawal however depends heavily on the Taleban being able to control jihadist forces such as Al-Qaeda and IS. If such groups remain, so too does the US military.

A US Forces-Afghanistan spokesman said the response to the attack was "Afghan led," but US personnel gave medical aid to the victims. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo insisted that



KABUL: Men stand next to a pile of clothes and footwear of victims yesterday, a day after a gun attack at a political rally. —AFP

despite the attack, violence in Afghanistan was "significantly down". "The violence levels, they're still lower than they have been in the last five or six years," Pompeo told CNBC television. "We see the path forward towards a peace and reconciliation opportunity."

He later condemned the "despicable" attack, saying in a statement that the peace process "presents a critical opportunity for Afghans to come together to build a united front against the menace of ISIS."

But since the deal was signed in Doha fighting has continued across Afghanistan, raising questions over whether the agreement would reduce violence and lead to talks between the Taleban and the Afghan government. Afghan government officials and the Taleban are supposed to meet in Oslo next week, but talks are likely to be delayed over disagreement about a prisoner release. —AFP

India makes u-turn on TV ban over New Delhi riot coverage

NEW DELHI: The Indian government backtracked yesterday after slapping a 48-hour ban on two TV channels for what officials called biased coverage of New Delhi riots. A blackout of Asianet News and MediaOne was ordered on Friday but lifted after an outcry from opposition groups and protests by the channels to the information and broadcasting ministry. Information minister Prakash Javadekar said Prime Minister Narendra Modi requested the ban be revoked on learning of it. "Our basic belief is that press freedom is essential in a democratic set-up," Javadekar told reporters when asked about the move.

A government order had accused the channels of covering last month's deadly riots in the capital "in a manner that highlighted the attack on places of worship and siding towards a particular community". At least 50 people were killed in Delhi's worst sectarian violence in decades, over two-thirds of them from India's Muslim minority, according to hospital lists. Mosques were burnt and vandalized along with Hindu-owned shops and at least 15 Hindus were killed.

'Undemocratic'

centuries-old biases against lower-caste groups, including Dalits persist, making it harder for them to access education, jobs and homes. More than half the country's lower-caste population is landless, census data showed. While several states have laws aimed at giving land to Dalits, few have done so, according to Dalit activists and leaders. Meanwhile, a growing population and rising pressure on land to build homes, highways, airports and industry is triggering conflicts, with farmers and lower-caste citizens most affected. In rural areas where caste biases are most entrenched, Dalits have lost their burial ground to village elites, Babar said. "Even where we do have land, there are no facilities like water and electricity. Or we are not allowed to pass through the village with the body to go to the burial ground," he said. After a recent campaign by Dalit rights groups, authorities in the western state of Maharashtra have allocated small plots of land for cremation in villages with Dalit populations, he said. A broader national campaign by Dalit activists has long demanded for 5 acres of land for each Dalit family - enough for a home and small farm to live off. Government officials in Tamil Nadu, in response to a court hearing after the viral video, said there was no discrimination against Dalits. But there is a long-standing battle in the state over so-called panchami land, which was allocated to Dalits during the British colonial era. Of an estimated 1.2 mil-

lower-caste Dalits fight for land in death

Denied in life, India's

NEW DELHI: India's lower-caste Dalits are increasingly asserting their claims over land so they can bury their dead, human rights activists said on Friday, as their traditional burial grounds are targeted by real estate developers and higher-caste Hindus. Last year, a viral video of Dalit men lowering a dead body by a rope from a bridge after an upper-caste community in the southern state of Tamil Nadu refused to allow the funeral procession to pass through their land, sparked a public uproar.

In other states, Dalits sometimes have to keep their deceased relatives for several days until they can resolve where to bury or cremate them, said Lalit Babar, general secretary of the National Federation of Dalit Land Rights, an advocacy group. "We do not have land for housing or for livelihoods. Now, we are being denied land for dying," he said. "We have launched campaigns in several states to demand that our traditional burial grounds be returned, or new land be allotted," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation at the sidelines of a land conference in Delhi.

India banned caste-based discrimination in 1955, but



KASBA BONLI, India: People belonging to the Dalit community take part in a nationwide strike called by several Dalit organizations in Rajasthan in this April 2, 2018 file photo. —Reuters

lion acres of land allotted, less than 10% is in the hands of Dalits, according to human rights groups. Without land of their own, Dalits are forced to cremate their dead along riverbanks or on public land, said Richard Devadoss, a convenor for the South India Coalition for Land Rights, an advocacy group. "Without land, they have no power, no dignity, even in death," he said. —Reuters MediaOne called the ban "a blatant attack on free and fair reporting" and an "unprecedented and undemocratic action". It also said it was penalized for criticizing Delhi police and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist group close to Modi's ruling right-wing party. Indian governments have long been sensitive to media coverage and criticism, analysts say. In 2016, officials banned NDTV's Hindi-language channel for 24 hours for broadcasting details of an attack by militants on an air force base.

The government also banned Qatar-based channel Al Jazeera for five days in 2015 for displaying a map of the disputed Kashmir region deemed incorrect. Last year a journalist was jailed over derogatory comments made on social media against a chief minister from Modi's party. The latest ban sparked an outcry from opposition parties. "All democratic minds should unite to voice against this fascist decision," Ramesh Chennithala, a senior member of the Congress party, said on Facebook. —AFP

Pakistan's 'biggest feminist' under fire after sexist tirade

LAHORE: He calls himself "Pakistan's biggest feminist", but soap-opera writer Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar sparked a national row this week after he hurled abuse at a women's rights activist on live television. The invective-laden diatribe came just days before thousands of people are expected to march in cities across Pakistan to mark International Women's Day, adding fuel to growing calls for greater freedoms in the ultra-conservative nation where pushback against such demands can sometimes be vicious.

Qamar's tirade targeting activist Marvi Sirmed quickly went viral, highlighting Pakistan's acrimonious conversation around women's rights and cultural values. While appearing on a television panel to discuss the upcoming Aurat (women's) march, Qamar took aim at its slogan, "My body, my choice". He told Sirmed that "no one would even spit on your body"adding she was a "cheap woman" who should "shut up".

Reaction was swift, with local media giant Geo Entertainment-which recently signed Qamar to write soap operas-suspending his contract, while politicians and celebrities condemned him on social media. Drama critic Sadaf Haider told AFP that Qamar held "deeply misogynistic" views that he wove into his soaps, arguing that such narratives are "not helping the cause of women's rights" in Pakistan.

Qamar declined repeated requests for comment, though he has appeared on other talk shows and refused to apologise, blaming Sirmed for interrupting him on air. Pakistani soaps have been criticised for their depiction of female protagonists-often damsels in distress silently accepting abuse from their in-laws and husbands, and that is shown as a strength.

Female villains are usually the opposite: they do not want to settle down, do not want to conform and end up creating problems by seducing the virtuous heroine's husband. While Qamar has come under fire for the negative portrayal of women in his soap operas, his latest work, "Meray Paas Tum Ho" ("I have you") broke viewership records in Pakistan.

Whose body?

The "my body, my choice" slogan during last year's event generated criticism in a Muslim country largely unaffected by the global #MeToo movement. Organizers and participants were accused of promoting Western, liberal values and disrespecting religious and cultural sensitivities.

Some of the more provocative posters and slogans from the march discussing divorce, sexual harassment and menstruation drew a quick backlash and a slew of threats against the organizers. Last month, anti-march campaigners filed a petition in Lahore to block this year's event, which is set for Sunday. Lawyer Azhar Siddique alleged it is being funded by "various anti-state parties" with the aim of sowing "anarchy" in society. The judge ruled that a ban would be unconstitutional, but warned marchers to refrain from spreading "hate speech and immorality".

A separate petition in Islamabad calling for a ban on the march was also dismissed Friday. Nighat Dad, part of the Aurat march organizing committee, was unfazed by the backlash to previous events. "In reality, men like Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar are threatened, which is why they are coming up with all kinds of ridiculous arguments against the women's movement," she said. Women have long fought for basic rights in Pakistan, where activists often face harassment and threats for the work they do.

Sirmed, the activist, is known to have received multiple death threats. In 2012, she escaped unharmed when unknown assailants fired upon her car. Her home was ransacked in 2018 and her laptops,



ISLAMABAD: In this picture taken on March 5, 2020 a man watches a video clip on his mobile phone of a local TV channel about a debate between women's rights activist Marvi Sirmed (right) and television playwright Khalil ur Rehman (second left). —AFP

passport and other travel documents were taken. Amnesty International expressed support for the Aurat march, saying in a statement that the "horrific threats of violence, intimidation and harassment of the marchers must stop".

Much of Pakistani society operates under a strict code of "honor", systemizing the oppression of women in matters such as the right to choose who to marry, reproductive rights and even the right to an education. According to estimates by the Honor Based Violence Awareness Network, at least 1,000 women fall victim to honor killings in Pakistan each year. Pakistan ranked a dismal 136 on the UN Development Program's Gender Inequality Index in 2018, doing worse than most of its South Asian neighbors. —AFP

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Analysis

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Kuwait Established 1961 The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

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Washington Watch

Netanyahu wins, justice loses in Israel election

By Dr James J Zogby

srael just completed its third national election in less than a year. The first two votes in April and September 2019 ended in an impasse with no party able to form a governing coalition of 61 Knesset Members (i.e. a majority of the 120-member body). While the result of this third round appears to be as muddled as first two, it also consolidated several profoundly disturbing trends that are shaping Israeli politics.

It's not as if nothing happened in the intervening months since Israelis first went to the polls in April. In fact, there were a number of dramatic developments. In the first place, Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud Party and current Prime Minister, was formally indicted on charges of political and financial corruption. His trial may begin in just a few weeks. His attempt to secure immunity from prosecution failed. Now Netanyahu's opponents are attempting to pass legislation that would bar a Knesset Member under indictment (meaning, of course, Netanyahu) from serving as Prime Minister.

The past few months also saw the release of the Trump Administration's "Deal of the Century." Since it gave Netanyahu everything he could have hoped for, the "Deal" might be better called "Trump's Gift of the Century." In remarks delivered in Jerusalem just a week before the election, Netanyahu described the benefits of the "Deal" in this way:

"For the last three years I've worked very closely with a good friend of mine, President Trump...to fashion a different plan for peace in the Middle East...A few weeks ago I stood as an Israeli prime minister in Washington next to the president of the United States, who said that the United States will recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, the northern Dead Sea and all the... Jewish communities large and small, in Judea and Samaria. This is a breakthrough..."

Another factor that impacted this round was the extent to which Netanyahu's opponents surrendered in the face his continued racist incitement against Israel's Palestinian Arab citizens. Netanyahu continued to insist that should Benny Gantz, the leader of the Blue-White Party, be victorious, he would "partner with terror supporters" (which is the way Netanyahu describes Arabs) to form a new government. Not only did Gantz go overboard in asserting that he would not "partner" with the Arab Knesset Members, he also embraced many of Netanyahu's policies acceptance of the Trump "Deal" and the promise to annex large portions of the occupied West Bank. Finally, there was the total collapse of what had at one point been a limited, but still numerically strong, liberal current in Israeli politics. The Labor Party, which in 1992 held 44 Knesset seats, was only able to elect three Knesset Members as part of the paltry seven member bloc they were forced to form with two other failing parties. When the votes were counted, Netanyahu's Likud won 36 seats in the new Knesset, while Gantz's Blue-White won 33. With his partners, far-right and ultra-religious parties, Netanyahu can tally up only 58 seats - not enough to govern. Gantz, on the other hand, can claim only 40 seats. There are two parties that remain outside of these calculations. The Arab parties, who coalesced as the Joint List and won 15 seats, have been rejected as potential partners by Gantz and, more importantly, have made it clear that they could not support him after endorsed policies they find abhorrent. Then there are the seven seats held by Avigdor Lieberman's far right, secular, and anti-Arab Yisrael Beitenu Party. Liberman's party could give Netanyahu the majority he needs to form a government - but it is a fervent opponent of the religious parties and Liberman insists Yisrael Beitenu will not sit in a government with them. So, Israel remains at an impasse. Even with the uncertainty that follows this third round, there are a few observations that can be made based on what has happened during the past year. Even though he appears unable to form a government and may yet end up convicted of the charges against him - Netanyahu has won. His poisonous anti-Arab rhetoric, his demagoguery, and his insistence on denying any Arab rights in the occupied lands now define Israeli politics. Despite having three serious indictments hanging over his head, Israelis voted for him because they support his polices, his racism, and his rejection of Palestinian rights. Not unlike the way US Republicans have turned their backs on decency and the rule of law in their embrace of Donald Trump, Israelis have embraced Netanyahu, whom they now call "King Bibi". Even those who deplore him personally and reject the divisions he has exploited within Israeli Jewish society nevertheless support the policies he has advanced. Along with this, it is important to acknowledge the end of the myth of the "Israeli peace camp." While there are still courageous Israelis who continue to fight against the occupation and for Palestinian human rights, they are not an electoral force and have no power to impact Israeli policy. Netanyahu has succeeded in intimidating politicians who might have played a role in the Knesset in opposition to his policies. He and his colleagues also used their power to pass laws that penalized and weakened peace groups. Another major contributing factor to the death of the "peace camp" has been the cowardice of past US Administrations, whose acquiescence to Israeli policy, even when mildly criticizing it, served to feed and empower the Israeli right, while starving and weakening the Israeli left. With agreement on so many of Netanyahu's policies vis a vis the Palestinians and the occupation, the major issues now dividing Israel's two major political camps both on the right - are Netanyahu, himself, and the role of religion in governance and personal affairs.



Democratic presidential candidate Sen Elizabeth Warren, with husband Bruce Mann, announces that she is dropping out of the presidential race during a media availability outside her home on March 5, 2020 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. —AFP

Madam President: A US goal proves elusive, again

Elizabeth Warren's exit from the Democratic presidential race leaves America's highest glass ceiling still intact, prompting some to ask whether the country will ever be ready to put a woman in the White House. After Hillary Clinton won the Democratic nomination in 2016, and then lost unexpectedly to Donald Trump, top women politicians openly theorized that 2020 might be their year. This latest Democratic field was the most diverse ever, with a record six women in contention, including four senators: Kirsten Gillibrand,

Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar and Warren. Their campaigns have since folded, and today's fight to oust the 73-year-old president from the White House has come down to two white men older than Trump: Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders. Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard remains in the race but has always been an extreme long shot, registering at around one percent support. Warren, in announcing her exit, told reporters Thursday that gender has been "the trap ques-

tion" in the lengthy nomination battle. "If you say, 'Yeah there was sexism in this race,' everyone says, 'Whiner.' And if you say, no, there was no sexism, about a bazillion women think, 'What planet do you live on?" she said. "The hardest part of this... is all those little girls who are going to have to wait four more years." After Warren dropped out, former candidate Harris spoke of the "challenges of women running for president" that remain in the United States.

Women have reached the pinnacle of power in US states as governors, and Nancy Pelosi is Trump's chief nemesis in Congress in her role as speaker of the House of Representatives. But she, too, vented her frustration Thursday that Warren - widely seen as one of the most competent and knowledgeable candidates in the race, with perhaps the best onthe-ground organization - failed to progress further in the nomination battle. "I do think there's a certain element of misogyny that is there," she said, noting the difficulties she herself faced in ultimately becoming the first female House speaker. "This is a marble ceiling, it's not a glass ceiling."

'Double standards'

Warren's campaign was seen as having imploded in part because she did not inspire voters or convince them she was the right person for the job. She also failed to chart a winning path between her party's left wing, championed by Sanders, and the more moderate lane occupied by Biden. But Warren also may have been the victim of "systemic" bias in the campaign process, according to Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics.

"Did she run a perfect campaign? Of course not, nobody does," Walsh told AFP Friday in an interview. But she finds it "hard to imagine a male candidate with (Warren's) credentials and smarts, and empathy and connection to crowds" not doing far better in the race. "It indicates... that there is still this sexism, misogyny, double standards."

Warren got hammered, for example, for truthfully revealing her estimated cost (\$20.5 trillion) for universal healthcare. Sanders fudged his "Medicare for All" numbers and got away with it, Walsh noted. Democrats are desperate to win in November, and there is a form of "risk aversion" at play, Walsh said, with women and people of color still seen as risky choices.

Polling bears that out to a degree. A CNN survey from January showed that 15 percent of respondents did not believe a woman could win the White House. Notably, the percentage of women who believed that one of their own could not get elected president was 20 percent, more than double the nine percent of men who thought

that. Female candidates performed extraordinarily well in the 2018 midterm elections, however, when they won a record number of seats in Congress and helped Democrats take back the House.

But women seeking the presidency still find themselves in a "horrible double bind", Walsh explained. On one hand they must demonstrate they are strong and competent, "because the assumption is they're not", she added. Yet when Warren showed that toughness and asserted her competencies, she was "seen as being self-righteous and smug, and lecturing". Her debate-stage evisceration of billionaire Michael Bloomberg led critics to brand her too aggressive, a dismissal rarely attached to Sanders, who is known for his combative tone.

"She is a very mean person and people don't like her," said Trump - who memorably waged a scorched-earth strategy against Clinton in 2016, branding her a "nasty" woman. Warren for her part insisted she still has faith. "It's just going to be a little longer before we're going to have woman in the White House," she told MSNBC. "We can't lose hope because the only way we make change is we get back up tomorrow we get back in the fight." —AFP

An opportunity and challenge for French hand gel producer 2009 swine flu pandemic was nothing like the current clamor for the product. "With the H1N1 outbreak, we had a considerable increase in production. But what we are seeing now has no comparison," he said. Gilbert, which says it is the second-largest producer of gels by sales in pharmacies in France, has sold 1.7 million bottles in the last six weeks compared with 800,000 for all of 2019. But despite the ramped up production, demand at pharmacies is still exceeding production. "We have sold out



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

All articles appearing on this page are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein. The production lines are whirling at Gilbert, one of France's main producers of sanitising gels, in a bid to meet the soaring demand for the bottles by people hoping to fend off infection in the face of the coronavirus outbreak. But executives warn against seeing the boom as a winwin situation for producers, saying it is a struggle to keep up with demand for a product that is far less profitable than highend cosmetics.

"The phones don't stop ringing. This morning we had the schools, the town halls, the public transport company," said Muriel Jehanne, the telephone operator at Laboratoires Gilbert in Herouville-Saint-Clair, outside the city of Caen in northern France. "Everyone wants gel. We are under siege," she said. Pharmacies and shops have reported major shortages of sanitising gel as people seek an instant and quick hand cleaner to protect themselves from the risk of contracting the virus without the need for running water. Governments have insisted that while such alcohol-based gels are helpful, it is just as effective to properly wash hands.

'No comparison'

This family owned business, which mainly supplies pharmacies and hospitals, produces 80,000 to 100,000 plastic bottles of gel every day at three sites in the region. Dominique Lecomte, its deputy director, said even the surge in demand during the

Egypt architects seek antidotes to rising heat

The desert buildings Atef Azzazy and his team of farm workers once lived and toiled in were hot in the summer, cold in the winter and leaky enough they sometimes let in snakes, he remembers. Three years ago, however, the team working in Bahariya Oasis, in Egypt's Western Desert, got an upgrade: Well-insulated homes and work buildings designed to shed Egypt's increasingly searing summer heat and hold down climate-changing emissions.

ECOnsult, an Egyptian architecture firm that specializes in green, energy-efficient and affordable buildings, designed the structures for 120 workers in the Saharan oasis village, from farmers and engineers to administrative staff. "The buildings are now cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter" by about 5-7 degrees Celsius, Azzazy said – a huge advantage as climate change brings ever more extreme weather.

Faced with rising temperatures, Egyptian architects are working to come up with green buildings that can keep people safe and cooler, and cut down on the emissions that drive global warming. ECOnsult, one of the firms – now a finalist for an award for innovative cooling without air conditioning – has turned out more comfortable government buildings, banks and coffee shops across Egypt, often using local materials.

In a country where temperatures can hit nearly 50 degrees Celsius in the summer, outsince Saturday when we sold 20 bottles in a single day," said the director of a pharmacy close to the factory. "If there are 20,000 pharmacies in France and if 10 bottles are sold every day, you are going to need to produce 200,000 a day," added one local pharmacist, who asked not to be identified. Gilbert has taken on some 30 more employees for now, and also plans to keep production lines running on a Saturday. The company expects to produce up to 4.3 million plastic bottles in the first five months of this year – five times more than for all of 2019.

'Not the best margins'

Until now sanitizing gels represented just a minuscule part of the company's activities, accounting for just one percent of its annual sales of around €200 million. Its most successful product is a saline solution. But tomorrow it will open a new production line for gels at its plant in Plouedern, which produces 65 bottles a minute. Lecomte would not be drawn on what kind of financial profit the company would make on the ramped-up gel production, but indicated it was not to be seen as a straightforward windfall. "It is not the product on which we realize the best margins and we have transferred some cosmetic production to less efficient lines in order to free up production capacity," he said. The coronavirus "is not good news for the economy", he added. With the French government announcing it will impose a ceiling on the price of gels, Lecomte insisted that the company would

An employee of Laboratoires Gilbert monitors a production chain of hydroalcoholic solution in Plouedern, northwestern France on March 4, 2020. — AFP

not be raising prices for the product. "We took the decision that prices would not be increased, that we would follow our pricing strategy. We did not take advantage of or speculate on the growing demand for the hydroalcoholic gel," he said.

The French government announced a price ceiling of \in 3 (\$3.50) for a 100 ml bottle Friday in the latest edition of its official gazette. with a ceiling of \notin 2 for 50 ml and \notin 5 for 300 ml. Those prices will be guaranteed until the end of May, whereupon the government said it would assess the market situation with consumer priority its priority. Paris added that retailers who had acquired stock at a price which would cause them to make a loss could request an indemnity to make up the difference. —AFP

door workers struggle - and even those inside often depend on fans or air conditioning. Smarter design can cut the need for electricalpowered cooling and make people more comfortable and able to continue with their jobs even in the heat, architects say. "We use heatabsorbing materials and other cooling techniques like heat-reflecting roofs in order to keep buildings cooler," Sarah El-Battouty, the founder of ECOnsult, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Creating structures that are oriented to best shed heat and that incorporate local materials is key, Battouty said. Insulating air layers, in particular, can help keep heat out, she said. "We innovate as much as possible through layering between the outside and into the inside which has helped us cool down air coming into interiors by almost 5 degrees. We also use color and reflectivity," she added. Battouty said that rising temperatures hit the poor - who struggle to afford air conditioning - and those working outside hardest. "That is why we want to provide sustainable cooling," Battouty said.

The cost of cooling

One problem facing Egypt's fast-growing urban areas is that as temperatures rise, more people turn on air conditioners, which in turn churn out waste heat, further raising temperatures outside. The devices also are heavy energy users, and if that energy comes from fossil fuels their use can drive further climate change. According to a 2018 International Energy Agency report, using air conditioners and electric fans to stay cool "accounts for nearly 20% of the total electricity used in buildings around the world".

Demand for cooling is "putting enormous strain on electricity systems in many countries, as well as driving up emissions," the report



A view of green buildings designed to help farm workers beat rising heat in Baharyia Oasis in Egypt's Western Desert. —Reuters

added. ECOnsult architects said one of their goals is to make sure the heat-beating designs they come up with work for the poor as well as the rich. "We care about making our green buildings affordable, so we design buildings in a way that makes them have the same cost as traditional buildings," said Ahmed Al-Shareif, a business development manager with ECOnsult, which started in 2013.

ECOnsult uses recycled materials as much as possible, and keeps in mind issues from potential pollution to excessive use of water as well in its designs, he said. The firm hopes to win an innovation in low-carbon cooling award to be presented in July by Ashden, a London-based charity focused on sustainable energy. "The climate emergency means higher temperatures are now a fact of life, and so people are turning up the air conditioning, completing a vicious circle" as they use more energy to stay cool, said Harriet Lamb, Ashden's CEO. "The world must wake up to this new reality and urgently invest in sustainable solutions," she said. "We cannot sit back and wait for the next lethal heatwave to arrive - we need action now."

Other Egyptian firms also are looking at innovative cooling. KarmSolar, a solar and technology integration company, for instance, is working through a subsidiary in another village in Bahariya Oasis to employ windcatchers, hot-air extractors, and strategic placement of doors and windows for natural cooling. As Egypt's population grows and more people move from rural to urban communities, demand for cooling and warming devices has increased by about 30 percent over a decade, said Saber Osman, head of the Ministry of Environment's climate change adaptation department. —Reuters



BUSINESS

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2020



Burgan Bank Group announces solid full year 2019 performance









BAABDAT: Lebanon's President Michel Aoun (center) heads a ministerial council at the presidential palace in Baabda, east of the capital Beirut yesterday. The government formed in January inherited a disastrous economic situation and faces an impossible balancing act between the traditional powerbrokers who voted it in and a street that wants all of its ruling elite out. Lebanon must decide whether to repay \$1.2 billion in Eurobonds due tomorrow. —AFP

Lebanon suspends banks' asset freeze

Central bank moves to stem spiraling unofficial exchange rate

BEIRUT: Lebanon's attorney general has suspended an order freezing the assets of 20 banks and their directors over concerns about its impact on the country's fragile economy, state-run media said. The order was postponed to allow for the "study of its impact on the national currency, banking transactions as well as on the money of savers and economic security", Ghassan Oueidat said Thursday according to a statement carried by the National News Agency. "Such a measure would likely drag the country and its financial sector into chaos."

Lebanon has been gripped by mass protests against the political class and banking sector even as it suffers its worst economic crisis in decades. Banks have imposed increasingly tight limits on dollar withdrawals and transfers abroad as part of measures to tackle a severe liquidity crisis. But bankers stand accused of having sent millions of dollars abroad despite those limitations. On Monday the prosecutor separately called in 15 banks over more than 2 billion dollars in capital flight despite the restrictions in the two months after the start of the protests.

The value of the Lebanese pound has plummeted on the black market, prices have risen, and many businesses have been forced to slash salaries, dismiss staff or close. Lebanon is one of the most indebted countries in

the world, with a public debt equivalent to 150 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP). The country is now under pressure to pay a \$1.2-billion Eurobond maturing on March 9, with a decision expected on whether or not to default.

Unofficial exchange rate

Meanwhile, Lebanon's central bank is seeking to rein in exchange rates and enforce a cap on the local currency in the parallel market to contain its unofficial devaluation. Central bank chief Riad Salameh asked "all exchange offices, under pain of legal or administrative sanctions, to commit exceptionally to a maximum buving price for foreign currency in Lebanese pounds of no more than 30 percent above the exchange rate set by the central bank to deal with lenders".

The official exchange rate has stood at 1,507 Lebanese pounds to the dollar for decades, but the value of the local currency has plummeted to more than 2,600 on the black market. Money changers in protesthit Lebanon had agreed in January to cap the dollar exchange at 2,000 pounds, but the move has failed to stem spiraling rates. Friday's central bank order, which reinforces the January agreement, is to apply for the next six months, according to the statement carried by

state-run National News Agency.

Debt-ridden Lebanon is facing its most serious economic crisis since the end of its 1975-1990 civil war. Banks have increasingly limited dollar withdrawals and transfers abroad to stem a severe liquidity crisis, even as the tanking economy has caused businesses to slash salaries, fire staff, or close. The country has been rocked by unprecedented, nationwide protests in recent months, led by young people who blame government corruption and incompetence for the lack of jobs and basic services.

Sovereign debt

Lebanon's top leadership opposes repaying the country's sovereign debt, the presidency said yesterday, indicating the heavily indebted state is heading towards a default as it grapples with a major financial crisis. A default on Lebanon's foreign currency debt will mark a new phase in the crisis that has hammered Lebanon's economy since October, slicing around 40% off the value of the local currency and leading banks to deny savers full access to deposits.

Lebanon has a \$1.2 billion Eurobond due on March 9, part of a wider portfolio of some \$31 billion in dollar bonds that sources told Reuters on Friday the government would seek to restructure in negotiations with its

Burgan Bank extends dining loyalty program

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced adding three of Kuwait's trendiest and most popular outlets to its dining loyalty program. The newly added places are "Gia", "The Backburner", and "Eggslt". Burgan Bank ensures its customers receive a taste of unique concepts by continuously evolving its offerings through new collaborations.

Using any of Burgan Bank's cards, customers can now enjoy 15% discount from the three recent additions to its list

New Restaurants added to our dining list

of restaurants. A Kuwait-born concept, GIA provides a rich, refreshing and colorful cuisine, capturing the essence of Mediterranean food. Customers can visit any of the GIA's three branches located in Salmiya, Kuwait City or Al Hamra Shopping Center to enjoy the discount.

Located in Khaleejiya Complex, The Backburner is a specialty coffee shop, serving artisanal coffee and sweet bites while Eggslt, situated in Crystal Tower, is a chef-driven, gourmet food concept. Inspired by a true love for eggs, the menu offers fresh and quality products cooked to order with its key ingredient, eggs. To know more about Burgan Bank's latest offers, or any of its products and services, customers can visit any of the Burgan Bank's branches or Burgan Banks Instagram page on @BurganBankKuwait.



Markets extend slump as virus crisis deepens

NEW YORK: Global stocks tumbled and oil prices collapsed Friday as investors panicked over the expected damage of the coronavirus to global economic growth. Haven investments gold and the yen surged as the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the epidemic must be taken seriously. At the close of trade, the Paris stock market was down by 4.1 percent, Frankfurt dived 3.4 percent, London shed 3.5 percent and Milan tumbled 3.7 percent in a fierce global markets selloff that began about two weeks ago.

Wall Street stocks also suffered another bruising session, with petroleum producers and banks especially hard-hit, as the S&P 500 ended down 1.7 percent. Oil, already slumping on virus-linked demand fears, extended losses to around 10 percent as Russia said it had failed to reach an agreement on possible cuts in output at a meeting with OPEC.

"Stocks are on the back foot once again, with markets tumbling amid continued growth in the coronavirus crisis," said analyst Joshua Mahony at IG trading group. "The stimulus-led rebound in global stocks has been short-lived, with fears over an escalation of the coronavirus crisis providing yet another bout of selling across European markets." — AFP

Lufthansa to halve flight capacity over coronavirus

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: German airline giant Lufthansa said it would slash capacity by half in the coming weeks, as the group battles "drastic declines in bookings and numerous flight cancellations" prompted by the novel coronavirus. "Based on further demand development, capacity will be reduced by up to 50 percent in the coming weeks," Lufthansa said in a statement, after earlier announcing it would cut one in four flights.

The carrier's shares closed slightly lower in Frankfurt, shedding 0.2 percent to trade at 11.48 euros (\$13), but still outperforming the overall blue-chip DAX index, which was down 3.4 percent. Lufthansa with subsidiaries like Eurowings, Swiss and Austrian Airlines has announced deep cuts in its timetable this week as the effect of the COVID-19 disease began to bite.

It will not fly routes to China and Iran until late April, while Israeli restrictions on non-resident arrivals from some EU countries prompted it to scrap flights to the Jewish state until March 28.

creditors. Prime Minister Hassan Diab will address the Eurobond issue and Lebanon's wider economic crisis in a speech to the nation at 6:30 pm. The announcement from the presidency followed a meeting attended by the president, prime minister, parliament speaker, central bank governor and head of the country's banking association.

"The attendees decided unanimously to stand by the government in any choice it makes in terms of managing the debt, except paying the debt maturities," the presidency said in a statement after the meeting. Sources said Lebanon was set to announce that it cannot make upcoming dollar bond payments and wants to restructure \$31 billion of foreign currency debt unless a last-minute deal with creditors could be found to avoid a disorderly default.

Lebanon hired US investment bank Lazard and law firm Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP last week as advisers on the widely expected restructuring. The financial crisis came to a head last year as capital inflows slowed and protests erupted over state corruption and bad governance. The import-dependent economy has shed jobs and inflation has risen as the pound has slumped, adding to grievances that have fuelled protests. - Agencies

> Capacity equivalent to 150 planes was already grounded, 25 of them from the long-haul fleet. On Thursday, Lufthansa said its previously-announced 25-percent capacity cut would mean 7,100 flight cancellations around Europe through to the end of its winter timetable on March 28.

> Many of the cancellations will fall on high-frequency German domestic services to cities like Berlin and Hamburg from the group's Frankfurt and Munich hubs. The group is also looking into temporarily taking "the entire Airbus A380 fleet" out of service in Frankfurt and Munich, amounting to 14 aircraft. Meanwhile, "a second focus of the route cancellations" was Italy, with cities including Milan, Venice and Rome affected, and other countries around Europe also hit.

> The Lufthansa group said it had instituted a hiring freeze, offered unpaid leave and is considering slashing workers' hours "to avoid dismissals". The group is due release its 2019 results on March 19 and will likely face questions over the expected financial impact of the epidemic at the annual earnings news conference. Lufthansa however cautioned that it was "not yet possible to estimate the burden on earnings" from the virus fallout. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) recently warned the total revenue impact on the industry could be in the range of \$63-\$100 billion. —AFP





In London, NY, banks send staff home and to other locations; virus spreads

Lenders cancel travel, split up trading teams

LONDON: More than 50 staff at Societe Generale's across the world surpassed 100,000 on Friday. The London office were working from home on Friday, while Bank of America Corp is splitting its trading force and sending 100 New York-based staff to nearby Stamford, Connecticut, from Monday as a precaution against spread of the coronavirus, sources familiar with the matter said.

Morgan Stanley is shifting part of its London and New York-based sales and trading staff to its sites near Heathrow Airport and Westchester County, New York, respectively, as well as having some teams work from home starting on Monday, according to sources familiar with the plans. The three banks join other financial companies sending staff home, splitting up trading teams and activating backup offices in a bid to contain the spread of the virus in the world's largest financial and business hubs.

The number of people infected with the coronavirus

outbreak has killed more than 3,400 people and spread across more than 90 nations, with six countries reporting their first cases on Friday. Societe Generale declined to comment on how many of its London staff were working away from its office in Canary Wharf but said it has instituted travel restrictions, rotation of staff and work-from-home arrangements.

Commodity broker Marex Spectron said late on Thursday that one of its London employees had tested positive for coronavirus. It said the individual had attended a Marex Spectron-sponsored event during IP week, a major petroleum industry gathering, on Feb. 25 in London. Citigroup has sent 10% of traders who usually work in its Canary Wharf office in London to a backup site in Lewisham, a source familiar with the move said.

Allied Irish Banks has cancelled a planned postresults road show to London as a result of a ban on

Oil takes biggest daily dive in over a decade as Russia, OPEC split

NEW YORK: Brent slid to its biggest daily loss in more than 11 years on Friday after Russia balked at OPEC's proposed steep production cuts to stabilize prices hit by economic fallout from the coronavirus, and OPEC responded by removing limits on its own production. More than 1 million US crude contracts changed hands during the session, as the three-year pact between OPEC and Russia ended in acrimony. "Prices plunged because the OPEC confab ended up being an epic fail on the part of all involved. Russia has clearly decided to employ a scorched earth approach to the oil market: every country for itself," said John Kilduff, partner at Again Capital LLC in New York.

Brent futures had their biggest daily percentage fall since December 2008, down \$4.72, or 9.4%, to settle at \$45.27 a barrel. It was Brent's lowest closing price since June 2017. US West Texas Intermediate crude dropped \$4.62, or 10.1%, to \$41.28, its lowest close since August 2016 and the largest daily percentage loss since November 2014. More than 4.58 million US front-month crude contracts changed hands this week, the busiest week ever for that contract.

stc launches postpaid plans for Samsung **Galaxy S20 series**

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company- stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, launched its postpaid plans for the Samsung Galaxy S20 series. stc is offering new and existing customers three revolutionary devices from Samsung's flagship series, two of which support 5G technology under stc's exclusive postpaid plans.

The Samsung Galaxy S20 series includes a total of three new devices; Samsung Galaxy S2O (4G), Samsung Galaxy S20+ (5G) and the Samsung Galaxy S20+ Ultra (5G). The devices from the series offered by stc are equipped with massive storage capacities ranging from 128GB to 512GB (128GB for the 4G Galaxy S20 and S20+; 128GB and 512GB for the 5G Galaxy S2O+ and S2O+ Ultra).

stc offers a variety of bundled data and minute packages through postpaid plans that are specially lesigned to meet the needs and requirements of the company's diverse customer base. Commenting on the launch of the S20 series, Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) of stc, Haneen Ibrahim Al-Fulaij, said, 'Samsung's new flagship devices have gained the popularity of a wide and growing loyal fan base due to the advanced features and options included in every device by Samsung year over year.

We are proud to launch the Samsung Galaxy S20 series through our range of postpaid plan offerings to our diverse customer base. The Galaxy S20 series is Samsung's latest flagship 5G lineup and we are thrilled to offer these devices on Kuwait's most advanced and largest 5G network." "The 5G era will evolve and comnon-essential travel and has conducted a deep clean of all branches, Chief Executive Colin Hunt said in a radio interview. "Earlier this week we introduced a ban on all non-essential travel across the group, that's one of the reasons why I'm talking to you this morning from Dublin and not London," he said. Jefferies Financial Group Inc executives told clients on Friday it had put in place business continuity and technology plans to enable it to operate remotely.

"Those plans include both the technology to continue to trade and the technology that will permit us to continue to communicate seamlessly with each other, with you, with our regulators, and with our partners and affiliates," the email said. HSBC and Standard Chartered have also convened committees of senior executives to give daily briefings on the crisis. HSBC on Thursday sent home more than 100 staff in London after a worker tested positive for the virus,

pletely change the way we communicate and experience the world online. At stc, we are committed towards our mission to enable the digital transformation in Kuwait. We believe that the

mass deployment and adoption of the 5G technology in Kuwait will be a key steppingstone in our goal towards enabling digital transformation in the nation." She added, "In line

Haneen Ibrahim Al-Fulaij with our mission, stc strives

to provide its customers with the latest and most advanced smartphone devices at affordable and exclusive plans that meet their diverse needs and requirements. Stc has also been on a continuous development path to ensure that it is offering its customers the highest speeds, widest coverage area and best overall experience to take advantage of the networks powerful tools and solutions."

A massive leap forward

Samsung's Galaxy S20 series introduces 3 new devices; S20, S20+ 5G and the S20+ Ultra 5G. The highly advanced smartphone devices are also offered based on their network capabilities, RAM, and storage capacity, which have received an upgrade from the previous S series launched by Samsung. The series also offers a range of quad HD+ dynamic AMOLED 2X display sizes starting with the 6.2-inch Galaxy S20, 6.7-inch Galaxy S20+ and 6.9-inch Galaxy S20+ Ultra. The smartphone devices in the series introduces a brand-new camera architecture that combines AI with Samsung's largest image sensor yet for stunning image quality. Along with the camera, the Galaxy S20 makes the

the first known case at a major company in Europe's financial hub.

Don't panic

The mood among financial firms was more practical than panicked. "Had a few hedge funds that went into full shutdown on Monday because of coronavirus but then realized they were over-reacting and went back into the office later in the week," said one hedge fund recruiter. Staff in coffee shops in the Canary Wharf financial district said business was down, but they hoped for only a shortlived disruption to normal customer traffic. "We expect it to be quieter for the next few days," said a worker named Tahar in a Starbucks in Canary Wharf. An employee in a branch of the Notes coffee chain in the financial area said business was down compared with the usually busy Friday rush. "People just want to be safe I guess. We are hoping things pick up soon," she said. —Reuters



experience of everything customers love to do with their phones, easier and better-enjoy personalized music for every moment of the day, watch videos the way they are meant to be seen and play console-style games on the go. In addition to solving connectivity challenges, the bold, 5G-ready Galaxy S2O+ and Galaxy S20 Ultra enable continuous, integrated experiences between work, life, and play.

Apart from offering a world of connected possibilities, Galaxy S20 Series features Space Zoom, which allows users to zoom in up to 100x and capture the world in perfect clarity during any situation and at any time. For more details, follow stc's official social media platforms, visit one of stc's branches, download the stc

Both Brent and WTI are down over 30% so far this year.

The number of people infected with coronavirus across the world surpassed 100,000 as the outbreak reached more countries and the economic damage intensified. Business districts began to empty and stock markets tumbled. The split between OPEC and Russia revived fears of a 2014 oil price crash, when Saudi Arabia and Russia fought for market share with US shale oil producers, which have never participated in output-limiting pacts. OPEC was pushing for an additional 1.5 million barrels per day (bpd) of cuts until the end of 2020.

Non-OPEC states were expected to contribute 500,000 bpd to the overall extra cut, OPEC ministers said. The new deal would have meant OPEC+ production curbs amounting to a total of 3.6 million bpd, or about 3.6% of global supply. "From (April 1) all oil producers are allowed to produce as much as they like," analysts at ABN AMRO said in a report. The Dutch bank cut its Brent oil price forecast for 2020 by 15.5% to \$49 a barrel from the previous forecast of \$58. The bank noted that OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Barkindo indicated there will be more informal meetings on the proposed cuts in coming weeks, however. —Reuters

Solid US economy bracing for coronavirus infection

WASHINGTON: Hiring is surging and wages are rising in the United States as the year begins, but the coronavirus is poised to infect the economy and hamper President Donald Trump's re-election bid. Wall Street has tumbled in recent days as the outbreak spread and undermined the view that the US economy is inoculated against the danger. The White House has tried to downplay the impact, and Trump on Friday even made the extraordinary claim that US businesses are benefitting from people staying in the country while predicting stocks would bounce back.

But private economists warn the positive data presents an outdated picture, and more real-time gauges of economic activity already show the spreading alarm. That is all the more dangerous in an economy dominated by the services sector: factories can ramp up production once the danger is passed, but if people stop going to movie theaters, sporting events and hotels, those earnings are lost forever.

And workers in many of those businesses do not have

paid sick leave, meaning they may go to work while infected with the virus or lose money they would otherwise spend if they take time off. "It's not a health pandemic yet... it's what I call an economic pandemic," Diane Swonk of Grant Thornton said on CNBC. "The global effect of all these things happening simultaneously is compounding the impact and the fallout for the United States."

Trump on Friday once again demanded the Federal Reserve lower borrowing rates to stimulate the economy, even though the central bank announced an emergency rate cut on Tuesday. "The Fed should cut and the Fed should stimulate," Trump told reporters as he signed a bill providing \$8.3 billion for the coronavirus response. In fact, most economists - and financial markets - overwhelmingly expect Trump will get what he wants: another half-point chop to the Fed's benchmark policy interest rate.

Calm before the storm

The US economy produced another blockbuster hiring spree in February, adding 273,000 new jobs, and the January figure was revised up to show the same increase, according to the closely-watched Labor Department report.

The back-to-back surges blew away all expectations. The strong hiring put the unemployment rate at 3.5 percent, dipping from 3.6 percent in January, near a 50-year low. The job gains mean the monthly average for 2020 was 273,000,

mobile application, visit www.stc.com.kw or contact the customer service center by dialing 102 for around the clock assistance.

far outpacing the 178,000 monthly pace in 2019. But that was before the major shutdowns caused by the outbreak that began in China before spreading to numerous countries. Infections now number more than 100,000 worldwide, with 3.400 deaths.

"Overall, these are great numbers, but unfortunately this is news from another planet," Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said in an analysis. "Pre-virus, the labor market was strong, if weather-assisted. Now, trouble is coming, fast." In fact, a Fed survey released Wednesday contained dozens of mentions of the virus outbreak, with widespread impact already seen across the country, including people refusing to go to Chinese restaurants. And the report said "producers feared further disruptions in the coming weeks."

'Temporary and short-lived'

White House economic advisor Larry Kudlow acknowledged there would be some effects on the economy but urged calm. "I've argued and I will continue to argue economic problems are going to be temporary and short-lived," he said on CNBC. "The virus is not going to last forever." But he said the administration is considering some targeted stimulus measures to help businesses and individuals "in areas that have been hit the worst" including "people who may be stranded at home and will lose pay." - AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

	ini Exchange Co. N COUNTRIES	Euro Sterling Pound Canadian dollar	349.370 403.570 230.230	Thai Bhat Turkish Lira Singapore dollars	10.710 50.740 219.748		Hong Kong Dollar Indian Rupee Indonesian Rupiah	0.037470 0.003624 0.000017	0.040220 0.004396 0.000023
Japanese Yen Indian Rupees Pakistani Rupees	2.908 4.158 1.024	Turkish lira Swiss Franc	51.460 331.390	BAHRAIN EX	CHANGE COMPAN	Y WLL	Japanese Yen Korean Won Malaysian Ringgit Nepalese Rupee	0.002830 0.000247 0.069971 0.002611	0.003010 0.000262 0.075971 0.002951
Srilankan Rupees Nepali Rupees Singapore Dollar	1.680 2.592 224.320	Dollarco E	xchange Co. Ltd	CURRENCY	BUY Europe	SELL	Pakistan Rupee Philippine Peso	0.001337 0.005902	0.002951 0.002107 0.006202
Hongkong Dollar Bangladesh Taka Philippine Peso Thai Baht Malaysian Ringgit	39.390 3.593 6.057 9.778 78.312	US Dollar Buying US Dollar Canadian Dollar Sterling Pound Euro	298.750 305.850 229.040 395.370 342.135	British Pound Czech Korune Danish Krone Euro Georgian Lari Hungarian	0.393247 0.005677 0.042448 0.338673 0.111091 0.000155	0.407147 0.014977 0.047448 0.352373 0.111091 0.001345	Singapore Dollar Siri Lankan Rupee Taiwan Thai Baht Vietnamese Dong	0.216940 0.001324 0.010186 0.009414 0.00013	0.226940 0.001904 0.010366 0.009964 0.000013
GCC Saudi Riyal Qatari Riyal	C COUNTRIES 81.708 84.156	Swiss Frank Bahrain Dinar UAE Dirhams	295.210 813.370 83.675	Norwegian Krone Romanian Leu Russian Ruble	0.028098 0.065718 0.004526	0.034298 0.082568 0.004526	Bahraini Dinar	Arab 0.806030	0.814130
ani Riyal Bahraini Dinar UAE Dirham	795.841 813.600 83.422	Qatari Riyals Saudi Riyals Jordanian Dinar	84.915 82.455 432.670	Slovakia Swedish Krona Swiss Franc	0.009183 0.028741 0.320738	0.019183 0.033741 0.331738	Egyptian Pound Iranian Riyal Iraqi Dinar	0.019367 0.000085 0.000201	0.022107 0.000086 0.000261
ARA Egyptian Pound - Cash Egyptian Pound - Transfer Yemen Riyal/for 1000	B COUNTRIES 21.000 19.637 1.230	Egyptian Pound Sri Lankan Rupees Indian Rupees Pakistani Rupees Bangladesh Taka	19.613 1.681 4.176 1.980 3.596	Australian Dollar New Zealand Dollar	Australasia 0.195769 0.188909	0.207769 0.198409	Jordanian Dinar Kuwaiti Dinar Lebanese Pound Moroccan Dirhams Omani Rival	0.426977 1.000000 0.000104 0.021207 0.790179	0.435977 1.000000 0.000254 0.045207 0.798121
Tunisian Dinar Jordanian Dinar Lebanese Lira/for 1000 Syrian Lira	114.680 432.390 0.204 0.000	Philippines Pesso Cyprus pound Japanese Yen Svrian Pound	5.596 6.052 18.190 3.845 1.595	Canadian Dollar US Dollars US Dollars Mint	America 0.222900 0.302100 0.302600	0.231900 0.306650 0.306650	Qatar Riyal Saudi Riyal Syrian Pound Tunisian Dinar	0.083448 0.080567 0.001299 0.104498	0.084486 0.081867 0.001519 0.112498
Morocco Dirham EUROPEAN & .	32.644 AMERICAN COUNTRIES	Nepalese Rupees Malaysian Ringgit	2.639 74.425	Bangladesh Taka	Asia 0.002876	0.003677	Turkish Lira UAE Dirhams Varaani Binal	0.043748 0.082731	0.053593 0.083563
US Dollar Transfer	306.200	Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.515	Chinese Yuan	0.042647	0.046147	Yemeni Riyal	0.000996	0.001076



Burgan Bank Group announces solid Full Year 2019 performance

Burgan's net income grew to KD 84.7 million



Majed Essa Al-Ajeel, Chairman of Burgan Bank Group.

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank KPSC (Burgan or Group) announced its Full Year 2019 financial results yesterday. Burgan's FY'19 Net Income grew to KD 84.7mn (up 3% y-o-y), thereby generating shareholders returns of 10%.The strong numbers reflect focus on generating high quality earnings, achieving operating efficiencies, improving asset quality with clear goal of maximizing shareholders returns. Given this solid performance, Burgan Board of Directors has proposed cash dividend of 12 fils per share, subject to shareholders approval at Annual General Meeting.

For FY'19, the Group reported total Revenues of KD 248.2mn due to its ability to maintain stable Net Interest margins (NIMs) of 2.7% and generate strong levels of non-interest income (at 33% of revenues in FY'19 as compared to 31% in FY'18). During FY'19, Burgan's Cost to Income ratio improved by 90bps driven by lower operating costs. Burgan's asset quality further improved with NPL ratio of 2.5% in FY'19 (20bps reduction y-o-y), while its Coverage Ratio further strengthened to 200% (as compared to168% in FY'18). The credit costs for the year also improved to 110bps (as compared to 140bps in FY'18).



Masaud Hayat, Vice chairman and Grou Chief Executive Officer of Burgan Bank.

In FY'19, Burgan grew its loan book by 1%, reflecting a cautious growth approach in the subsidiaries market while focusing on its core market (Kuwait) where the loan book grew by 8%. In FY'19 Burgan's customer deposits grew by 6% adding further diversification in its funding base. In FY'19, Burgan reported Common Equity Tier 1 ratio (CET1) of 11.5% and Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) of 16.8% indicating sufficient capital buffers for the business. Commenting on these results Majed Essa Al Ajeel, Chairman of Burgan Bank Group KPSC said: "Burgan's solid set of FY'19 results yet again proves the strength of our operating capabilities and prudent risk management.

This approach helps us generate consistent shareholders returns while maintaining sound risk appetite" "During 2019, one of theGroup's major achievements was the successful issuance of USD 500mn Tier1 capital securities. The issuance was very well received by the global investor community and the strong subscription levels and attractive pricing demonstrated strong investor confidence in Burgan" added Ajeel. Aieel concluded "On behalf of the board,

I take this opportunity to thank our cus-



Raed Al-Haqhaq, Burgan Bank Deputy Group CEO and CEO-Kuwait.

tomers and shareholders for the trust they have in our capabilities and our regulators, the Central Bank of Kuwait, for their continuous support. I would also like to thank our executive management team for their leadership and their execution of the Group's strategy, and our staff for their continued support and commitment."

Furthermore, Masaud M J Hayat, Vice Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer of Burgan Bank KPSC added, "Burgan successfully optimized its international businesses to mitigate risk and scaled up its Kuwait focus to deliver double-digit returns to the shareholders. Burgan's cautious growth strategy, focus on efficiency and asset quality has ensured continued growth in profitability" Talking about the planned sale of Bank of Baghdad (BoB), Hayat commented, "The sale of BoBwill present us with an opportunity to redeploy capital towards our key growth areas, while improving our Asset Quality metrics."

Looking ahead, Hayat said, "Digital transformation of our operations is one of the main priorities of the bank's new strategy in the coming period. We look to the year 2020 to represent an important milestone by dedicating our efforts on long term sustainability with a focus on environmental, social and economic pillars through working to develop human capital, applying the principles of good governance, and the digital transformation of our business activities. We firmly believe that this transformation will enhance the delivery of our valuable services and offers to our valued customers. "

Raed Al-Haqhaq, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer & CEO- Kuwait of Burgan Bank KPSC said, "Kuwait operations has had another strong year with improvements across the key metrics. The Kuwait Revenues grew by 7% while its loan book grew by 8%. Kuwait's Cost to Income ratio improved to 27.6% and its cost of credit improved to 50bps while its NPL ratio was stable at 1.6%.

Please note that beginning this year, the

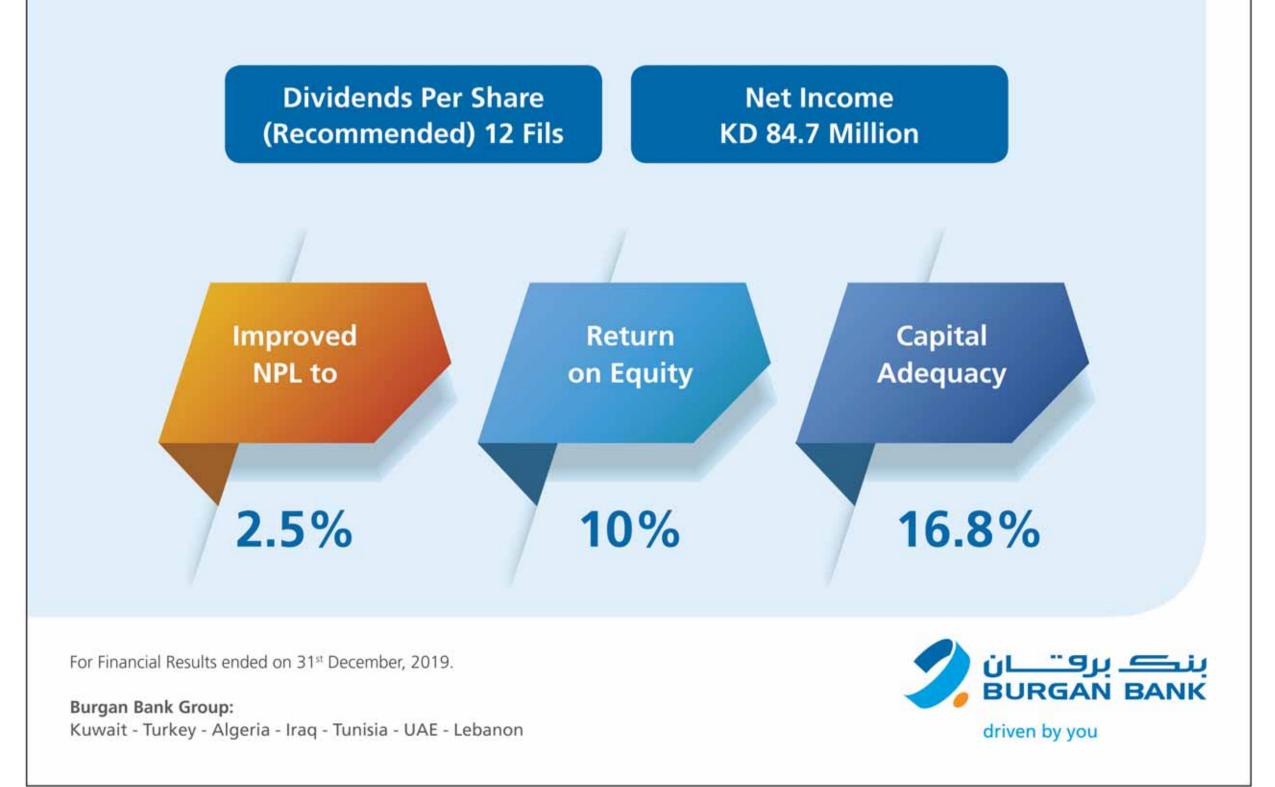
Bank has revised its financial statements' closing process by changing the reporting date of its subsidiaries to one month earlier than the Group's reporting date. Accordingly, the reported financial results of FY'19 include only eleven months (i.e. January to November) performance of the subsidiaries instead of full twelve months as included in prior periods.

Sunday, March 8, 2020

The consolidated financials encompass the results of the Group's operations in Kuwait, and its share of results from its subsidiaries, Burgan Bank Turkey, Gulf Bank Algeria, Bank of Baghdad and Tunis International Bank. Through this regional reach, Burgan Bank has one of the largest regional branch networks with 164 branches across Kuwait, Turkey, Algeria, Iraq, Tunis, Lebanon and a representative office in the United Arab Emirates.



KD 84.7 Million





Business



•Our diversification and digitization strategies set NBK on the right course to maintain its leadership position

•Strong volumes across most business segments further maintain our robust balance sheet and demonstrate the high quality and diversity of our earnings

•NBK's new headquarters is a milestone in the Bank's sustainability practices

•Our dominant market share and strong financial position enable us to navigate through various operational challenges

We are committed to supporting economic growth and Kuwait's national development plan as the bank of choice for financing mega public sector projects



•Our financial results reflect the strength of our business model and our strategic focus on diversification

•We continued to grow our balance sheet while maintaining healthy asset quality metrics and robust levels of capitalization

•Our Tier 1 capital securities issuance was very well-received by investors globally, reflecting NBK's well-established reputation and prominent leadership position

•Our financial and operational results confirm the soundness of our business model and our ability to achieve further growth in the future

•We are building a global banking network that supports Kuwait's economy and its infrastructure development plan

•NBK is focused on increasing operational efficiency through its investments in technology and digital transformation to provide its customers with the best banking solutions

NBK approves the distribution of 35% cash dividends and 5% bonus shares

AGM held with a 77.86% quorum; BOD's proposals approved



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held yes- well and delivered strong results despite the challengdistribute 35% cash dividends to shareholders (equivalent to 35fils per share) and the distribution of 5% bonus shares (5 shares for every 100 shares owned).

terday, its 2019 Annual General Meeting (AGM) and ing operating environment which was negatively Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), at which there impacted by volatile oil prices. NBK's performance in was a quorum of 77.86%. The AGM and EGM 2019 highlighted the strength of our business model approved the Board of Directors' recommendation to and strategic focus driven from our diversification strategies as clearly reflected in the strong growth of our balance sheet. Total assets grew by 6.7% y-o-y, reaching KD 29.3 billion and equity attributable to shareholders stood at KD 3.21 billion. Meanwhile, customer loans and advances increased to KD 15.9 billion, up by 10.7%. Al-Sager confirmed that NBK maintained healthy levels of capitalization, with a capital adequacy ratio of 17.8% at year-end, exceeding the Central Bank of Kuwait's guidelines and Basil III requirements. NBK's asset quality metrics remained strong with the ratio of non-performing loans to gross loans at 1.10% and an NPL coverage ratio of 272.2%. Return on average equity was 12.3% while return on average assets was 1.42%. Al-Sager highlighted that towards the end of 2019, NBK issued USD 750 million RegS/144A perpetual Non-Call 6-Year Tier 1 capital securities. The issuance was well received by fixed income investors and financial institutions around the world, reflecting NBK's well-established reputation, solid investor confidence and its highest credit ratings among Kuwaiti and regional banks.

Sustained growth

NBK's Chairman Nasser Al-Saver delivered his speech at the 2019 AGM and EGM affirming that NBK had another year of stellar performance in 2019 across all business units and markets. That performance was clearly reflected in the continued profitable growth and the solid financial results, a testament that NBK is on the right track to consolidate its leadership in the local market and solidifies its prominent position in expanding its geographical footprint across regional markets in line with its diversification and digital transformation strategies; the cornerstones of NBK's future growth.

Al-Sayer added that in 2019 NBK reported over KD 401 million in net profits which was mainly driven by core banking activities and strong volumes across most business segments. Customer loans and advances grew by 7% y-o-y, maintaining the Group's robust balance sheet and demonstrating the quality and diversity of both operations and earnings.

"That confirms that the Group's diversification strategy is an important factor in our strong and consistent financial performance, as we continually seek to maintain diversity in both the markets we operate in and services we provide in such a way that guarantees operational excellence in the ever-changing banking environment", Al-Sayer commented.

Al-Sayer said that he was pleased to host the AGM and EGM at NBK's new headquarters which is considered a milestone in the Bank's sustainability practices, resulting in NBK's selection to be a constituent of the prestigious sustainability FTSE4Good Index Series. NBK Tower is a new landmark green-building built in line with LEED Gold requirements, being one of the first with such high certification in Kuwait and the region based on its energy saving and environment preservation designs.

"We are very optimistic regarding conserving energy and water consumption, as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions," Al-Sayer stressed. Al-Sayer confirmed that in the backdrop of a challenging global economic environment Kuwait has been a beacon of stability thanks to its solid economic foundations that supported the stability of the operating environment despite global trade uncertainties and regional geopolitical tensions.

NBK showed a great deal of resilience in facing such challenges, thanks to its leadership position, its dominant market share and its strong financial position, thus positioning NBK to be the trusted bank of choice for financing public and private projects, as it maintains its leading role in supporting economic growth and the agenda of 'New Kuwait 2035'", Al-Sayer concluded.

Strong balance sheet

Isam J. Al-Sager, NBK's Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "We are extremely proud of our solid financial performance over the past year. NBK fared

Diversification strategy

Al-Sager indicated that NBK's financial and operational performance is a testament to its solid foundations and confirms its ability to grow in the medium and long terms, as the Group's strategies continues to focus on its forward-looking development and sustainable growth. "The diversification of our income sources by focusing on Islamic Banking through our subsidiary, Boubyan Bank, and the diversity of our customer base in the MENA region were key drivers for consistently reporting strong profits.

Our international operations accounted for 28% of the Group's profit. This is a huge step in building a global banking network that fulfills the Kuwaiti economy's need in supporting "New Kuwait 2035" through playing our role as a deeply rooted bank with a vastly expanded international network and the prestigious reputation of NBK's name," Al-Sager added.

Going forward, Al-Sager stressed that NBK is focused on increasing operational efficiency through its investments in technology and digital transformation in order to reach a more efficient operational performance and provide the best solutions to the Bank's retail and corporate clients as it strives to maintain its leadership position in providing the best digital banking solutions.

Digital future

Commenting on NBK's solid performance throughout 2019, NBK's Deputy GCEO Shaikha Al-Bahar said: "2019 was an outstanding year, not only in terms of the Bank's solid financial performance but it was a great year for NBK all around. NBK successfully managed to achieve huge strides in establishing its digital footprint and consolidating its leadership position in advanced banking technologies across the region. We continue to reap the benefits of building digital disruptive businesses to diversify income sources and mitigate risks by expanding our international operations, which is considered one of the Group's unique competitive advantages.'



New NBK Tower



Business



We made huge progress in building our digital future and consolidating our leadership position in the region

•Our profit growth and business expansion are in line with our prudent risk mitigation policies

 The launch of our in-house Digital Factory is a milestone that marks our future leading role in digital offerings

•Our international operations is a key competitive advantage as it enables us to provide unique and exceptional banking services

We are about to launch an unconventional banking model that will represent a fundamental pillar in supporting our expansion strategy in the Saudi market

Al-Bahar

Al-Bahar added that these achievements were reflected in NBK's financial results, as profits continued to grow despite operational challenges and as the Bank accelerated its drive towards establishing its digital age through the implementation of its digitization roadmap in order to maintain its strategic competitive advantage over its peers.

In the meantime, NBK's balance sheet continued to expand while keeping strong asset quality metrics, demonstrating our deep commitment towards sustainable growth within the guidelines of the Bank's prudent risk mitigation policies. "We are proud of launching our in-house Digital Factory, which is playing a vital role in driving the Group's progress towards a digital future and supporting our digital offering in the region. With its client-centric approach, the Digital Factory is staffed by the market's sharpest and most capable FinTech minds," Al-Bahar added.

Global expansion

Al-Bahar emphasized that the continued expansion of the Group's footprint represents its most significant competitive advantage, thanks to the unique offerings that sets NBK apart from its competitors. Therefore, international operations is an essential pillar in maintaining the Bank's leadership and its continued growth as its contribution to the group's net profit reached 28% despite the lower cost of risks in the Kuwaiti market, and its contribution also increased to 25% of the total operating revenue.

"We maintain our focus on expanding our operations and continue to heavily invest in the deployment of our digital offerings across our main markets, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia," Al-Bahar confirmed. Speaking of the Egyptian market, Al-Bahar pointed out that NBK is focused on building digital platforms to complement the traditional branch-based sales and service model.

NBK Egypt is also focused on expanding its footprint in the Egyptian market as the country's economy gathers further momentum in the rollout of the widereaching economic reform program, as we maintain our focus on increasing our share of the burgeoning retail banking segment and continue to expand our presence throughout various Egyptian governorates.

As for the Saudi market, NBK is working on launching an unconventional banking model that will represent a fundamental pillar in supporting its expansion strategy in the Saudi market. Moreover, NBK successfully inaugurated two new branches as it maintains a permanent presence in three of the Kingdom's major cities: Jeddah, Riyadh and Khobar. NBK Saudi is also targeting to capitalize on growing its Assets Under Management (AUM) through Watani Wealth Management Company. As for the remaining international markets, Al-Bahar indicated that NBK has established a unique banking framework which mainly maintains a strong emphasis on promoting cross-selling culture across the Bank's locations and units through its international operations in 15 countries across 4 continents. NBK also continues to expand its presence in EU markets as it strives to support international trade between Europe and the regional countries through NBK France.

adverse headwinds that negatively impacted the nonoil sector and the delay in project award and execution, thanks to the continued development of the bank's business model in the Kuwaiti market, our primary market, which constitutes 44% of total assets and 63% of net profits".

Al-Fulaij pointed out that last year, NBK mainly focused on corporate banking services to maintain its dominant share in the local market through skillfully maintaining close relations with former and current clients thanks to its exceptional customer service and specialized professional advice, in addition to its international presences. Moreover, NBK Capital provides further support through the comprehensive and wide range of financing solutions and investment offerings, which are key elements in maintaining the Group's leading position in financing mega deals.

"NBK continued to consolidate its position at the forefront of Kuwait's oil & gas, as it remains the 'house' bank for lending to KPC and its subsidiaries as demonstrated by the KD 350 million revolving facility it arranged in 2019," Al-Fulaij added. Al-Fulaij highlighted that Private Banking Group successfully maintained its leadership position as a leading provider of wealth management services in the Kuwaiti market with improved liquidity and significant increase in its AUM which enabled the Group to record strong growth in its revenues.

Technological excellence

Speaking on digital banking products and services, Al-Fulaij confirmed that NBK has the best mobile banking applications across local and regional markets thanks to the continuous development and improvement efforts. In 2019, 17 new and updated services were launched, as Mobile app users can now book term deposits in various currencies and may also benefit from NBK Geo Alerts, the first of its kind service that allow customers to receive notifications about discounts, offers and NBK Rewards Points on their phone while shopping, in addition to further developing NBK Ouick Pav.

That was reflected in a significant increase of 55% in NBK Mobile users y-o-y, and Mobile users satisfaction rate jumped to 95%. As for Social Corporate Responsibility (CSR), Al-Fulaij said: "We are very pleased that NBK has become the biggest contributor to CSR, and we are proud to be at forefront of all local and regional institutions that have introduced environmental, social and economic sustainability initiatives. Our CSR initiatives grew by approximately 11% in 2019, including our contributions to NBK Children's Hospital, in addition to numerous initiatives covering various sectors, including: health, education, youth, environment, sports, and culture".



requirements. Moreover, 45% of the workforce consists of female employees, which is an unprecedented achievement across the local and regional banking sector.

Gratitude and appreciation

Year

On behalf of NBK Group's board of directors and executive management, Al-Sayer expressed his deep thanks and sincere appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al- Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for their ongoing support of Kuwait's economy and prosperity. Appreciation was also extended to the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) for making Kuwait increasingly attractive to international investors.

Al-Sayer also thanked NBK's shareholders for their confidence and expressed his deep appreciation to NBK's customers in Kuwait and across all markets for their continuous loyalty and support. Furthermore, Al-Sayer extended his gratitude to the board of directors for their leadership and guidance, expressing his appreciation to NBK's Executive Management, who have endeavored to maintain the Bank's strategic path while

exploring new avenues for growth, and the bank employees who made customers' confidence and trust possible.

NBK mourns Al-Hammad

•We continued to achieve outstanding robust results across our main business segments thanks to the bank's continuously evolving business model in the Kuwaiti market

•Our dominant share and close relationship with our clients support-

•We managed to successfully maintain our leadership position through offering Private Banking Services and wealth management

•We continuously develop our digital channels and have the best

•Our CSR initiatives grew by 11% in 2019, covering all key sectors

•NBK human capital remain our most valuable asset as our employees are the driving force of our success and leadership, we are very

ed our Corporate Banking Services

mobile banking applications in Kuwait

proud of the diversity of our team

NBK's Chairman Nasser Al-Sayer concluded his message by extending his deepest condolences on behalf of NBK board of directors, management team and employees on the demise of Yaqoub Youssef Al-Hammad, former member and Chairman of NBK. Al-Sayer said that Kuwait mourns the loss of a great patriot, outstanding leader and a visionary who had immense contribution in pushing forward the country's development through his comprehensive redefinition of advancing its economy, education and society. Al-Sayer also prayed that Al-Hammad be shrouded in the mercy of Allah the Almighty, and to live in His spacious gardens, and to inspire his family patience and solace.

Distributions date

Event

Cash dividends and bonus shares will be distributed starting Monday, 30/03/2020. The distribution will be made to the shareholders on the bank's records as of the record date Thursday, 26/03/2020.

I Call	Life in
1952	Emiri Decree issued to establish NBK with a capital equivalent to KD 1 million
1959	Indian Rupee substituted for Gulf Rupee, issued by Reserve Bank of India and traded for the first time in Kuwait. NBK supports the substitution process
1950s	NBK supports the establishment of some of Kuwait's most prominent companies, including Kuwait Airways, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, Kuwait Oil Tanker Company, Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries
1961	NBK replaces the Gulf Rupee with the Kuwaiti Dinar
1982	During Al Manakh crisis, NBK records no losses due to its conservative leadership
1990	Iraqi invasion of Kuwait forces NBK to manage its operations from its permanent branch in London
1991	NBK supports the Kuwaiti government with the region's largest loan, worth USD 5.5 billion
1995	NBK provides a loan worth USD 1.2 billion to support the establishment of Equate Petrochemical Company
1998	NBK introduces the first internet banking service in the Middle East
2000	NBK is the first bank in the Middle East to offer electronic US stock trading through its website

Opening of the NBK Children's Hospital in Al Sabbah medical area

Operational Excellence Meanwhile, NBK-Kuwait CEO, Salah Al-Fulaij said: "NBK had unique operational performance in 2019 as it successfully managed to achieve outstanding growth rates across our main business segments despite

Team spirit

Al-Fulaij concluded his message by stressing on NBK's role in achieving these accomplishments and maintaining its leadership position as a leading franchise in the private sector that attract talented and experienced employees as it continues to heavily invest in its human capital with over KD 1.5 million spent last year towards training programs in cooperation with the most prestigious universities and institutes around the world including Harvard Business School and INSEAD.

Al-Fulaij also stressed that NBK's strength stems from employing national manpower, as NBK brought its Kuwaitization ratio to 70.6%, exceeding regulatory

- NBK is the first bank in the GCC and Middle East to issue international bonds in global markets,
- worth USD 450 million 2002
- NBK is the only bank in the GCC and Middle East granted a license to operate in Iraq 2004
- 2007 NBK acquires Al Watany Bank of Egypt
- NBK avoids the negative impact of the global financial crisis, continuing to support its Kuwait and
- Middle East customers with all their international requirements 2008
- NBK acquires a majority stake in Boubyan Bank 2012
- NBK issues USD 700 million in capital securities and KD 125 million in subordinated bonds 2015
- NBK provides financing for the largest clean fuel project 2016
- 2017 NBK issues USD 750 million in senior unsecured notes
- Opening of the NBK Stem Cell Hospital for Children 2017
- 2018 NBK reaches a new milestone with record profits exceeding USD 1.2 billion
- 2019 NBK issues USD 750 million RegS/144A Perpetual Non-Call 6-year Tier 1 capital securities
- 2019 NBK moves into its new corporate headquarters







Health & Science

Pregnant women scared to give birth in coronavirus-hit China

BEIJING: Scared of the deadly new coronavirus that has swept China, pregnant women and new mothers are giving birth alone, keeping their newborns inside and switching to pricier private hospitals to avoid the risk of infection. One new mother, surnamed Xie said she gave birth to her baby girl in Wuhan earlier this month alone, because nobody from her family was allowed to come with her to the hospital in the quarantined city where the outbreak emerged in December.

With roads blocked, she had been unable to attend pre-natal checks and was afraid to go to hospitals for fear of cross-infection. "They let you out when you are delivering a baby," Xie said, saying she had chosen a special gynaecology hospital to give birth. "When I got there, there was only one ward left," she said. "During my time in the hospital I wore masks and gloves all the time and washed my hands very often. I seldom left my ward."

Some 56 million people in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei province have been under quarantine since late January. State media propaganda videos show volunteers in hazmat suits driving pregnant women to hospitals. But Xu Tingting from Huanggang said she struggled to find a vehicle to get to says she's been trying to remain calm but hospital when she went into labor two weeks before her due date. "I was having contractions every 10 minutes, and asked my parents to take me to the hospital. It took them nearly two hours to find a car and I was panicking, thinking I'd have to deliver at home without assistance," Xu said.

"My husband was in another city and wasn't allowed to enter the town. It was the grocery store owner in our compound who finally agreed to take me in his delivery van." Xie and Xu-who had a healthy boy-are also nervous about going out to vaccinate their newborns. "I still don't know what to do yet. There's still 20 days left for my baby to get vaccinated, I hope by then the situation is under control," Xie said.

'I am afraid'

With some 80,000 infections nationwide and over 2,900 deaths, it isn't just in the virus epicenter where new mothers are scared. Beijing-based Angelika Fu, whose baby is due in two weeks, has chosen a private hospital despite the cost being 10 times higher. "We opted for a private hospital, although costlier, because we wanted to avoid crowds and feel safe," she said. She that she had had "some hysterical moments".

"I think the situation is getting better and better and the risk of being infected in the hospital is much lower than a month ago. At least, that's what I want to believe," Fu said. Mental health service providers have also seen an uptick in the number of calls from anxious new mothers. "Over the last month, dozens of pregnant women and new mums have been calling us with stress or anxiety related concerns," said a volunteer at Beijing International Christian Fellowship, which runs a mental health hotline, who wished to remain anonymous.

"The uncertainty and disruption to normal life created by the epidemic was weighing down on many, in addition to the usual baby blues." Parenting groups and play areas have also been closed. Theresa Ying delivered her baby in Beijing two days after Wuhan was placed in lockdown. "I was very nervous. We didn't have enough information at the time about this virus and that caused a lot of stress," she said. "For the baby's first month vaccination, we asked a friend to buy the vaccine from Singapore and paid a nurse to come home and administer it. "It's costly, but I am afraid to take my baby out."



NUHAN: This file photo taken on February 26, 2020 shows a volunteer escorting a pregnant woman to the hospital in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province. —AFP

The outbreak comes as China's marriage and fertility rates decline, despite the introduction of a two-child policy. Yi Fuxian, senior scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said the virus chaos will likely impact on demographics. "The

coronavirus epidemic will lead to a further decline in GDP growth, an increase in unemployment, a decline in household income, and a decline in the ability to raise children, so the fertility rate will continue to decline," said Yi. — AFP













Kuwait in Times







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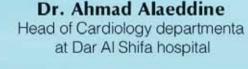
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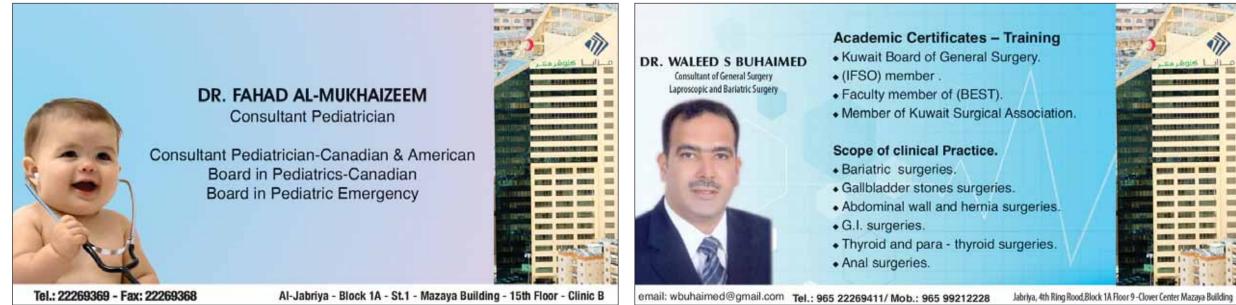
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ic_kwt

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Sunday, March 8, 2020

Stars

CROSSWORD 2452

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STAR TRACK



An evening at home with your sweetheart could seem very appealing today, Aries. Sex and romance are very much on your mind, and you might surprise yourself with how Earthy you feel. You could decide to pick up a romantic novel or see a sexy movie. You could learn to communicate better with your partner today, both verbally and physically. Make sure you look your best, and go for it!



you may not be able to get through. Money could be coming in the mail, Taurus, but probably won't arrive today. This could be a day full of frustrations, but the evening should make up for it. Love and romance look great right now. This is a wonderful day to schedule an evening with your partner or to look for one. Enjoy!

Libra (September 23-October 22)

You're a born romantic by nature, Libra, but today you're likely to think more in terms of physical passion than idealized romance. You're likely to be especially concerned with your appearance, and might want to go for a professional makeover or buy some new clothes. The color blue might seem especially appealing right now, but don't forget to add some red for passion! Phone your romantic interest and have fun tonight!



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Even if you aren't romantically involved, Scorpio, you're likely to feel especially passionate today and anxious to schedule an intimate evening with someone who's caught your eye. You may not gallop off into the sunset right away, but you could dream of faraway lands. You might want to plan a trip. Be patient and don't overwhelm this person with too much passion too soon. Wait and see how things go

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Communication with a significant other might hit a brick wall, and you may not be able to get through. Money could be coming in the mail, Taurus, but probably won't arrive today. This could be a day full of frustrations, but the evening should make up for it. Love and romance look great right now. This is a wonderful day to schedule an evening with your partner or to look for one. Enjoy!

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Sagittarius, this might seem even more pronounced today. Racy novels and movies could be especially appealing. You may want to plan a romantic evening with a lover. If you don't have one, don't be surprised if an old friend suddenly looks very sexy! This is a great day to shop for clothes. You're more likely to pick the most becoming items.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Communications with family members and others should be clear, honest, and loving. Although your physical passions may be surging beneath the surface today, Cancer, they're still very much present. You're likely to be feeling particularly romantic, and might want to read racy novels or go to a sexy movie. This is the night to be alone with that special person. Make sure you look your best. Have fun!



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Your mind isn't likely to be on the job today. That could cause a number of problems. You might be feeling especially romantic. You're thinking about the evening when you can be alone with your romantic partner or at least luxuriate in racy novels or sexy movies. At lunch, buy some clothes you feel are especially flattering and then enjoy your evening!

Leo (July 23-August 22)

A phone call from your sweetheart might bring out your passionate, romantic side today, Leo. You'll probably have a lot to do, and therefore not be able to meet with him or her until late. All signs indicate that the encounter will be worth the wait. You should be especially attuned to your partner right now. You might know instinctively what they need from you now. Buy some new clothes, and enjoy!



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

determination into whatever projects you need to do today. However, your mind won't really be on them, Aquarius, as you could be feeling especially passionate now. Your own intellectual and philosophical interests might be uppermost in your mind, right up there with sex and romance! That physical vigor could prove very pleasurable tonight. Enjoy your day.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You're in a romantic mood today, Pisces. You're more likely to notice attractive strangers you pass on the street, and attract admiring glances from them! Racy novels and movies could seem more appealing than usual, and you might do some window-shopping for sensual products. This is definitely an evening to spend with that special person in your life. Have a professional style your hair to make sure you look your best!

ACROSS

- 1. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods. 4. Coat with a patina.
- 12. A United States unit of weight equivalent to 2000 pounds.
- 15. A unit of pain intensity.
- 16. An intense and irresistible love for yourself and concern for your own needs.
- 17. (Old Testament) Adam's wife in Judeo-Christian mythology.
- 18. Black tropical American cuckoo.
- 19. The act of making a noisy disturbance.
- 20. The seventh month of the Moslem calendar.
- 22. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- 24. German chemist remembered for his discovery of the ring structure of benzene (1829-1896).
- 25. (Hindu) A manner of sitting (as in the practice of Yoga).
- 26. A city in northwestern Syria. 29. An official prosecutor for a judicial dis-
- trict. 30. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal
- to 10 liters. 31. Deciduous South African tree having
- large odd-pinnate leaves and profuse fragrant orange-yellow flowers.
- 33. Used as a Hindi courtesy title. 37. A radioactive element of the actinide
- series. 39. An affirmative.
- 41. The brightest star in Ursa Minor.
- 42. A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.
- 43. A state of extreme confusion and disorder.
- 47. A Kwa language spoken by the Yoruba people in southwestern Nigeria.
- 48. United States screenwriter and filmmaker (born in 1944). 52. An ancient region of northeastern Africa
- (southern Egypt and northern Sudan) on the Nile.
- 54. A city in southern Turkey on the Sevhan

3. Surveying instrument consisting of the

upper movable part of a theodolite including the telescope and its attachments.

DOWN

1. (Babylonian) A demigod or first man.

2. The fifth of the seven canonical hours.

- 4. A fine closely woven cotton fabric.
- 5. Largest known toad species.
- 6. An alloy of copper and zinc (and sometimes arsenic) used to imitate gold in cheap jewelry and for gilding.
- 7. (folklore) Fairies that are somewhat mischievous.
- 8. The state that precedes vomiting.
- 9. The part of the nervous system of vertebrates that controls involuntary actions of the smooth muscles and heart and glands.
- 10. A light strong gray lustrous corrosionresistant metallic element used in strong light-weight alloys (as for airplane parts).
- 11. Worn or shabby from overuse or (of pages) from having corners turned down.
- 12. Large (to 3 feet) blackish yellow-banded South American lizard.
- 13. Rounded like an egg.
- 14. The compass point that is one point east of northeast.
- 21. Jordan's port.
- 23. Of the color of black ink.
- 27. Being one more than fifty.
- 28. Tropical American shrub or small tree
 - having huge deeply palmately cleft leaves and large oblong yellow fruit.
- 32. Weapon consisting of a fighting ax. 34. An anti-TNF compound (trade name
- Arava) that is given orally.
- 35. Originally a British youth subculture that evolved out of the teddy boys in the

A renewed sense of physical vigor could have you plunging with

While you are Earthy by nature and enjoy physical passion,



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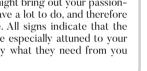
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As someone who tends to operate through your intellect, Virgo, you might be surprised by the surge of romantic passion that comes your way at this time. For today at least, your values might shift from the intellectual to the physical. You'll probably want to plan a romantic evening with someone special. You might even want to get out and spend some money on clothes. Enjoy your day.



River. 55. A Hindu prince or king in India.

- 56. The work of caring for or attending to someone or something.
- 57. Southeastern European plant cultivated for its fragrant purplish flowers and round flat papery silver-white seedpods that are used for indoor decoration.
- 59. The residue that remains when something is burned.
- 61. A soft silver-white or yellowish metallic element of the alkali metal group. 62. An oily colorless liquid obtained by the
- condensation of two molecules of acetaldehvde.
- 65. Make a high-pitched, screeching noise, as of a door.
- 69. Inquire about.
- 72. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
- 73. Having excessive asymmetrical ornamentation.
- 75. Joint capital (with Riyadh) of Saudi Arabia.
- 76. A drug combination found in some overthe-counter headache remedies (Aspirin and Phenacetin and Caffeine).
- 77. Any of several cultivated sour cherry trees bearing pale red fruit with colorless juice.
- 79. A rotating disk shaped to convert circular into linear motion.
- 80. A serve that strikes the net before falling into the receiver's court.
- 81. Edit and correct (written or printed material).
- 82. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

36. Someone who lends money at excessive rates of interest. 38. Any taillike structure. 40. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens. 44. Register formally.

1960s

- 45. Two items of the same kind.
- 46.36th President of the United States.
- 49. Clouding of the natural lens of the eye.
- 50. Of or like a feeble old woman.
- 51. Durable fragrant wood. 53. A dull persistent (usually moderately
- intense) pain. 58. A Bantu language spoken in the Kenyan
- coastal areas of East Africa. 60. Having or joined by a seam or seams.
- 63. Fierce wild dog of the forests of central
- and southeast Asia that hunts in packs. 64. An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
- 66. A strip of land projecting into a body of water.
- 67. A small boat of shallow draft with cross thwarts for seats and rowlocks for oars with which it is propelled.
- 68. Type genus of the Aceraceae.
- 70. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- 71. God of love and erotic desire.
- 74. A tight-fitting headdress.
- 78. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.

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Wordsearch Puzzle

Old West 1

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid.

The remaining 25 letters spell a George Eliot quotation.

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OUTLAW GANG

PLOW HORSE POSSE

RAILROAD RANCH RATTLESNAKE

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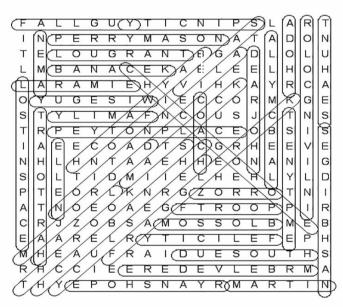
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Old TV Shows 4



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ALLY MCBEAL	ELLEN	IN LIVING COLOR	PEYTON PLACE
AMEN	EMPTY NEST	LARAMIE	RHODA
BANACEK	F TROOP	LOST IN SPACE	RYAN'S HOPE
BAYWATCH	FALL GUY	LOU GRANT	SEA HUNT
BLOSSOM	FAMILY	MAJOR DAD	SPIN CITY
CHICAGO HOPE	FELICITY	MARTIN	THE ROOKIES
CHINA BEACH	FRAGGLE ROCK	MATLOCK	VEGAS
COACH	HART TO HART	MR BELVEDERE	WISEGUY
DEAR JOHN	HAZEL	NASH BRIDGES	ZORRO

The hidden TV show is: LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE

Friday's Solution

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Lifestyle

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2020





Croatian designer launches

Croatian designer Zoran Aragovic posing with protective face masks bearing his designs.

'cheerful' virus mask line

nspired by the global scare over the nov- masks, which cost around nine euros (\$10), el coronavirus, a Croatian fashion designer has launched his own "cheerful" collection of virus masks. They offer no protection against the disease which continues to spread around the world but that has not put off buyers. "The idea for a designer mask was spontaneous," Zoran Aragovic, owner of the BiteMyStyle brand, told AFP. "Every morning while having coffee we were commenting on the coronavirus and lack of masks.

"I was joking that I would make a colorful, cheerful mask, like my fashion creations, and put it on my Instagram," said the 39-year-old from Zagreb. But Aragovic's cotton mask, inspired like his clothes by Disney characters, pop art and comic books, immediately sparked an interest across the country. Dozens of the

have been sold since he started production some two weeks ago and people continue to order them, the designer said. Aragovic, who believes that the best way to fight against fear of the virus is with positive items such as clothes, stressed that "these are not medical masks but cheerful fashion accessories".

Croatia has registered nine cases of the virus which has killed over 3,200 people across the world. More than 94,000 have been infected in 81 countries and territories, according to AFP's latest toll based on official sources. — AFP

> **Croatian designer Zoran Aragovic** working on a protective face mask.





Croatian designer Zoran Aragovic posing next to protective face masks bearing his designs.



A picture shows a woman wearing a protective face mask designed by Croatian designer Zoran Aragovic.



A woman presenting a protective face mask designed by Croatian designer Zoran Aragovic. — AFP photos

Surprise! Katy Perry reveals pregnancy in latest music video

t was a twofer for fans of Katy Perry: the pop star dropped a new music video-and revealed that she and her fiance, actor Orlando Bloom, are expecting a baby. The 35-year-old Perry cradles a baby bump in the final seconds of the video for "Never Worn White," released late Wednesday. Shortly before it dropped, Perry had published a snippet of the clip, fuelling specula-

tion on social media that the singer-known for hits such as "I Kissed A Girl" and "Roar"-might be expecting.

"Let's just say it's gonna be a jam packed summer..." Perry wrote afterwards on various social media sites. "So glad I don't have to suck it in anymore... or carry around a big purse," she told her more than 108 million Twitter followers.

The songstress is engaged to Bloom, who is best known for his role as Legolas in "The Lord of the Rings" saga as well as his turn in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise alongside Johnny Depp. The baby will be Perry's first and the second for Bloom, 43, who has a son with model Miranda Kerr. — AFP



In this file photo British actor Orlando Bloom (left) and US singer Katy Perry pose upon their arrival at the 2nd Monte-Carlo Gala for the Global Ocean 2018 held in Monaco.—AFP





Lifestyle Features

Sunday, March 8, 2020







Mamdouh Hassan carries a mummified crocodile at his home in the Nubian village A mummified crocodile hangs above the entrance door of Mamdouh Hassan's (cen- A mummified crocodile hangs at a house in the Nubian village of Gharb Soheil.

of Gharb Soheil, on the west bank of the Nile river off Egypt's southern city of ter) house in the Nubian village of Gharb Soheil. Aswan, some 920 kilometers south of the capital. — AFP photos

EGYPT'S NUBIANS TAME CROCODILES FOR SELFIE-SNAPPING TOURISTS

eep in the Nubia, a region along the Nile in southern Egypt, a baby crocodile sits on Mamdouh Hassan's shoulder to wow tourists. The reptiles are a source of income for Egypt's Nubian minority, with visitors paying to marvel at the tamed creatures. But beyond bringing in tourist dollars, crocodiles play an important role in the culture of the ethnic group with a history dating to Pharaonic times and its own unique language. The Nubians traditionally lived along the banks of the Nile in southern Egypt with roots extending into northern Sudan.



Visitors watch a crocodile at Mamdouh Hassan's (not pictured) house.

Crocodiles

During the reign of president Gamal Abdel Nasser, the construction of the Aswan High Dam created a reservoir over traditional Nubian lands. When Lake Nasser began filling in 1964, 44 Nubian villages were flooded. While the Nile's crocodiles benefited from the new habitat, Nasser never fulfilled his promise to adequately compensate Nubians with new land. Instead, about 50,000 Nubians were displaced to villages north of the dam, on the west bank of the Nile near Kom Ombo and Aswan-a narrow strip of land with limited space for agriculture.

Ever since, Nubians have demanded the return of their lands and have maintained their culture by modernizing their traditions. Keeping crocodiles became a way to supplement incomes and promote their heritage. Hassan learnt to domesticate crocodiles from his father. "My father was one of the first people in the Nubian village who really pioneered the idea of bringing in crocodiles as pets to lure tourists," he told AFP. In the 20 years

and when wild crocodile eggs will hatch. Female crocodiles lay their eggs along the banks of Lake Nasser where Hassan watches for the baby reptiles to emerge before carrying them home. "The crocodile's aggressive nature is tempered by growing up in the home with us and being cared for," he said.

Francesca is the star of the show in the village, Hassan says. She was named by Italian tourists who enjoyed her sunny personality, so Hassan kept the name. Visitors snap selfies with the lounging beasts, while the villagers regale the tourists with Nubian folk tales about the crocodiles. Hany, a tourist from Cairo, was delighted with the spectacle of Hassan opening the crocodiles' mouths wide with his bare hands. "I came here with my family to spend school holidays, for the kids to enjoy seeing the crocs," the 35-year-old said.

Mohamed Mamdouh, the son of Hussein, shows a baby crocodile at his house.

floods. A temple is dedicated to Sobek in Kom Ombo, engraved with pictograms and hieroglyphics detailing the embalming of crocodiles. To this day, Nubians maintain a tradition of crocodile taxidermy, one that remains true to a centuries-old technique. "Although we know very well the value of crocodile leather, we do not sell it... we cherish it," Hassan explained.

A dead crocodile is skinned from its gut and filled with straw or sawdust. Large crocodiles take about a month to mummify while a smaller one dries in a few days, Hassan said. "This is Franco, who died last month," he said of the large mummified head of one of his former pets. Abdel-Hakim Abdou, a curly-haired, 37-year-old cafe owner who recommends Hassan's terrarium as a must-see tourist attraction, rhapsodized about the importance of crocodiles to Nubians. "The Nile for the Nubian represents life... everything that roams in it we consider angels," he said.—AFP



Mamdouh Hassan (right) shows a crocodile to visitors at his house

In Gharb Soheil, a Nubian village near Aswan, mummified crocodile heads still adorn the doors of the traditional blue and white domed homes. Crocodiles represent an important physical totem of blessings in Nubian belief. In Gharb Soheil a stuffed crocodile on the door shows that the

homeowner keeps the large reptiles as pets.

Outside his humble home in the village, Hassan gently rubbed the back of Francesca-a 1.5-metre (five-foot)-long, 15-year-old crocodile. "I have raised her since she was born," the 45-year-old said lovingly of his pride and joy. "She lives on fish, meat and chicken.'

'Angels of the Nile'

For ancient Pharaohs, the crocodile-headed god Sobek embodied the fluid nature of the Nile since, he has developed a keen sense for where and was prayed to for protection from the annual



A picture shows a rare blue, white and celadon porcelain moon flask with a dragon which belonged to the 18th century's emperor Qianlong. — AFP photos

18th century Chinese gourd sells for \$4.6 million at auction

Chinese porcelain gourd which once belonged to the 18th century Chinese Emperor Qianlong sold for 4.1 million euros (\$4.6 million) at auction yesterday. The cobalt blue and white gourd, which represents an imperial dragon with five claws in search of the sacred pearl, went to a Chinese buyer by telephone. Auctioneer Olivier Clair, who found the object while executing a will in a Parisian apartment, told AFP that with fees, the sale amounted to more than 4.9 million euros. "There have been a number, but it remains very rare," he said. "The gourd was intended for Chinese pilgrims. Little by little, it has become a decorative symbol like a coronation sword. It is an object that interests the Chinese because it is their heritage."

The gourd was possibly looted, along with many other objects, during the sack of the Summer Palace by a Franco-English

expeditionary force in 1860 but Clair said its path to Europe was unclear. "We do not know how the object arrived in France, we only know its history for three generations. "It belonged to an old family of the paper industry which had links with the political sphere of the 19th century, no doubt relatives of Mac Mahon and Napoleon III." Imperial items from the Qianlong reign (1735-1796) are particularly sought after. A pink family porcelain bowl sold for \$30.4 million in April 2018 at Sotheby's in Hong Kong. In June 2018 a Chinese porcelain vase created for Qianlong reached 16.2 million euros at Sotheby's in Paris and a gourd of the same era fetched 5.1 million euros at a sale near Tours. — AFP

> A detail of a rare blue, white and celadon porcelain moon flask with a dragon.





A picture shows the mark of the emperor Qianlong under a rare blue, white and A detail of a rare blue, white and celadon porcelain moon flask with a dragon. celadon porcelain moon flask with a dragon which belonged to the 18th century's emperor.





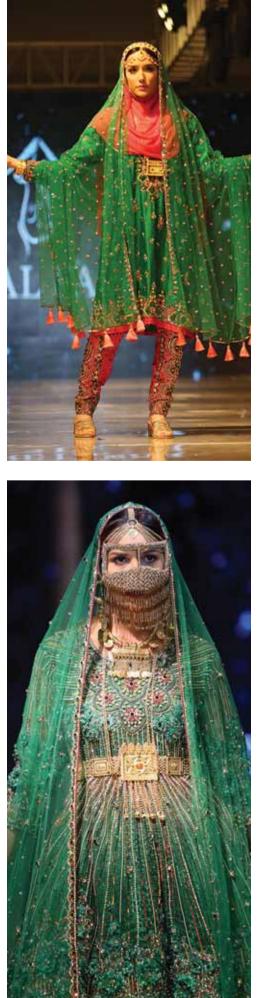
A detail of a rare blue, white and celadon porcelain moon flask with a dragon.



Lifestyle Fashion



Models display creations by Lebanese designer Antoine Salameh during the launch of the 7th edition of the "Ladies a La Mode" fashion show in the Omani capital Muscat. — AFP photos



7TH EDITION OF THE 'LADIES A LA MODE' FASHION SHOW















Lifestyle Music & Movies



'Star of the East' Umm Kulthum returns to light up Cairo

evered Arab singer Umm Kulthum returned to light up the stage once more on Friday, almost five decades after her death, in the form of a hologram that delighted a packed-to-capacity crowd at Cairo's Opera House. Affectionately known in Egypt as "El Sett" ("The Lady"), Kulthum's deep, resonant voice enthralled the Arab world for decades, inspired western singers like Bob Dylan and Robert Plant, and can still be heard in Egypt's streets, cafes, taxis and Nile sailboats. At the majestic entrance of the Opera House in the Egyptian capital, a large golden plaque bearing her image greeted giddy visitors, along with a placard reading "Star of the East, Umm Kulthum"-her most popular moniker.

As the curtains were raised, a halo of light appeared in the center of the stage which transformed into a threedimensional virtual composition of the singer, sending the audience of more than a thousand into rapturous applause. In a nod to her packed concerts of decades ago, the hologramclad in a bright purple dress and clasp-

ing Umm Kulthum's signature handkerchief-sang from one of her most famous songs, "You toyed with my heart".

"I came today because I have always dreamed of attending an Umm Kulthum concert," Aya Yassin, a professor of medicine at Ain Shams University, told AFP. "My grandmother used to tell me about the famous Thursday concerts of hers which made me really interested in coming tonight." Umm Kulthum was born at the end of the 19th century and her career flourished from the 1920s until her death in 1975, taking in an impressive repertoire of religious, patriotic and sentimental songs and poetry.

Her concerts lasted for hours and her live radio broadcasts attracted huge audiences. Friday's virtual performance comes amid fierce debate over contemporary Egyptian music. Last month, the Egyptian musicians' union banned performances of popular electro street music known as mahraganat, which captures the wild, carefree spirit of Egyptian youth but is viewed by conservatives as overstep-



ping moral boundaries. "I am a retired soldier and I made a point of coming here because I miss art that has an ethical component," Mostafa, a 60-yearold attendee who only gave his first name, told AFP.

"I'm sick of what the new generation of singers are putting out these days and calling it art. It's nothing but trash," he added. The performance in Cairo is not the first to feature a hologram of Umm Kulthum. Last year a virtual representation of the singer delighted adoring crowds in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. — AFP

Holograms of legendary Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum is projected on stage at Cairo Opera House in Cairo, late on Friday, about 45 years after the singer's death. — AFP photos

Bollywood 'Oscars' called off over coronavirus

Bolywood on Friday called off its Oscars night, the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) awards, because of the spreading coronavirus. Organizers of the Indian cinema's biggest awards ceremony said they had to postpone the three-day event in Indore starting March 27 because of the "sensitivity" of the mounting health crisis. Bollywood's biggest names including Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif were due to attend the gala where "Gully Boy", an international hit about a Mumbai rapper, was favorite for the top awards.

Organizers said in a statement the decision to call off the show was taken "with due regard to growing concerns" around the spread of COVID-19, while keeping the health and safety of fans and the general community. "A fresh date and plans for hosting IIFA in Madhya Pradesh will be announced at the earliest," it added. With nearly 1,800 titles released in 2018, India is the world's biggest film industry in terms of movies made and is now a major exporter.

After using venues in several countries and other Indian cities, the 2019 IIFA returned to the Bollywood capital in Mumbai. But the government has warned against holding mass gatherings because of the virus, which has infected 30 people in India so far. Many conferences, celebrations for next week's Holi religious festival and public events have been cancelled in recent days. More than 3,300 people have died worldwide from the virus. — AFP

PUBLISHER CANCELS WOODY ALLEN MEMOIR AFTER BACKLASH

A leading publisher on Friday scrapped plans to release the autobiography of filmmaker Woody Allen, who has long been accused of molesting his daughter, following an outcry and a staff walkout. Hachette's announcement came after Allen's son Ronan Farrow, who is extremely critical of his father, denounced the book group over "Apropos of Nothing," originally scheduled to hit shelves next month. "The decision to cancel Mr. Allen's book was a difficult one," a spokeswoman for Hachette said in a statement emailed to AFP, adding it would return all rights to the author.

Allegations that Allen molested his adopted daughter Dylan Farrow when she was seven years old in the early 1990s have dogged the Oscar-winning filmmaker for decades. The 84year-old director of "Annie Hall" and "Manhattan" was cleared of the charges, first leveled by his then-partner Mia Farrow, after two separate months-long investigations, and has consistently denied the abuse. But Dylan, now 34, maintains she was molested. Hachette said on Monday its Grand Central Publishing subsidiary would release Allen's memoir in the United States on April 7. It sparked an immediate backlash with high-profile investigative journalist and best-selling author Ronan Farrow, brother of Dylan, saying on Tuesday he would no longer work with Hachette. Ronan has long defended Dylan, who renewed her accusations against Allen in the wake of the #MeToo movement in early 2018. On Thursday, dozens of employees company employees in New York staged a walkout in protest at the decision to publish the memoir. We stand in solidarity with Ronan Farrow, Dylan Farrow, and survivors of sexual assault," the employees said in an email, Publishers Weekly reported.



In this file photo US director Woody Allen poses during a photocall. — AFP photos

ny executives had engaged in "extensive conversations" with staff and others in the past few days. "After listening, we came to the conclusion that moving forward with publication would not be feasible for HBG," she said. She added that the imprint does "not cancel books lightly." Allen did not immediately comment.



In this file photo Journalist Ronan Farrow attends the Hollywood Reporter's annual Women in Entertainment Breakfast Gala, at Milk Studios in Hollywood, California.

Hachette subsidiary Little, Brown and Company published Ronan Farrow's best-selling account of the investigation into disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, "Catch and Kill." Hachette chief executive Michael Pietsch on Tuesday defended the decision to publish Allen's memoir, telling The New York Times there was "a large audience" who wanted to hear his story. The publisher had described it as "a comprehensive account of his life, both personal and professional." There has been some criticism of Hachette's move, including by best-selling author Stephen King. "The Hachette decision to drop the Woody Allen book makes me very uneasy. It's not him; I don't give a damn about Mr. Allen. It's who gets muzzled next that worries me," he said on Twitter. Amazon has tagged the book a bestseller, signifying that the site has received a large number of pre-orders. — AFP



Bollywood actors Katrina Kaif (left) and Kartik Aaryan dance on stage as they attend the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) press Conference for the 21st Edition of NEXA IIFA Weekend & Awards 2020, in Mumbai. — AFP

The spokeswoman for Hachette said compa-

'Gratitude'

Dylan Farrow thanked all the employees who "stood in solidarity with my brother, myself and all victims of sexual abuse yesterday: words will never describe the debt of gratitude I owe to you." "For someone who has felt alone in my story for so long, yesterday was a profound reminder of what a difference can be made when people stand and unite together for what's right," she said on Twitter. Ronan Farrow retweeted a post by Publishers Weekly reporting Hachette's announcement, without comment.

Dylan had described Hachette's decision to publish Allen's autobiography as "deeply upsetting to me personally and an utter betrayal of my brother whose brave reporting, capitalized on by Hachette, gave voice to numerous survivors of sexual assault by powerful men."

SXSW festival in Texas cancelled over coronavirus fears

The South by Southwest festival in Texas has been cancelled due to concerns over the spread of the novel coronavirus, organizers and the host city of Austin said Friday. The decision comes as coronavirus concerns grow stateside and pressure ramps up over whether to cancel entertainment and sporting events that draw large crowds. "The city of Austin has cancelled the March dates for SXSW and SXSW EDU," the festival said in a statement. "SXSW will faithfully follow the city's directions."

Austin mayor Steve Adler told a news conference he had declared a local disaster in response to the coronavirus, and had "issued an order that effectively cancels South by Southwest for this year." The music, tech and film festival was slated to take place March 13-22, although Netflix, Apple and Amazon had already pulled out.

More than 400,000 people attended the 2019 edition of SXSW, which was headquartered in the Texas capital's convention center but hosted many events spread throughout the city. Texas has so far recorded a handful of novel coronavirus cases, and there have been more than 200 confirmed cases in the United States. Earlier this week Austin said there was "no evidence that closing SXSW or any other gatherings will make the community safer"-but festival organizers said the situation had "evolved rapidly."

"We understand the gravity of the situation for all the creatives who utilize SXSW to accelerate their careers," organizers said, also acknowledging the hit to small theaters and vendors who rely on the annual business. "We are exploring options to reschedule the event and are working to provide a virtual SXSW online experience as soon as possible for 2020 participants," SXSW said.

Ultra dropped

The SXSW announcement comes on the heels of Miami authorities saying they were cancelling the Florida beachfront city's annual Ultra electronic dance festival-which draws in more than 160,000 revelers-over coronavirus threats. The March 20 to 22 event was to feature sets from major DJs including Gesaffelstein and Sofi Tukker. Ultra has also canceled its edition of the festival in Abu Dhabi, which was scheduled for March 5-6.

The epidemic poses a particular challenge for Miami, which relies on tourism especially in March and April, when thousands of young people fly south for spring break. There have been more than 100,000 confirmed coronavirus infections across 92 territories worldwide, according to AFP's latest toll, and almost 3,500 deaths. Florida has recorded nine cases. —AFP



File photos shows Puerto Rican singer Bad Bunny performs during the Pepsi Super Bowl LIV Halftime Show at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, Florida.— AFP

Bad Bunny dominates first Spotify music awards in Mexico

he first ever Spotify music awards, held in Mexico City, saw reggaeton star Bad Bunny walk away with the most accolades in a show marked by a powerful performance by US-Mexican singer Julieta Venegas and dedicated to the struggle of women across Latin America. "Thank you for having me here and making a dream come true, I love you Mexico, see you soon," said Puerto Rican Bad Bunny as he accepted the top prize of Spotify Artist of the Year. In the user-generated awards, that prize went to the artist most listened to, most shared and most downloaded by Mexican users of the streaming service in 2019.

Bad Bunny, whose real name is Benito Martinez, also won in the categories of most listened to artist and artist most added to a playlist. The awards ceremony had its most emotional moment when Venegas debuted her new song "Women," after being presented by French-Chilean singer Ana Tijoux, who called for women to stand together against violence. "So that never again any of us is murdered, raped, so there is not one less of us! We don't want cheers!," said Tijoux, name-checking a number of environmental activists and other women who had been murdered in recent years.

Tijoux then handed off to Venegas, who appeared on stage

accompanied by a dozen other Latin American singers. A line from her new song states that "women are standing up, and men don't know what to do." The 100,000-capacity National Auditorium went wild for Colombian reggaeton star J Balvin, who had been tipped to win in several categories but who went home with just one-"most shared artist." Colombia's Karol G went home with the "most listened to female artist" award, and captivated the audience with her performance. — AFP



In this file photo Steven Lee Olsen, Ashley McMillen, Justin Davis, Sarah Zimmerman, Charles Esten, Barry Dean and Luke Laird perform following the world premiere of 'Bluebird' at Paramount Theatre in Austin, Texas. — AFP

Classifieds





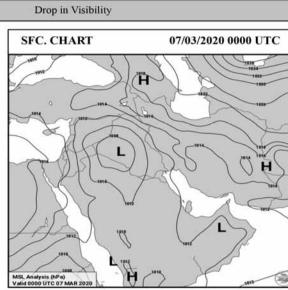
Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817 Fax: (+965) 24348714 www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 45 km/h with a chance for carried dust.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold and Dust will subside gradually with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for scattered light

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN, REC.
KUWAIT CITY	25 °C	19 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	28 °C	17 °C
ABDALY	29 °C	17 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	30 °C	16 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	25 °C	18 °C
SALMIYAH	21 °C	18 °C
AHMADI	22 °C	17 °C
NUWAISIB	28 °C	15 °C
WAFRA	29 °C	15 °C
SALMY	29 °C	16 °C



	4 DAYS FORECAST									
100 MINT			Tempe	ratures		202001 (2027) 01				
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	MAX.	MIN.	Wind Direction	Wind Speed				
Sunday	03/08	Warm and some scattered clouds will appear	26 °C	13 °C	NW-VRB	10 - 35 km/h				
Monday	03/09	Warm	29 °C	14 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h				
Tuesday	Tuesday 03/10 Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy		27 °C	13 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 28 km/h				
Wednesday	03/11	Warm and some high clouds will appear	29 °C	11 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 26 km/h				

PRAYER	TIMES	RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT				
Fajr	04:48	MAX. Temp.	29 °C			
Sunrise	06:07	MIN. Temp.	09 °C			
Zuhr	11:59	MAX. RH	69 %			
Asr	15:21	MIN. RH	15 %			
Sunset	17:51	MAX. Wind	SE 43 km/h			
Isha	19:08	TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm			

Flight Schedule

Hospitals									
Sabah Hospital	24812000								
Amiri Hospital	22450005								
Maternity Hospital	24843100								
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700								
Chest Hospital	24849400								
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010								
Adan Hospital	23940620								
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300								
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000								
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9								
Clinic	S								
Kaizen center	25716707								
Rawda	22517733								
Adaliya	22517144								

Kaizen center	23/10/0/						
Rawda	22517733						
Adaliya	22517144						
Khaldiya	24848075						
Kaifan	24849807						
Shamiya	24848913						
Shuwaikh	24814507						
Abdullah Salem	22549134						
Nuzha	22526804						
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764						
Qadsiya	22515088						
Dasmah	22532265						
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908						
Shaab	22518752						
Qibla	22459381						
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082						
Mirqab	22456536						
Sharq	22465401						

Salmiya



CHANGE OF NAME

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**)

I Prashanth Karivellur holder of
Indian Passport No P6278035I,Indian Passport No P6278035Missued at Kuwait on 16.10.2016,
permanent address of Flat No
103 Providence Abode 1 BejaiMnew Road Mangalore Karnataka
and presently residing in Kuwait
do hereby change my name as
follows: Given Name: Prashanth
and Surname: Karivellur.Th
and
Surname: Karivellur.Objections if any may be for-
warded to Embassy of India
Diplomatic Enclave Safat Arabian
Gulf St. Kuwait City 13015Nu
Sur
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changed to Given name: HAFSA Surname: SHAIK ANNWAR BASHA. (C 5701) I, ZAINAB, with Indian PP No.

by declare that my name is

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, FATHIMA, with Indian PP No. M5456712 issued at Kuwait hereby declare that my name is changed to Given name: FATHI-MA Surname: SHAIK ANWAR 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.

Air	Colores
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

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

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

25746401

	Arrival Fligh	ts on Sunday 8/3/2020		KAC	118	New York	14:50		Departure Fli	ghts on Sunday 8/3/20	20	SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	KAC	692	Muscat	15:00	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	JZR	305	Istanbul	11:10
JZR	130	Dubai	00:05	KAC	618	Doha	15:00	JZR	215	Jeddah	00:05	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	KNE	529	Jeddah	15:10	MEA	407	Beirut	00:20	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	KAC	792	Madinah	15:10	QTR	1093	Doha	00:25	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
KAC	102	London	00:55	KAC	788	Jeddah	15:25	OMS	226	Muscat	00:40				
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	JZR	222	Riyadh	15:30	RJA	5643	Amman	00:40	JZR	139	AAN	12:05
THY	3962	Istanbul	01:00	OMA	645	Muscat	15:35	UAE	2554	Dubai	00:45	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
UAE	2555	Dubai	01:20	KAC	562	Amman	15:40	JZR	111	Doha	01:55	JZR	115	Doha	13:00
JZR	002	LGW	01:25	UAE	857	Dubai	15:45	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00	GFA	210	Bahrain	13:05
DLH	625		01:30	ABY	127		15:55	THY	3963	lstanbul	02:00	KAC	781	Jeddah	13:30
ETH		Dammam				Sharjah		KAC	677	Dubai	02:10	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
	3424	Addis Ababa/Bahrain	01:30	JZR	140	AAN	16:05	THY	773	lstanbul	02:20	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
THY	764	lstanbul Dubai	01:50	JZR	212	Jeddah	16:25	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	QTR	1072	Doha	16:35	UAE	2556	Dubai	02:50	KNE	382	Taif	15:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	JZR	612	Tbilisi	16:40	ETH	3425	Addis Ababa	02:55	FDB	060	Dubai	15:05
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	JZR	116	Doha	16:40	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	FDB	051	Dubai	16:45	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:45
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:25	KAC	621	Doha	03:50	KAC	673	Dubai	15:50
THY	3964	Istanbul	02:55	GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55	SVA	501	Jeddah	16:00
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	JZR	214	Jeddah	17:45	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55	KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00
RJA	648	Amman	03:05	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00	THY	3965	Istanbul	03:55	KAC	563	Amman	16:00
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	FDB	063	Dubai	18:15	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	JZR	302	Istanbul	18:15	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00				
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	JZR	124	Dubai	18:20	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi Dammam	16:20
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	QTR	1080	Doha	18:30	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15	KAC	743	Dammam	16:20
JZR	540	КТМ	04:45	JZR	306	Istanbul	18:55	PGT	861	lstanbul	04:25	KAC	785	Jeddah	16:30
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	RJA	640	Amman	19:10	KAC	103	London	05:00	OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	KAC	156	Istanbul	19:20	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:35
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25	OHY	351	lstanbul	05:30	JZR	103	Bahrain	16:50
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30	THY	771	lstanbul	06:25	KAC	619	Doha	17:35
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	KAC	744	Dammam	19:35	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
QTR	8511	Doha	05:45	QTR	1090	Doha	19:35	JZR	001D	LGW	06:45	FDB	052	Dubai	17:45
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	KAC	782	Jeddah	19:50	RJA	649	Amman	06:55	JZR	539	KTM	17:50
UAE	873	Dubai	05:50					FDB	070	Dubai	07:05	QTR	1073	Doha	18:00
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	616	Bahrain	19:50	JZR	601	Baku	07:10	KAC	675	Dubai	18:10
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	JZR	104	Bahrain	19:55	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:20
BAW	157	London	07:10	KNE	381	Taif	20:00	UAE	874	Dubai	07:15	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15	KAC	776	Riyadh	20:05	KAC	167	Paris	07:35	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	104	London	20:05	QTR	8512	Doha	07:45	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
KAC	622	Doha	08:00	OMA	647	Muscat	20:20	KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00	JZR	253		19:20
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	QTR	1088	Doha	20:30	KAC	165	Rome	08:15			Amman	
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	166	Rome	20:40	KAC	161	Geneva	08:20	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	DHX	172	Bahrain	20:50	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35	MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
				DLH	624	Frankfurt	20:55	BAW	156	London	09:00	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
	125	Sharjah Dubai	09:05	KAC	674	Dubai	20:55	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00	ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	MEA	402	Beirut	21:20	KAC	691	Muscat	09:20	RJA	641	Amman	20:10
QTR	1070	Doha Dive dh	09:45	ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20	QTR	1085	Doha	09:30	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
SVA	512	Riyadh Balana in	10:00	UAE	859	Dubai	21:20	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45	JZR	501	Lahore	20:40
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC	172	Frankfurt	21:30	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45	KNE	232	Riyadh	20:50
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	KAC				KAC	101	London	09:45	QTR	1091	Doha	21:00
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35		162	Geneva	21:40	KAC	561	Amman	09:45	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55	DLH	624	Dammam	21:45
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	JZR	002D	LGW	21:55	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	KAC	564	Amman	22:00	KAC	791	Madinah	10:00	QTR	1089	Doha	21:55
JZR	602	Baku	12:50	KAC	168	Paris	22:00	KAC	117	New York	10:00	KAC	203	Lahore	22:15
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	KAC	620	Doha	22:00	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:15
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:50	QTR	1082	Doha	22:05	KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05			Bahrain	22:23
KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10	ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15	GFA	220		
FDB	059	Dubai	14:15	KAC	786	Jeddah	22:50	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20	UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
КАС	672	Dubai	14:25	GOW	061	CNN	23:00	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
КАС	742	Dammam	14:35	QTR	1092	Doha	23:10	KAC	617	Doha	10:35	KAC	783	Jeddah	23:15
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40	JZR	128	Dubai	23:15	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40	KAC	383	Delhi	23:20
KAC	774	Riyadh	14:40	KAC	676	Dubai	23:20	JZR	611	Tbilisi	10:45	QTR	1083	Doha	23:25
							20.20	QTR	1071	Doha	11:00	COW	060	CNINI	23:55
SVA	500	Jeddah	14:45	FDB	071	Dubai	23:45	QIII	1071	Dona	11.00	GOW	062	CNN	25.55





Premier: Lebanon to default on Eurobond debt for the first time

BEIRUT: Lebanon said yesterday it would default on its Eurobond debt for the first time and seek out debt restructuring agreements amid a spiralling financial crisis that has hit foreign reserves. Foreign currency reserves have fallen to "a worrying and dangerous level which pushes the Lebanese government to suspend payment of the March 9 Eurobond maturity because of a need for these funds," Prime Minister Hassan Diab said in an address to the nation. "The Lebanese state will seek to restructure its debts," added Diab, whose self-styled government of technocrats was formed in January to tackle an intensifying financial crisis amid unprecedented protests.

The president, prime minister and senior finance officials "agreed to support the government in any decision regarding debt management, with the exception of a payment of debt maturities", the presidency said in an earlier statement. That was widely seen as a signal that officials are leaning towards defaulting on the payment due next week.

The presidency on Monday said an economic rescue plan would include "financial, administrative and banking reforms," without providing additional details. Lebanon's debt burden, long among the largest in the world, is now equivalent to nearly 170 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP). Despite a series of crisis, the country has never before defaulted, but in recent months it has grappled with its worst economic turmoil since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Foreign currency inflows have slowed, Lebanon's pound has plunged and banks have imposed tough restrictions on dollar withdrawals and transfers. According to Marwan Barakat, head of research at Bank Audi, Lebanese banks owned \$12.7 billion of the country's outstanding 30 billion Eurobonds as of the end of January. The central bank held \$5.7 billion and the remaining were owned by foreign creditors, he said.

According to local media reports, Lebanese banks have recently sold a chunk of their Eurobonds to foreign lenders. Local banks, which own a chunk of the Eurobonds maturing on March 9, have argued against a default, saying it would pile added pressure on a cash-strapped banking sector and compromise Lebanon's ties with foreign creditors. Lawmakers, most notably those representing the Shiite Amal and Hezbollah movements, have advocated debt restructuring to preserve plummeting foreign currency reserves.

Anti-government demonstrators who have remained on the streets since October have also lobbied against repayment, fearing a depletion of reserves could further limit access to their savings. "We shouldn't have to pay the price of government shortcomings," said Nour, a 16-year-old demonstrator, during a rally outside central bank headquarters in Beirut. Lebanon's sovereign debt rating slid into junk territory long ago, but investor confidence has fallen further since the mass protests erupted.

Credit rating agencies have warned of further downgrades in the event of a default, but economists have stressed the need to protect Lebanon's foreign currency reserves. Jad Chaaban, an economics professor at the American University of Beirut, blamed the political class for Lebanon's predicament, accusing them of decades of corruption. "This 'catastrophe' or 'fireball' is the creation of a failed and criminal political class that has lied and robbed for more than 30 years," he said on Facebook.



BEIRUT: An aerial picture taken yesterday shows a view of the Lebanese capital. — AFP

He called on officials to restructure the debt and introduce an economic rescue plan that would protect modest depositors. Diab met last month with a delegation from the International Monetary Fund to discuss how to tackle the country's spiralling economic crisis. The premier asked the Washington-based crisis lender for advice,

but has yet to ask for financial assistance. Barakat at Bank Audi said IMF assistance was necessary. "Lebanon needs first and foremost an imminent debt restructuring plan within the context of a comprehensive plan for debt management," he told AFP. "The best is to have such a plan under the umbrella of the IMF for international financial assistance to materialize." The Lebanese pound, which has been pegged to the dollar since 1997, has plummeted on the parallel market, amid soaring inflation and unemployment. The World Bank has warned of an impending recession that may see poverty rates rise drastically. — AFP

No going back after deadly Delhi riots

NEW DELHI: Hazra Begum has been living in fear since witnessing men chanting Hindu religious slogans hack, bludgeon and burn Muslims to death in Delhi's worst sectarian riots in decades. Ten days after the violence, she is among 1,000 people at a squalid relief camp too scared to go home, wondering if the mixed Hindu-Muslim areas where the violence took place will northeast Delhi. The government-appointed Delhi Minorities Commission said it was "one-sided and wellplanned", with "maximum damage... on Muslim houses and shops with local support." But there was violence on both sides.

In Ashok Nagar, a Hindu-dominated locality, anger was palpable as men complained how no one was highlighting their plight. "Our homes and shops have also been burnt, our people have died as well. A Hindu (security) official was stripped and stabbed to death," said Dharam Veer. "But no one seems to care about us. Everyone is saying only Muslims were targeted. This is not the case, as you can see." Both sides agree, though, that the police were slow to act. Some even accuse them of helping Hindu rioters as they went on the ram-



ever recover. "I can't trust anyone now," she told AFP as she sobbed at the makeshift camp in an open prayer ground in the Mustafabad area of the Indian capital that was the epicenter of the unrest.

"I will never forget how these men wearing helmets and chanting Jai Shree Ram (Hail Lord Ram) shouted 'kill the Muslims, don't spare any of them." At least 50 people died in the riots on February 24-25, over twothirds of them from India's 200-million-strong Muslim minority, according to hospital lists. One policeman was also killed. Critics blame Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist ruling party for stirring animosity between communities that have co-existed largely peacefully for decades. Modi, 69, who was chief minister of Gujarat state in 2002 when around 1,000 people perished in religious riots, insists he wants to protect India's secular tradition.

For the most part, it was the Muslims who were the victims. They were shot, stabbed, beaten to death or burned in their shops and homes in rundown districts of

page with Molotov cocktails and pouches of acid.

Such is the fear of more violence that some Muslims, even those who do not live where the riots took place, are changing their habits, their appearance and even their names. "There seems little hope (of things getting better). Things have only gone downhill since 2014," when Modi was first elected, said a 26year-old journalist who asked not to be named. "From lynchings to rioting, the minorities, particularly Muslims, are being persecuted with impunity. The hate has entered our households."

Student Salim, 23, said that he has changed his name on apps for ride-sharing services Ola and Uber to make it sound less Muslim to avoid arguments or even violence. "I am more conscious about being a Muslim now than I was five years ago," he told AFP. "I'll leave this country when I get the opportunity. I know that Muslims are not safe anywhere in the world but living here has just become humiliating."

Recent graduate Noor, 27, said that her mother

NEW DELHI: In this photograph taken on March 5, 2020, Muslim woman Hazra Begum (left) sits along with her family as they speak during an interview with AFP inside a relief camp at Eidgah Masjid.—AFP

had decided not to wear the Islamic burqa on an upcoming trip out of town. "This is a woman who never shied away from wearing the burqa. She used to wear it during our school parent-teacher meetings... the fear now is something else," she told AFP. Reports said men were being made to drop their trousers to prove their religion since Muslims are often circumcised but Hindus are not.

Farhan Zaidi, 30, a marketing professional, said he was considering shaving off his beard and he and his friends now use Hindu-sounding names in public. "The problem with Muslim men is that your identity is in your pants," he said. "In reality, if I am caught, then there is no escape." — AFP

Flights suspended from 7 nations..

Continued from Page 1

Mosque, Islam's holiest site, reversing one of a series of measures introduced to combat the coronavirus outbreak. Saudi authorities this week suspended the yearround umrah pilgrimage and also announced the temporary closure of the area around the Kaaba.

But King Salman has "allowed for the opening of the mataf (where people circle the Kaaba) for non-umrah performers" starting yesterday at dawn, SPA reported. Hundreds of Muslims were seen rotating around the Kaaba, but the area between two hills that pilgrims must go between seven times to complete umrah remained closed. Barricades blocked access to the Kaaba, draped in a gold-embroidered black cloth, while men in green uniforms cleaned the white-tiled floor. Authorities had emptied the Grand Mosque for sterilization on Thursday.

Authorities have said prayers will be allowed at the Prophet's (PBUH) Mosque in Madinah and in Makkah's Grand Mosque while the umrah is suspended, apart from during nighttime cleaning and sterilization. The suspension has left thousands of Muslim pilgrims in limbo. Around two-thirds of the 18.3 million umrah participants in 2018 were citizens and residents of the kingdom, according to government statistics. The newly established ministry of sports said it would "suspend public attendance" at all sports events starting yesterday, reflecting calls across the Gulf to cancel mass gatherings.

The number of coronavirus cases in the United Arab Emirates has risen to 45 from 30, while Qatar reported its 12th case, the health ministries in the two nations said yesterday. Saudi Arabia reported two new cases yesterday, a woman coming from Iran, via Bahrain, and another one from Iraq, via the UAE, bringing the total number of infection in the kingdom to seven, according to a statement from the health ministry. The virus, which was first recorded in China in December, has spread across the Gulf and beyond. Most cases in the Gulf Arab states are among people who either travelled to Iran personally, or were infected by people who had visited the Islamic Republic. The United Arab Emirates, a major air transit center, business and tourism hub, has advised citizens and residents against travelling abroad and all schools are closing for a month from today. Events across the country have also been cancelled or postponed, while some sports, such as horse racing and soccer, are going ahead without any fans in attendance.

Dozens of Saudis have come forward after authorities called on Friday for people who had been in Iran during the last two weeks to inform officials, the staterun Saudi Press Agency reported yesterday, citing the health ministry. Members of Saudi Arabia's Shiite minority tend to keep their trips to Iran secret due to a bitter rivalry between the two countries. Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic relations with Iran in Jan 2016.

The Saudi Press Agency said 95 Saudis have come forward to say they are currently in Iran, while 26 said they had returned from Iran. Another seven said they were in a third country after having visited Iran, SPA said. Dubai-based Al-Arabiya TV cited Bahraini health officials saying yesterday six new cases of coronavirus were confirmed in the Gulf state, bringing its total number of infections to 62.

The death toll from the novel coronavirus in Iran continued to rise yesterday with 21 more people killed, including a politician who became the eighth official to succumb to the disease. Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour announced 1,076 additional cases had been confirmed in the past 24 hours, bringing the overall tolls to 145 dead and 5,823 infected. "More than 16,000 people are currently hospitalized as suspect cases," Jahanpour said during a televised news conference. He added that 1,669 people who were sick with the COVID-19 illness have recovered.

The Islamic republic is battling one of the world's deadliest outbreaks of the disease outside China, where it originated. The capital Tehran remains the worst-hit province in the country, with 1,539 confirmed cases. Yesterday, a newly elected conservative MP for the city was the second Iranian lawmaker killed by the virus, state news agency IRNA reported.

Fatemeh Rahbar, 55, served as MP from 2004 to 2016 and was among the top candidates in Tehran for the conservatives, who overwhelmingly won February's general election marked by the lowest turnout in the Islamic republic's history. Seven other politicians and government officials have died in the outbreak since the country reported its first cases in mid-February.

Iran has closed schools and universities until early April, as well as suspended major cultural and sporting events and reduced working hours across the country to slow the contagion, which has spread to all of its 31 provinces. The number of infections is climbing in northern provinces in particular, Jahanpour said. More than 300 of the new cases reported yesterday were in Mazandaran province, a popular tourist destination north of Tehran on the Caspian sea.

Several provinces, including in northern and central Iran, have said they will not provide lodging to tourists in an effort to dissuade people from travelling. Gilan and Mazandaran police from Friday started preventing cars without local license plates from entering the provinces. But according to an adviser to the health minister Alireza Vahabzadeh, some locals were bypassing the restrictions by giving non-residents lifts across province borders. In a tweet, he urged people to "cooperate" with the authorities.

The World Health Organization called the spread of the virus "deeply concerning" as a wave of countries reported their first cases of the disease - which has now killed more than 3,500 people and infected more than 100,000 across 94 nations and territories. The US was battling to contain an outbreak on a cruise ship where 21 people have tested positive for the virus. The Grand Princess has been stranded off San Francisco since Wednesday - when it was supposed to dock after it emerged that two people who had been on the ship during its previous voyage had contracted the virus. One later died. US Vice President Mike Pence said the ship will be brought to a non-commercial dock this weekend and all 3,533 passengers and crew will be tested. The Grand Princess belongs to Princess Cruises, the same company which operated the coronavirus-stricken ship held off Japan last month on which more than 700 people tested positive.

In China, where the outbreak began in December, the virus has wreaked havoc on the world's second-largest economy, shutting down businesses and disrupting global supply chains. The negative impact was shown in official data yesterday, with China's exports plunging 17.2 percent in the first two months of the year.

Colombia, Costa Rica and Malta have announced their first cases. Florida confirmed Friday two deaths from the virus - the first US fatalities outside the west coast states of Washington and California - taking the country's death toll to 16. The number of infections in South Korea breached 7,000 yesterday - the highest in the world outside China. Two apartment blocks in Daegu - the fourth-largest city and the epicenter of its outbreak - have been quarantined after dozens of residents tested positive.

The number of cases recorded in France rose to 716 with 11 deaths. Italy, meanwhile, began recruiting retired doctors yesterday as part of urgent efforts to bolster the healthcare system with 20,000 additional staff. In China, the number of new cases reported yesterday nationwide was the lowest in weeks. The Chinese government has hinted it may soon lift the quarantine imposed on Hubei province - the locked-down epicenter where some 56 million people have been effectively housebound since late January. For the second consecutive day, there were no new cases reported in Hubei outside Wuhan, the province's capital.

But the number of infections beyond the epicenter rose for the third straight day, fuelling fears about cases being brought into the country from overseas. There have now been 60 imported cases. Many local authorities are imposing two-week quarantines on anyone who has travelled to virus-affected provinces or countries. — Agencies



France 'on alert' for Grand Slam complacency in Scotland

Galthie's les Bleus are unbeaten in their opening three games

EDINBURGH: France head coach Fabien Galthie says his side are "on alert" against complacency as they travel to Scotland today with an eye on setting up a Six Nations Grand Slam showdown with Ireland.

Galthie's les Bleus are unbeaten in their opening three games of the tournament but head to Murrayfield without a win in Edinburgh since 2014. A victory in the Scottish capital would give Galthie's side a shot at a first Grand Slam since 2010 by hosting Ireland on March 14.

"We have to keep the standards we have been looking for on and off the field," Galthie said on Friday. "It's what's at stake. We are on alert for this type of experience, we are on alert for this danger," he added.

The former scrum-half's team manager Raphael Ibanez also had a word of warning for their inexperienced side. Only winger Gael Fickou has more than 50 Test appearances and lock Bernard Le Roux is the sole member of the squad older than 30.

"We're in a positive situation. Obviously there's perspective of great things to come but with that in mind nothing is written beforehand," Ibanez said. "We will remain careful, humble and we will work.'

RUSSELL'S INSIDE INFORMATION

Galthie's Scotland counterpart Gregor Townsend has enlisted the help of exiled fly-half Finn Russell, who plays his club rugby with Paris' Racing 92, as well as scrum coach Pieter de Villiers who made 69 appearances for France between 1999-2007.

Despite his input, Russell will not feature for his

country this weekend due to a breakdown in his rela-tionship with Townsend. "We don't know the French as well as the other teams, we don't play them on a regular basis in the PRO14, and the French have brought a number of new players into their squad," Townsend said.

"Conversations with players who are playing in France, people who have worked under Fabien Galthie in the past, and also having a former French international (Pieter de Villiers) on our coaching staff has certainly helped.

"It was good to have that contact to help us with our preparation," he added. Despite the absence of the influential Russell, Galthie said Townsend's men remain dangerous. "When they get into the action zone, they are capable of creating choas by moving the ball wide, long passes, and the speed of their players," he said.

"Individuals like Hamish Watson, who is an excellent player, and Stuart Hogg too. Their organisation around the ball is capable of hurting pretty much any team in the world," he added.

The game takes place under the cloud of the coronavirus outbreak. Italy's trip to Ireland this weekend has been postponed as has England's visit to Rome next Saturday.

Nine people have died in France from COVID-19 and Ibanez said it was now time for his side to focus on the game after doubts it would go ahead earlier in the week. "Obviously we haven't been able to avoid the news. We took time to explain to the players what



EDINBURGH: Scotland head coach Gregor Townsend (2L) and players participate in the Captain's Run training session at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh yesterday, the eve of the Six Nations rugby union match between Scotland and France. — AFP

could happen. After the public authorities confirmed the game could go ahead we automatically switched onto the rugby," he said.

"With the next match in Paris, we are well informed, the authorities keep us informed. For now we are preparing to play these two matches," he added. - AFP

Auckland end their blues, Melbourne **Rebels tame Lions**

WELLINGTON: The Auckland Blues snapped a woeful losing record downing a 12-man Wellington Hurricanes, while the Melbourne Rebels coasted past the Golden Lions in Super Rugby yesterday.

The Blues ended a run of 25 straight losses in away games in New Zealand with a 24-15 win over the Hurricanes in Wellington. Meanwhile in Melbourne, the Rebels broke a run of five losses against the Lions with a bonus-point 37-17 win half for a shoulder to the head of Blues fullback Stephen Perofeta.

With 13 minutes to go Vaea Fifita received a yellow card and Jordie Barrett was sin-binned soon after as the 'Canes record slipped to three wins from five games while the Blues now have four from six.

The Auckland side has unearthed a self-belief after returning victorious from South Africa where they toppled the Northern Bulls and the previously unbeaten Western Stormers in recent weeks.

However, it was hard to see them winning when the Hurricanes produced an explosive start with Ngani Laumape crashing through the Blues first line of defence, Fifita pulled in the remaining defenders leaving Ben Lam to scamper 30 metres to the line.

It was the sort of start that would have seen the Blues of old lose heart. Instead,



MELBOURNE: Rebels player Marika Koroibete (R) attempts to tackle Lions player Morne van den Berg (L) as Andries Coetzee (top) leaps over during the Super Rugby match 's Rebels and South Africa's Lions in M

Tompkins set for 'surreal' Six **Nations clash**

CARDIFF: Nick Tompkins is preparing himself for a "surreal" experience when he takes the field for Wales in a Six Nations international at Twickenham having once been an England Under-20 international.

Six years ago, the Saracens centre helped England's juniors win an age-grade World Cup. But he failed to make the step up to the senior side, despite playing alongside several England internationals at Premiership champions Saracens. A maternal grandmother from Wrexham, however, allowed Tompkins to qualify for Wales. Last month's Six Nations opener against Italy in Cardiff saw Tompkins, born in Sidcup, southeast England, given a Wales debut by coach Wayne Pivac and on Saturday he will win his fourth cap against an England side featuring six of his Saracens team-mates — Owen Farrell, Maro Itoje, Tompkins' England Under-20 captain, Elliot Daly, George Kruis, Jamie George and Ben Earl. "Dad has to wear the red jersey or else he can't come!" joked Tompkins. "It does feel surreal (playing against England) and I suppose it's not going to kick in until I am really there."

over the South Africans.

Auckland's win was their first derby away win in New Zealand since against the Hurricanes in 2013. The Blues, for so long the under-achievers of New Zealand rugby, had their cause helped by the Hurricanes ill-discipline with prop Tyrel Lomax red-carded early in the second

they produced a huge defensive effort as the Hurricanes controlled most of the first half and then took control as the 'Canes lost players in the second half.

Captain Patrick Tuipulotu said there is a new determination within the side. "There's certainly a difference in mood... it's a good feeling," he said. "What I'm

most happy with is we managed to keep our composure especially in tough times. Certainly in past years we probably wouldn't have.'

The Rebels led 15-10 at half-time after getting away to 15-0 inside the

Andrew Kellaway and Richard Hardwick. But vellow cards to Marika Koroibete and Tom English in the final 10 minutes of the half allowed the Lions back into the contest. — AFP

Sports events hit by coronavirus epidemic

LONDON: Here is a list of international sports events hit by the outbreak of a coronavirus:

OLYMPICS

· Crowds will be smaller and receptions have been scrapped at the Tokyo 2020 torch-lighting ceremony in ancient Olympia, Greece next week. The dress rehearsal the day before will be held without spectators. The International Olympic Committee gave further unequivocal backing to this year's Games in July and August, urging athletes to prepare "full steam" despite the coronavirus threat.

ATHLETICS

· The World Athletics Indoor Championships, scheduled for Nanjing from March 13-15, were postponed until next year. World Athletics is working with organisers on a date to host the biennial event in 2021.

· The Paris marathon has been postponed from April 5 to Oct. 18 due to the virus outbreak in France.

• The Barcelona marathon scheduled for March 15 has been postponed until Oct. 25.

SOCCER

• Italy has ordered all major sporting events, including top-flight Serie A soccer games, to be played without fans for a month in a bid to curb Europe's worst outbreak of the virus.

· Ten Serie A matches have been postponed as well as two Coppa Italia semifinal ties (Juventus v AC Milan and Napoli v Inter Milan).

• Players in England's Premier League will forgo traditional pre-match handshakes between opponents as a measure to prevent the further spread of the virus, the league said.

• Players from Danish Super League clubs Brondby and Lyngby are in isolation after they met and hugged former Denmark international Thomas Kahlenberg, who has since tested positive for the virus.

• The Swiss soccer league has been put on hold until at least March 23 after the clubs rejected the possibility of playing matches without any spectators attending.

 Asian Champions League matches involving Chinese clubs Guangzhou Evergrande, Shanghai Shenhua and Shanghai SIPG were postponed.

 China's 2022 World Cup qualifiers against Maldives at home and Guam away in March will be moved to Buriram, Thailand. The games will be played without any spectators attending.

FIFA is also considering postponing the Asian World Cup qualifiers due to be played this month. More than two dozen matches are scheduled to be played around the continent over two match days on March 26 and 31.

 The Chinese Football Association said domestic games at all levels would be postponed.

• South Korea's professional soccer league has postponed the start of its new season. The league also asked its four teams in the AFC Champions League to hold games without any spectators attending.

 Japan's J League postponed seven Levian Cup matches scheduled for Feb. 26 and all domestic games until the first half of March.

• The French Ligue 1 game between RC Strasbourg and champions Paris St Germain scheduled for March 7 was postponed.

FORMULA ONE

• The Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai set for April 19 has been postponed by the governing body FIA and Formula One. The authorities will consider alternative dates later in the year.

· Melbourne's major events chief Martin Pakula is confident the Australian Grand Prix will go ahead as scheduled on March 15, but said he could offer no firm

guarantees because of the dynamic be held before October. nature of the epidemic.

MOTOGP

• The opening two rounds of the season, in Qatar (March 8) and Thailand (March 22), will not go ahead as scheduled.

RUGBY

• The Irish Rugby Football Union has postponed the country's Six Nations fixture against Italy due to the virus outbreak in northern Italy. The game was scheduled to take place in Dublin on March 7.

• England's final Six Nations match against Italy in Rome next week, which had been due to be played without fans present after an Italian government ruling, has been postponed.

• The women's Six Nations game between Scotland and France scheduled for March 7 in Glasgow was postponed after a home player tested positive for coronavirus.

TENNIS

• China forfeited a Davis Cup tie because its men's team was unable to travel to Romania for the March 6-7 playoff.

 he WTA cancelled the Xi'an Open (April 13-19) and Kunming Open (April 27-May 3) in China. The governing body of women's tennis said it would monitor the situation with several events scheduled to take place in the country later this season.

• Two Davis Cup qualifiers — Italy v South Korea in Cagliari and Japan v Ecuador in Miki — will be played without any spectators in attendance.

TABLE TENNIS

· The world championships to be held in Busan, South Korea, from March 22-29 have been pushed back provisionally to June 21-28.

SPEED SKATING

 The International Skating Union postponed the March 13-15 short track speed skating world championships in Seoul, South Korea, and the event will not

opening 30 minutes from tries by

CRICKET

• The ICC have postponed the men's Cricket World Cup Challenge League A that was set to begin on March 16 in Malaysia. Canada, Denmark, Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore and Vanuatu were set to take part.

GOLF

• The women's LPGA golf tour cancelled the March 5-8 Blue Bay tournament to be held on Hainan. The tour also cancelled the Honda LPGA Thailand event in Pattaya and the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore.

• The European Tour said the Maybank Championship (April 16-19 in Kuala Lumpur) and the Volvo China Open (April 23-26 in Shenzhen) have been postponed.

CYCLING

• The final two stages of the UAE Tour were cancelled after two Italian participants tested positive for coronavirus. Tests on 167 people at the event proved negative for coronavirus after they were feared to have been exposed to the infected cases.

· Four teams, including Britain's Ineos, have pulled out of several cycling races in Italy.

• Race organisers in Italy, Europe's most affected country by the outbreak, cancelled Saturday's Strade Bianche oneday race after Rome decided to hold events without fans.

• The Milan-San Remo one-day race, one of cycling's five 'Monument' classics, scheduled for March 21, has been cancelled.

RUGBY SEVENS

• The Japanese Rugby Football Union said the April 25-26 Asia Sevens Invitational, which doubles as a test event for rugby sevens at the 2020 Olympics, had been cancelled.

• The Singapore and Hong Kong legs of the World Rugby Sevens Series have been postponed from April to October. — Reuters

'TAKING CONTROL'

Tompkins admitted it was tough watching his colleagues at north London club Saracens pile up the Test caps as he waited for recognition at senior international level. "I would say that was one of the hardest things I had to go through," he explained. "You see all these guys, they make it. The opportunities they've had, they've taken them.

"I was probably blaming other people, making up excuses for why I wasn't doing what I (should have been) doing." Tompkins said his fortunes turned when he accepted more personal responsibility for his own career.

"I started taking control, doing it right...You have to be patient, and I realise looking back that everybody has got their own path. "I wasn't ready then. I am ready now, but I don't know if I would have been ready if I had been thrust in (to international rugby) at 22 or 23."

Tompkins, who made a try-scoring debut off the bench against Italy, said he had felt an added intensity in training ahead of Wales' trip to Twickenham. "Yeah. There's a lot of hatred for the English! I'm a lover, not a fighter, but you can feel the anticipation, you feel a bit of edge, which is great."

'MATURE' SINCKLER

Meanwhile England flanker George Kruis warned Wales against trying to wind up prop Kyle Sinckler as they did during last year's encounter in Cardiff when the Welsh came from behind to win 21-13.

Wales got under the skin of the Harlequins front row who, after a superb first-half display that ended with England leading 10-3, conceded penalties in quick succession before being withdrawn by coach Eddie Jones on the hour mark.

'Kyle's come a long way," Lawes insisted. "He's always been a pretty feisty character and he still is. He needs that — it's part of him and what makes him such a great player. "But he's able to control it now. He knows where the line is and where he needs to be in terms of that line." — AFP





Bangladesh thrash Zimbabwe in fitting farewell to Mashrafe

Match reduced to 43-overs-a-side as rain halted play

SYLHET: Liton Das and Tamim Iqbal became the first Bangladeshi opening pair to score a hundred each as Bangladesh crushed Zimbabwe by 123 runs in the rainhit third one-day international to complete a clean sweep in the three-match series in Sylhet on Friday.

Liton hit 176 off 143 balls, the highest ever individual ODI score for Bangladesh, while Tamim stayed unbeaten on 128 off 109 balls as the duo put on 292 runs in Bangladesh's highest partnership for any wicket.

Tamim had scored Bangladesh's previous highest score in the second ODI just three days ago.

Liton and Tamim guided Bangladesh to 322-3 in 43 overs before 4-41 from Mohammad Saifuddin ensured victory and gave captain Mashrafe Mortaza a fitting farewell.

It was Mashrafe's last game as Bangladesh's ODI captain after he announced his decision to step down from the position on Thursday and his teammates rose to the occasion to dominate Zimbabwe.

As Bangladesh's innings was interrupted by rain, Zimbabwe were set a revised target of 342 in 43 overs under the DLS method, but were bowled out for 218 in 37.2 overs, with Sikandar Raza making 61.

Mashrafe, who oversaw 50 wins as skipper, began the demolition in the very first over before finishing with 1-47, while Taijul Islam (2-38), Mustafizur Rahman (1-32) were also among the wickets.

"This is a great honour. My boys have been fantastic. They have given everything for the team. I'd like to say my thanks to all the boys," said Mashrafe, who was presented with a special memento by the Bangladesh Cricket Board after the match.

RECORD-BREAKING LITON

Striking 16 fours and eight sixes in his third ODI century and the second in the series, Liton broke the record of his opening partner Tamim, who scored 158 on Tuesday.

The match was reduced to 43-overs-a-side when rain halted play after 32.2 overs of Bangladesh's innings, and the opening duo, who had put on 182 at the time of the interruption, added another 110 runs before finally being separated. Liton was reprieved on a no-ball on 107 and was also dropped on 122 and 144 respectively by Raza and Wesley Madhevere.

Carl Mumba finally dismissed Liton as Raza took a catch at long-on to end the record-breaking partnership, which surpassed Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad's 224-run stand during the 2017 Champions Trophy against New Zealand in Cardiff.

Mumba later took the wicket of Mahmudullah (three) and debutant Afif Hossain (seven) to finish with 3-69 as Tamim clubbed seven fours and six sixes in his 13th ODI century.

"It has been a very disappointing series for us. Looking for the T2Os now to put this in the past," said Zimbabwe captain Sean Williams.

The two teams will next play a two-match Twenty20 international series at Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on March 9 and 11. — AFP



SYLHET: Bangladesh's captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (Top) is lifted by his teammate Tamim Iqbal (R) after the third one day international (ODI) cricket match between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe at the International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet. — AFP

Australia eye fifth T20 world title in front of huge crowd

MELBOURNE: Australian captain Meg Lanning says her team are "pumped" for their defence of the women's Twenty20 World Cup against India today with hopes high that more than 90,000 fans will cram the cavernous Melbourne Cricket Ground.

They go into the final as favourites, courtesy of being the sport's dominant side, winning four of the six tournaments so far, in contrast to Harmanpreet Kaur's India, who are in their first decider.

But with large numbers of Indian fans expected in the 100,000-capacity arena, there will be little in the way of home advantage. Organisers have set their sights on beating the official world attendance record for a women's sporting fixture today, to coincide with International Women's Day. That was set at the 1999 football World Cup final, when 90,185 watched the United States beat China at the Rose Bowl in California. While widely accepted as the benchmark, an estimated 110,000 are said to have attended the Mexico-Denmark women's World Cup Championships final in 1971, but it was not a sanctioned event. Pop superstar Katy Perry, who this week revealed she is pregnant, has been recruited to help get punters through the turnstiles, performing before and after the game. As of Friday, more than 75,000 tickets had been sold for a match that marks the culmination of a 17-day, 10-team, tournament that has proved both entertaining and competitive. "It seems like it has sort of fallen into place a little bit, and today is going to be massive," said Lanning ahead of Australia playing their sixth successive final. "So hopefully there is 90,000 people there. Everything's been done that could possibly be done, and we're just really pumped



MELBOURNE: Australia's Alyssa Healy bats in the nets ahead of the Twenty20 women's World Cup cricket final, in

T20 World Cup final highlights India's gender pay gap

NEW DELHI: When defending champions Australia compete in the Women's Twenty20 World Cup final in Melbourne today, they will earn the same as their male counterparts would - in stark contrast to their rivals, India.

That the match, expected to attract a sell-out crowd of mainly Australian cricket fans, takes place on International Women's Day has only intensified the debate surrounding the gender pay gap that India's sportswomen have to contend with.

In cricket-mad India, male players are revered as gods, paid handsomely and showered with lucrative endorsement deals, from watches and shoes to snacks, headphones and even toothbrushes. The women barely get a look-in. Sports analysts say they are trapped in a vicious cycle - without the right resources, they face a disadvantage when playing at the top level, which in turn means they are less likely to get investment. "The women's game is stuck, like Cinderella, at the hearth while the men are off partying," said Prem Panicker, a senior cricket journalist who has written extensively about the issue. "And that is unfair to the women, to the game and to us spectators." A-list women cricketers including T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur, opener Smriti Mandhana and spinner Poonam Yadav make about \$68,000 each annually despite progressively better performances, including reaching the 50-over World Cup final in 2017. By contrast, the top male players, led by captain Virat Kohli, earn nearly \$1 million on the annual contract of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), which is the world's richest. But they can make many times that through sponsorships, endorsement deals, bonuses and the Indian Premier League. Last year, Kohli featured on Forbes' list of the world's 100 highest-paid athletes, with estimated earnings of \$25 million.

Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

we get to be out in the middle and play in front of everyone." The final will be a repeat of the tournament opener, when India upset Australia by 17 runs after leg-spinner Poonam Yadav ran riot. It made every game afterwards a virtual must-win for Lanning's team, and they rose to the task despite tournament-ending injuries to Tayla Vlaeminck and Ellyse Perry.

After beating Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, they edged New Zealand before overcoming South Africa in a nerveshredding and rain-affected semi-final. "It's been a hard road, certainly not smooth, but we've given ourselves a chance," said Lanning, who is wary of the threat posed by India. "They're a class side, they've been playing excellent cricket through the tournament."

A LOT OF LOVE

India went through the group phase as the only

unbeaten side, on the back of quality spin bowling and the exploits of teenage batting prodigy Shafali Verma. After upsetting Australia, they beat Bangladesh, New Zealand and then Sri Lanka before automatically making the final as Group A winners after their semi-final against England was washed out.

"Rather than thinking about what is going to trouble us, it's only about being there, enjoying the moment and giving our best," said Kaur. "One thing we have to keep in mind, today is a fresh day, a fresh start. We have to start from ball one." Like Lanning, she is relishing the chance to be part of a match that has the potential to take women's cricket to another level. "We were hoping we'd get there because everybody's feeling very positive about women's cricket at the moment," she said. "We will try to give our best. If we win, definitely we'll get a lot of attention and a lot of love from back home."— AFP

Secret behind Shafali Verma's trademark shot

NEW DELHI: India opener Shafali Verma dancing down the track to hit back over the bowler's head may look ridiculously effortless but it is the result of practising the shot at least 50 times a day, says the coach who nurtured the batting sensation.

Verma's explosive batting has powered India to their maiden final in Twenty20 cricket's biggest tournament despite the prolonged run droughts of fellow opener Smriti Mandhana and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur.

The 16-year-old has scored at a strike rate of 161 - the highest by any frontline batswoman in the competition - and her nine sixes are also the most by anyone in this year's tournament. She has shown a particular penchant to charge out and hit bowlers over their head, a shot she honed under coach Ashwani Kumar's watchful eyes at the Shree Ram Narain Cricket Academy in Rohtak.

"We made her play every shot, including that, at least 50-times-a-day," Kumar told Reuters by telephone from the north Indian city in Haryana. "This is how you build muscle memory. Obviously she was a natural striker of the ball. We didn't overhaul her style, we just polished it."

Verma is currently the top ranked Twenty20 batswoman, a remarkable rise for the daughter of a goldsmith who had to cut her hair and masquerade as a boy to get enough practice early in her career. "She was barely 12 when she enrolled

but within months she started striking the ball so hard that we started fearing for the safety of other girls in that group," Kumar said. "So we put her in the senior group and she then started practising with the boys."

Kumar's academy has produced quite a few first class cricketers and he got some of them to bowl against Verma. One of them was Haryana quick Ashish Hooda, who was immediately struck by Verma's talent and fearlessness.

"Being a Ranji Trophy-level player, you obviously don't want to bowl fast and injure an academy kid," medium pacer Hooda told Reuters. "So I began with a short run-up and was surprised by her ball-striking.

"Then I went full steam but she did not flinch and played quite a few shots. I knew she was special and will play for India one day, though could not imagine it would be so fast." Verma has strong arms and shoulders and boasts excellent hand-eye coordination which leaves little margin of error for the bowlers.

"She is blessed with certain traits but one has to work hard to get the best out of them," Kumar said. "To her credit, she is a fast learner and hard-worker. The only thing she probably needs is to mix more singles and doubles in her batting.

"But she's very young and will only grow better with experience." As for his advice to Verma ahead of today's final against defending champions Australia, Kumar said he did not want to clutter her mind.

"I just wished her well and asked her to follow whatever her captain and coach tell her." — Reyters



MELBOURNE: India's Harleen Deol (L) and Shafali Verma (R) prepare to train in the nets ahead of the Twenty20 women's World Cup cricket final, in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

NZ's Cotton, first woman to umpire T20 WCup final

MELBOURNE: New Zealander Kim Cotton is set to become the first woman to umpire the final of a major global cricket tournament after being appointed for the Women's Twenty20 World Cup decider at the Melbourne Cricket Ground today.

Cotton, a lawyer by profession, will stand alongside Pakistan's Ahsan Raza for the clash between defending champions Australia and first-time

finalists India on International Women's Day.

Barbadian Gregory Brathwaite will be the TV umpire while England's Chris Broad will be the match referee.

A lawyer by profession, Cotton umpired Australia's weather-hit semi-final win over South Africa. Today's match will be her fifth of the tournament. — Reuters Several top women cricketers contacted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, including Mithali Raj, captain of the national team in Test and one-day international cricket, were unavailable for comment.

Ananya Upendran, editor at cricket news website Women's CricZone, said female players' pay had gone up, but they were still "paid a pittance in comparison to the men".

'MEN BRING REVENUE'

The conversation around equal pay in professional sports has gained momentum since members of the US women's soccer team sued their federation over the disparity. India's female athletes, however, have seldom brought it up.

Mandhana - the 2018 International Cricket Council (ICC) women's cricketer of the year - even said it would be unreasonable for women to ask for equal pay. "We need to understand that the revenue which we get is through men's cricket," she told reporters in January.

"The day women's cricket starts getting revenue, I will be the first person to say that we need the same thing. But right now, we can't say that." Cricket experts have urged the BCCI to market the women better and give them more opportunities to play, such as their own version of the cash-rich Indian Premier League (IPL).

While the women played a mini IPL version last year, the BCCI chief said in December that a fullfledged tournament was unlikely before 2024, citing a lack of players. The BCCI did not respond to requests for comment. Former India women's captain Anjum Chopra said the national team, who are maiden finalists, had a long way to go before they could be compared with Australia, who have won a slew of major trophies over decades. — Reuters



James scores 37 points as Lakers get best of Bucks

Baynes' career night carries Suns past Blazers

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James had 37 points, eight added 18 as the Celtics lost for the third time in four games rebounds and eight assists, and the Los Angeles Lakers beat the visiting Milwaukee Bucks 113-103 on Friday in a matchup of clubs with the NBA's best records. Anthony Davis scored 25 of his 30 points in the second half for the Lakers, who won their third in a row and 10th in the past 11 contests. Davis also had nine rebounds. Kyle Kuzma added 11 points and eight rebounds. James hit 12 of 21 shots from the floor but missed six of his seven 3-point attempts. He also had three steals. Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points, 11 rebounds and six assists for the Bucks, who lost for the second time in three games. Donte DiVincenzo scored 17 off the bench while Brook Lopez contributed 13 points before fouling out with 1:11 left. Khris Middleton had an off night, scoring 12 points on 5-for-19 shooting. Eric Bledsoe finished with 11 points.

PHOENIX SUNS 127 -PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS 117

Short-handed Phoenix rode the hot hand of backup center Aron Baynes to end a four-game losing streak with a win over visiting Portland. Baynes, starting in place of Deandre Ayton (ankle), made a career high nine 3-pointers — five in first quarter — and scored a career-high 37 points with 16 rebounds. Baynes' previous career bests were 26 points and four 3-pointers. CJ McCollum's 25 points led the Blazers, who got 23 points and 20 rebounds from Hassan Whiteside. Damian Lillard added 24 points for Portland.

OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER 126 -NEW YORK KNICKS 103

Danilo Gallinari scored a game-high 22 points to lead six Oklahoma City players in double figures during a win at New York. Chris Paul had 21 points and 12 assists for the Thunder, who won for the seventh time in nine games. Steven Adams finished with 12 points and 11 rebounds, and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 18 points. Elfrid Payton (18 points, nine rebounds, eight assists) flirted with a triple-double for the Knicks, who have lost eight of 10. RJ Barrett had 17 points while Julius Randle finished with 12 points and eight rebounds.

UTAH JAZZ 99 - BOSTON CELTICS 94

Mike Conley scored 25 points on a hot 3-point shooting night as visiting Utah overcame a poor performance from Donovan Mitchell to beat banged-up Boston. Jordan Clarkson added 17 points off the bench as the Jazz won their fourth straight despite Mitchell scoring just 11 on 3of-15 shooting. Mitchell had torched the Celtics for 37 points in a 114-103 loss at Utah last week. Marcus Smart had 29 points on his 26th birthday, and Jayson Tatum

Teenager Billy

and for the third straight time at home. Gordon Hayward (knee) and Jaylen Brown (hamstring) sat out for Boston.

NEW ORLEANS PELICANS 110 - MIAMI HEAT 104

Josh Hart had a double-double and Brandon Ingram made two clutch jumpers in an otherwise poor shooting night as host New Orleans ended a three-game losing streak by defeating Miami. Hart came off the bench to score 19 points and grab 12 rebounds for the Pelicans. Jrue Holiday led the way with 20 points, and rookie Zion Williamson scored 17, breaking his string of 13 straight games with at least 20 points. Lonzo Ball added 16 points, nine rebounds and eight assists. Jimmy Butler scored 28 for Miami, Duncan Robinson scored 24 on 8-for-14 3point shooting, Goran Dragic scored 15 and Andre Iguodala had 10 for the Heat, whose four-game winning streak ended.

ORLANDO MAGIC 132 -MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES 118

Nikola Vucevic recorded 28 points and 12 rebounds to help Orlando end a three-game losing streak with a win over Minnesota in Minneapolis. Markelle Fultz added 24 points on 11-for-14 shooting for Orlando, which shot 60.7 percent from the field. Magic coach Steve Clifford left the court in the third quarter due to illness and was taken to a local hospital, where he was diagnosed with dehydration before being discharged. Assistant Ty Corbin ran the team for the rest of the game. Malik Beasley scored a seasonbest 29 points on 14-for-21 shooting for Minnesota, which had its two-game winning streak snapped. D'Angelo Russell had just five points on 2-for-14 shooting.

WASHINGTON WIZARDS 118 -ATLANTA HAWKS 112 Bradley Beal continued his torrid offensive streak, scor-

ing 35 points to lead host Washington past Atlanta, which was playing without All-Star guard Trae Young. Beal hit 13 of 21 shots from the field, including 7 of 10 from 3-point range, for his 30th game of 30-plus points this season. He torched the Hawks for 40 points on Jan. 26. Beal has scored 25-plus points in 21 straight games, the longest such streak in team history. Atlanta was led by Cam Reddish with 28 points and John Collins with 26 points and 10 rebounds. Kevin Huerter contributed 14 points and 11 assists. Young, the Hawks' leading scorer at 29.6 points per game, was sidelined with flu-like symptoms.

BROOKLYN NETS 139 - SAN ANTONIO SPURS 120 Caris LeVert pumped in 27 points, grabbed 11 rebounds

League debut. Even if all three were available, Lampard might well have stuck with Gilmour after his virtuoso effort against Liverpool Cilmour who stands just 5 feet 6 inches (168 cm) tall, had no doubts about his ability to mix it with the Premier League's best after surviving a bruising encounter with Manchester United defender Harry Maguire.



LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks handles the ball during the game against the Los Angeles Lakers at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

and distributed 10 assists to lead seven teammates in double-figure scoring as Brooklyn built a huge first-half lead and romped to a win over San Antonio in New York City. The Nets led 41-22 after the first quarter — with that output the most by Brooklyn in an opening period this season and never allowed San Antonio to get closer than 15 points the rest of the game. The Nets scored just 79 points in all four quarters in a home loss to the Memphis Grizzlies on Wednesday. The triple-double was the first in LeVert's four-year career, and he entered the game with just three career double-doubles. Joe Harris contributed 20 points for the Nets. DeMar DeRozan led the Spurs with 24 points on 10-for-13 shooting, adding nine assists.

INDIANA PACERS 108 - CHICAGO BULLS 102

Domantas Sabonis scored 24 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, and Indiana held on for a win at Chicago. Victor Oladipo finished with 16 points for the Pacers while Myles

"But I've no problem with him because if he's small in stature he's huge in personality, and also huge in talent. "The reason he moved from the academy to the first team building recently, to train with us all the time, is because of the quality of player he is.'

Turner contributed 15. Indiana completed a four-game season sweep of the Bulls and won for the fifth time in its past six games. Coby White led the Bulls with 26 points off the bench. Shaquille Harrison added 25 points on 9-for-14 shooting for Chicago, which lost for the 12th time in its past 14 games.

DALLAS MAVERICKS 121 -**MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 96**

Kristaps Porzingis contributed six of his game-high 26 points to a 25-6 flurry that opened the second half, and host Dallas ran away from Memphis en route to a victory. Porzingis added a game-high-tying 11 rebounds, and Luka Doncic complemented a team-high six assists with 21 points, helping the Mavericks post a second straight win. Grizzlies center Jonas Valanciunas recorded a 14-point, 11rebound double-double. Dillon Brooks added 15 points, and Ja Morant had 11 to go with a game-high eight assists for Memphis. —Reuters



Matches on TV

Gilmour sizes up **Chelsea chance**

LONDON: Billy Gilmour has set his sights on becoming a mainstay of the Chelsea midfield after the diminutive teenager proved he can stand up to the Premier League's bully boys. Gilmour delivered a coming-of-age performance as his smooth passing and tenacious tackling inspired Chelsea's FA Cup fifth-round win over Liverpool on Tuesday.

The 18-year-old was making only his third start for Chelsea, but he showed no signs of stage-fright against the runaway Premier League leaders. Gilmour crunched into a tackle on Curtis Jones and cheekily nutmegged Fabinho to the delight of the Stamford Bridge crowd, who should see the youngster again when Everton visit west London today.

Mateo Kovacic is sidelined with an Achilles injury, while N'Golo Kante is still out with adductor trouble and Jorginho misses the match through suspension. Those midfield issues for Blues boss Frank Lampard are likely to pave the way for Gilmour's full Premier

Recalling how the burly Maguire tried to intimidate him during a League Cup tie earlier this season, Gilmour said: "Basically he was saying I'm a wee guy. He was pushing me off, gripping me by the throat, and that's something I have to deal with.

"I won't let that happen again, that's for sure. That was a lesson. "He is going to try and bully young ones and that's where I need to learn in the game how to be stronger.

"I've been working on that. That was a learning curve, when he gripped me up in the box. I remember that really well.'

The sight of Gilmour holding his own was no surprise to Lampard, who has been aware of the freshfaced Scot since he swapped Glasgow Rangers for the Chelsea youth academy in 2017. "I've got absolute trust in Billy. I remember when he first came in against Sheffield United, we drew the game and people questioned this kid who looks like a 15-yearold. I remember someone individually saying that to me," said Lampard.

And former England midfielder Lampard recognises the potential in the down-to-earth Scotland Under-21 international, who modelled his game on Cesc Fabregas after watching footage of the Spanish playmaker at Chelsea.

"For a midfield player I have lots of questions. Do you want to receive the ball in all positions, in all moments? Yes, he does," Lampard said. "Do you want to make angles, can you pick the right pass? Yes, he generally does. Will you put your foot in? Yes, he does. "He does all the right things, and he's humble. He performed like a top-class player going up against top-class players."

Ross Barkley, who shone alongside Gilmour against Liverpool, knows the perils of being a teen star after bursting onto the scene with Everton before struggling for much of his time at Chelsea.

Asked if Gilmour can maintain his rapid rise, Barkley said: "It is about being ready in training, putting the extra yards in and being ready for your chance. "Billy was ready for his chance against Liverpool and he took it." — AFP

Fernandes set for first taste of Manchester derby

LONDON: Bruno Fernandes can cement his status as Manchester United's new talisman when the Portugal midfielder gets his first taste of the derby rivalry with Manchester City today. Fernandes has made a flying start with United following his January move from Sporting Lisbon for an initial £47 million (\$61 million).

The 25-year-old has scored three goals and provided two assists in his seven appearances, helping Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's team extend their unbeaten run to nine games in all competitions. Since the Alex Ferguson era ended in 2013, United have struggled to find players with the personality and presence to cope with the pressure of trying to emulate those golden days.

But the influential Fernandes already appears a perfect fit. He has shown no signs of being intimidated by the task of becoming United's leading man.

Said to be a vocal presence in training sessions, Fernandes displayed his leadership qualities with several animated discussions with Diogo Dalot, Scott McTominay and Fred during Thursday's FA Cup fifthround win at Derby. "I like to see that in a player, he doesn't change coming into a new team. He's the same as he was at Sporting," Solskjaer said.

"That's a boy with confidence, with quality, good form and that's his personality. Everyone should be themselves. He's come in as a leader and he's shown he's a leader." United reportedly balked at Sporting's summer asking price for Fernandes, but the fee they

paid in the January window is already looking a bargain. Fernandes' impact has been so notable that some critics claim Solskjaer and United executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward should have gone harder to sign him in the close-season.

Among numerous issues that have bedevilled them this term, United have had problems with missed penalties. So it was instructive to see the assertive way Fernandes seized the ball and calmly slotted home from the spot for his first United goal against Watford.

"Certainly Bruno has fitted in great on the pitch, and is as important around the pitch and in the dressing room," said United assistant manager Michael Carrick.

"He has got a real presence about him and the lads have taken to him well. He has lifted the standard and the spirit within the squad." Fernandes' form has raised fresh questions about the future of United's malcontent midfielder Paul Pogba, who is currently sidelined by an ankle injury.

Pogba has been the face of United's global brand since returning to Old Trafford from Juventus in 2016, but this week there were renewed reports the unsettled France star is still keen to leave. Real Madrid and Juventus are said to waiting to pounce and Fernandes' quick adaptation to English football may make it easier for Solskjaer to consider moving on from the divisive World Cup winner.

Regardless of Pogba's future, Fernandes will face City with a chance to strengthen the bond with fans who have already taken to chanting his name on the Stretford End.

United have beaten their neighbours twice at the Etihad Stadium this season - once in the Premier League and the other in the League Cup semi-finals. But City still knocked them out of the League Cup after a swaggering 3-1 first-leg victory that extended their excellent recent record at Old Trafford.



MAMCHESTER: File photo shows Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes shoots but fails to score during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Manchester United at Goodison Park in Manchester United. — AFP

Today's match is a fixture that means more to fifthplaced United than second-placed City as the hosts chase a place in the Champions League. Hoping to secure United's first top-flight win over City on home turf since 2015, Solskjaer underlined the expectations on Fernandes' shoulders when he urged him to improve on his display at Derby. "He's a winner. He doesn't take 99 percent as good enough. He'll probably know he must do better than this against City," he said. - AFP



ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE Chelsea FC v Everton FC 17:00 beIN Sports Manchester United v Manchester City 19:30 beIN Sports HD 2

Trout hits first spring homeruns

TEMPE: Mike Trout smacked his first homer of the spring to help the Los Angeles Angels play the visiting Kansas City Royals to a 4-4 tie in a battle of split squads on Friday afternoon at Tempe, Ariz. Trout smacked a three-run homer over the left-center field in the third inning off Royals right-hander Jorge Lopez. The Angels' other run came on Justin Upton's sacrifice fly in the sixth to knot the score at 4. Ryan McBroom had two RBIs for the Royals.

ROYALS (SS) 4, ANGELS (SS) 3

Salvador Perez hit a two-run shot for his first homer of the spring to help host Kansas City edge Los Angeles at Surprise, Ariz. Jared Walsh homered for the Angels.

PHILLIES 9, TIGERS 0

Right-hander Jake Arrieta pitched four hitless innings and Abrahan Gutierrez slugged a grand slam as Philadelphia routed visiting Detroit at Lakeland, Fla. C.J. Cron and Jordy Mercer had singles for the Tigers' only hits.

TWINS 5, RAYS 3

Matt Wallner clubbed a three-run homer with two outs in the bottom of the ninth to lift Minnesota over Tampa Bay at Fort Myers, Fla. Joey Wendle homered for the Rays.

BRAVES 7, RED SOX 5

Charlie Culberson lined a go-ahead three-run triple and later scored in a four-run eighth inning as host Atlanta beat Boston at Venice, Fla. Jonathan Arauz had a two-run single for the Red Sox.

PIRATES 19, BLUE JAYS 13

Philip Evans hit a go-ahead grand slam in the seventh inning and Bligh Madris smacked a two-run homer later in a frame as Pittsburgh outlasted host Toronto at Dunedin, Fla. The Pirates hit seven homers and the Blue Jays had four, including Randal Grichuk's first of the spring.

WHITE SOX 6, CUBS 3

Adam Engel went 3-for-4 with a two-run homer and Yoan Moncada went 3-for-4 with one RBI as the White Sox beat the host Cubs in the battle of Chicago teams at Mesa, Ariz. Cubs left-hander Jon Lester struck out six and gave up one run and four hits over 2 2/3 innings.

REDS 11, ATHLETICS (SS) 5

Matt Davidson hit a three-run homer and Francisco Pena slugged a two-run shot as visiting Cincinnati defeated Oakland at Mesa, Ariz. Matt Olson and Ramon Laureano homered for the Athletics.-Reuters



Liverpool wins, Arsenal close gap on top four

LONDON: Liverpool moved to within nine points of claiming the Premier League title by coming from behind to beat Bournemouth 2-1 as Arsenal boosted their charge towards the Champions League places with a 1-0 win over West Ham.

Jurgen Klopp's men had suffered three defeats in four games in all competitions, including their first in the Premier League for 45 matches at Watford last weekend. Callum Wilson's controversial early opener threatened another major upset. But all of Liverpool's setbacks of late have come away from Anfield and they set an English top-flight record for 22 consecutive home league wins as two quickfire goals from Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane turned the game around.

The runaway league leaders still needed a miraculous goal-line clearance from James Milner to deny Ryan Fraser an equaliser, but defeat leaves Bournemouth still marooned in the bottom three.

"We are not geniuses, but we can really fight and that's all we have to do until the end of the season and see what we get from it," said Klopp.

have a big impact on the Reds' title celebrations in the weeks to come with the possibility of games being played behind closed doors. But the abandonment of the normal pre-match ritual of handshakes was the only disruption to the Premier League calendar this weekend. Despite the coronavirus risk there was no halt to players celebrating wildly with each other and Arsenal players piled on top of Alexandre Lacazette after a long VAR review of the Frenchman's winner at the Emirates.

West Ham were made to rue a series of missed chances as they remain just outside the relegation zone on goal difference. Jarrod Bowen hit the woodwork and Bernd Leno made a string of saves from Michail Antonio and Sebastien Haller, but it was Arsenal who made the breakthrough 12 minutes from time.

Mesut Özil was originally flagged offside as he latched onto Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's deflected shot and headed down for Lacazette to sweep home. But the goal was finally given after a delay of several minutes to move Arsenal to within five points of the top four. Wolves missed the chance

The spread of coronavirus could to move into the top four as a disappointing 0-0 draw at home to Brighton left them still two points adrift of Chelsea in fifth. A vital point for the Seagulls edges them two points clear of the relegation zone.

Sheffield United moved above Manchester United and Tottenham into sixth to further their dreams of Champions League football next season thanks to captain Billy Sharp's winner to beat bottom-of-the-table Norwich 1-0.

Roy Hodgson celebrated his new contract as Crystal Palace boss with a 1-0 win over Watford as the Eagles moved into the top half of the table. Newcastle also secured the win that should guarantee their survival courtesy of Allan Saint-Maximin's strike to beat 10-man Southampton 1-0.

Moussa Djenepo gave the Saints a mountain to climb when he was shown a straight red card for a lunge of Isaac Hayden on 28 minutes. Alex McCarthy kept Southampton in the game as he saved Matt Ritchie's penalty, but Saint-Maximin stabbed home the winner 11 minutes from time to take the Magpies eight points clear of the drop zone. — AFP $\,$

Labuschagne hits century but SA sweep series

POTCHEFSTROOM: Australia's Marnus ball," said Australian captain Aaron Finch. It was Labuschagne hit a maiden one-day international century on returning to his South African roots but could not prevent South Africa from completing a series clean sweep in the third and final one-day clash at Senwes Park yesterday.

Applauded by a large group of his South African family, Labuschagne made 108 in an Australian total of 254 for seven after they were sent in to bat. South Africa were always ahead of the required rate and coasted to a six-wicket win with 4.3 overs to spare. Man of the match Jon-Jon Smuts (84), Kyle Verreynne (50) and man of the series Heinrich Klaasen (68 not out) made half-centuries.

Klaasen hit 242 runs in the series and was only dismissed once. "It's been a fantastic couple of weeks for me," he said. It was South Africa's third successive one-day series win against Australia and their 11th win in 12 matches against them, going back to September 2016.

"It's been disappointing but credit to South Africa, they put us under pressure with bat and

a bitter-sweet day for Labuschagne, who was born in Klerksdorp, 50km away, and started school in Potchefstroom before his family moved to Australia when he was nine years old.

He said it was "very special" to score a century so close to the town where he was born. "I carried on like a bit of a goose," he said on SuperSport television of his emotional celebration on reaching his hundred, "but it was amazing. I have 50 of my family members out there from all over South Africa."

But he was quick to add there were no divided loyalties. "I left so young, I love Australia, it's my country," he said. "Although I was born in South Africa and there's a little spot in my heart for the country, I'm Australian through and through."

Labuschagne, with help from D'Arcy Short (36), Mitchell Marsh (32) and Jhye Richardson (24 not out) had to rebuild the innings after the South African bowlers took advantage of early life in the pitch and reduced Australia to 55 for three after 15 overs.—AFP

