Kuwait, Saudi, UAE extend $1.1bn to Jordan

AMMAN: Gulf states have deposited over $1 billion in Jordan’s central bank as part of a $2.5 billion package to shore up the kingdom’s struggling economy. The three states, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, announced the aid package in June after IMF-backed austerity measures sparked some of the largest protests in Jordan in years.

As well as the deposits, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also committed $250 million each in budget support to Jordan over five years, while Kuwait pledged $500 million in project finance over five years. Senior officials from all four countries signed an agreement in Amman yesterday on the deposit of funds.

Jordan’s King Abdullah II affirmed yesterday the deep rooted brotherly ties that bind Jordan with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. A statement issued by the Royal Jordanian Court said King Abdullah met Kuwaiti Finance Minister Nayef Al-Hajraf, Director General of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development Abdulwahab Al-Bader, Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan and UAE Minister of State for Financial Affairs Obaid Al-Tayer. King Abdullah expressed his appreciation to the three Gulf countries for their continued support for Jordan to face the economic burdens it is suffering as a result of regional crises.

The $1.1 billion in deposits will help cushion Jordan’s $11 billion in foreign reserves, while the direct budget support will ease pressure on the government. "It will consolidate financial and monetary stability and confidence in the Jordanian economy and spur growth," Central Bank of Jordan governor Ziad Fariz told Reuters. "This will bolster the reserves and allow the treasury to implement its projects to provide better services with the least burden possible," Fariz added.

Kuwait was the first to place $500 million in the Central Bank while another $333 million were received each yesterday from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, a Jordanian government source said. Last month Jordan’s government sent a new tax bill to parliament, which it wants to push through this year to help it get a clean bill of health from the IMF to avoid higher servicing costs on over 1 billion dinars ($1.4 billion) of foreign debt due in 2019.

Credit guarantees extended by the Gulf states yesterday will also help Jordan avoid being downgraded by credit ratings agencies, officials said. The UAE alone extended $200 million in guarantees to allow Jordan to secure cheaper World Bank credit for much-needed infrastructure projects. Jordan’s key role in providing geopolitical stability in the Middle East already makes it one of the highest per capita recipients of foreign aid in the world, according to figures from USAID, the US aid agency. The kingdom receives over $1 billion a year from the United States, its largest donor, as well as aid from Europe and elsewhere. — Agencies
You eat your meat and I will eat my vegetables

We are the only species with the power to destroy the earth and also the capacity to protect it. – Dalai Lama

By Sahar Moussa

Just for the record - I'm surviving perfectly without eating meat, chicken or fish. How are you surviving? Are you a Buddhist or Hindu? Why should you deprive yourself from the pleasures that God created?! Are you on a diet? Do you eat cheese, eggs or drink milk? Are you crazy? These are some of the comments that I hear whenever I'm invited to a restaurant by my friends, at a family dinner or at the office. Just for the record - I'm surviving perfectly without eating meat, chicken or fish. I'm not Buddhist or Hindu. I'm not depriving myself from anything because it's totally my choice, and eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, etc. is a pleasure for me. I'm not on a diet to lose weight. I'm a vegetarian and not a vegan (yet), so I still do eat cheese and labneh. And yes, I'm crazy because I have to explain myself every time I'm asked how and why I'm vegetarian.

I have been a vegetarian for almost a year now. First I stopped eating meat and chicken, and a few months later I decided to stop eating fish and eggs. My father-in-law is a meat-eater - he (along with all his family) just love to eat meat, chicken and fish. He might get sick if one week passes and he didn't eat any kind of meat (along with his family). The day he found out I had decided to go vegetarian, he went mad, as if I was depriving him from eating all the meat in the world. He couldn't comprehend that someone in his full mental capacity can willingly stop eating (according to him) all the pleasures that God offers. Every time my husband and I are eating lunch or dinner at his place, he asks me - with a piece of kebab - in his mouth "Why did you become a vegetarian? Are you insane?" I became vegetarian for various reasons - one of them is to shrink the dietary carbon footprint and help reduce the climate change effects being caused by emissions of animals bred for their meat. Because according to a report that was published in The Guardian in 2006, the UN calculated that the combined climate change emissions of animals bred for their meat were 31 percent of the global total – more than cars, planes and all other forms of transport put together. The figure was revised upward in 2009 by two World Bank scientists to more than 51 percent, but attempts to fully account for meat-eating are condemned as simplistic. In general, livestock's contribution to climate change can be calculated as low as 5 to 10 percent of global emissions or as high as 50 percent.

Martin Heller of the Center for Sustainable Systems at the University of Michigan simplified the whole idea by saying, "Certainly the way that we produce meat currently and in the quantities that we produce it, it's much more impactful on the environment from a variety of indicators including carbon footprint, land use and water use." The other reason comes from a personal experience - the day I cleansed my body from all kinds of meat and started to live on fruits, vegetables and grains, my skin became shinier and my body became more energetic. Overall, my health is better and I'm cured from a lot of ailments. Kuwait is known as a food capital of the world for its countless choices of restaurants and amazing food. Kuwaitis and expats do eat a lot of meat, chicken and fish. In fact, Kuwait is listed as the second country in the world after the US that eats the most meat. But at the same time, veganism in Kuwait is on the rise. One proof is an increase in the number of exclusively vegan restaurants in Kuwait, as well as non-vegan restaurants having clearly-marked vegan dishes on their menus, according to Dr Abeer Al-Sharhan, founder of Kuwait Vegan Society.

Being a vegetarian or a meat-eater - it's totally a personal choice. When I'm invited to a restaurant or to a dinner at a family house, I don't ask them why you are eating meat, chicken or fish and give them lectures and go mental on them for not eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and seeds. I simply respect their food choices and I expect the same from them. So don't judge me for the way I eat. At the end of the day, you eat your meat and I will eat my vegetables.

A trip to Syria from Kuwait

By Botsam Ayman

It was an unforgettable feeling that nobody can describe. It was zero hour, and we were waiting for our plane at Kuwait International Airport with mixed feelings of excitement and worry, joy and sorrow. We were about to head to war-torn Syria. It is my country, my land, that I love and fear. Our plane arrived and took us straight to Lebanon. At first I felt a huge burden had been lifted off my shoulders. But anxiety was apparent on my face, and when a private car arrived to take my mother and me to Syria, that’s when I realized things were about to get serious. We left the beauty of Lebanon with its sea views and adorable farm life of its villages by a traffic-choked road, and there it was - the Syrian border.

Tension and anger were palpable in the air. We were required to pass 15 roadblocks - luckily the driver was a regular and knew how to get us through. When we reached Homs, I was under the impression that the day of reckoning had hit it. Everything - the buildings with bullet holes, the roads were surrounded by barricades and the only sound we heard was of bullet casings being fired in the city. At night, power was cut and homes were left in darkness. People were like zombies, neither alive nor dead. People went out in numbers, looking for any help. The army had informed all shop owners to close their shops at 6 pm daily.

The final week came ever so slowly, and it was time to go back to Kuwait on a Thursday morning. We felt that we had left a piece of us in this land. Back in the car, you could only see trucks loaded with weaponry, crumbling government buildings and crushed trees. After arriving in Kuwait, I felt depressed for two long days from all that I had witnessed.

I have a message to deliver to Syrians in Kuwait - love and peace is the only way out of this.
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The majestic Siddiqa Fatima Zahra Mosque, a replica of the Taj Mahal, has become a much-photographed building in Kuwait. Located in the affluent Kuwaiti neighborhood of Abdullah Mubarak near Kuwait International Airport, the mosque is a must-see attraction for tourists visiting Kuwait. According to a caretaker, people of various nationalities regularly drop by to take pictures of this beautiful mosque.
The construction of the mosque started in 2008 and was completed in 2011. The minarets and dome are adorned with brass crescents. The color of the mosque is a little different - while the real Taj Mahal is white, the Siddiqa Fatima Zahra Mosque is a combination of white and light brown marble sourced from Iran. Iranian and Indian artisans worked 24/7 for eight months etching designs into it.

From afar, the mosque is an impressive structure, and is no doubt a copy of the Taj Mahal, even though I haven't seen the real Taj. I went there one afternoon and only caretaker Raja Zaidi was there to guide visitors. He said even non-Muslims stop here to take photos. To enter the mosque, visitors need to pass through multiple security checks.

The caretaker doesn’t allow anyone inside without prior permission. “This is a mosque visited by people to worship Allah, and it’s not a museum. The real Taj Mahal is a museum and is visited because of its rich history and because it was built many years ago without computers or engineers. It is recognized by people all over the world,” said Zaidi. The Taj Mahal was built around 1632 by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a monument to his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal. Located in Agra, India, it is a globally recognized landmark and has been designated at UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1983.

The Siddiqa Fatima Zahra Mosque, according to Zaidi, has a library, separate male and female community centers and a diwaniya. The parking area can hold about 1,000 cars. The mosque is flanked by a row of villas on one side, and empty desert on the other. The gated building is centrally air-conditioned and is fully equipped with security cameras in all corners.

The mosque is reportedly the brainchild of former MP Has-san Jowhar, who raised about KD 1.2 million to pay for its construction. Inside, the walls have carefully carved inscriptions from the Holy Quran. While there are copies of the Taj Mahal in other countries such as the US, China and UAE, it is said that the builders obtained permission from the Indian Embassy in Kuwait to avoid copyright issues.
The ushering of the digital age has resulted in a huge leap in information and data gathering, as well as overall progress for mankind. But before such developments, public libraries and private bookstores where places to go when one sought knowledge and wisdom. While public libraries have been present in Kuwait since 1923, the current boom in information access through digital platforms has forced such facilities to fight an uphill battle for relevance.

Providing their response on the issue, a number of librarians and bookstore owners told KUNA that their facilities remain as beacons of knowledge and education despite all the circumstances and challenges. Official at Al-Faiha Public Library Fatima Al-Arada said that libraries are a huge part of the education process, helping countless knowledge seekers in the past and present to expand their horizons. The Faiha Public Library and its counterpart in Khaldiya continue to serve their purpose despite the digital age, said Arada, who indicated that some public libraries, such as those in Aradiya and Kaifan, still conduct tours for school students to instill the importance of reading. She added that the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) continues to support public libraries, heeding their calls for development and progress.

Meanwhile, to compensate for the lack of physical material, the Kaifan Public Library began to digitize content to keep up with the current status quo. Kaifan library official Huda Al-Humaidan said publishers are keen on digitizing their products to appeal to the masses. She affirmed that such a step was a necessity to survive nowadays, stressing that the NCCAL and the ministry of education should provide more assistance to keep public libraries up-to-date. Humaidan indicated that a lack of interest in reading was due to the advent of easy and on-the-go material, almost substituting books. She also blamed the current economic and political happenings in the region for driving people away from seeking books or heading to public libraries. Libraries and bookstores owned by the private sector do not fare any better, suffering from the dilemmas plaguing their public counterparts.

Razan Al-Marshad, a partner in Sophia bookstore, said the digital age was the least of the problems facing book lovers in Kuwait, because there are other matters, such as censorship, that keep dragging down public interest in reading and knowledge. To have a successful private bookstore, one must have a vast variety of books appealing to every age and gender, said Marshad, who indicated that most library customers in her opinion were children and females.

Some private libraries and bookstores - such as Takween bookstore owned by Bothayna Al-Essa - are eager to have an extensive database of e-books. Having such a database, alongside physical books, is not necessarily a bad thing, because both formats complement each other, said Essa, who affirmed that any facility catering to the needs of knowledge seekers and students is a welcome sight in her opinion. The argument whether the digital age would kill libraries and bookstores might be subjective according to whom a person asks - however, such facilities seem to withstand the test of time as long as there are enthusiasts willing to open books. — KUNA

Ghanem receives ice hockey team

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem received in his office yesterday Kuwait's ice hockey team on the occasion of their victory in a Hong Kong international tournament. Ghanem congratulated the team members for their achievements and wished them all the best in future competitions. The members of the team expressed their gratitude for Ghanem's support, stressing their determination to do more to proudly represent the Kuwaiti flag. — KUNA
KISR organizes workshop

KUWAIT: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) has organized, in coordination with the UN resident coordination bureau, a workshop for universities and think-tanks to map out a strategy for technical, development and humanitarian coordination between the state and the UN during 2019-2023. UN expert Alexander Mackenzie said in a press release that the workshop aimed at establishing cooperation between Kuwait and the UN to back up and execute objective of the national policy for development, humanitarian aid, as outlined in New Kuwait Vision 2035. He added that the activity was also designed to ponder measures and common executive schemes for agile response and drawing up methods of cooperation, namely with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the office of the assistant foreign minister for international organizations. — KUNA

Quality of Arab cities

CAIRO: Member of the Kuwaiti Municipal Council and chairman of the council’s structural planning and projects committee Abdulwahab Buresi yesterday stressed the importance of exchanging Arab experiences in improving the quality of Arab cities. This came following a meeting with Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazalé as part of preparations for the Arab Conference on Arab governments’ vision to implement goals of “Sustainable Development 2030” scheduled to be held in Kuwait in Nov 2019. Buresi said that the meeting with Abu Ghazalé dealt with a number of issues, as well as an invitation extended to Abu Ghazalé to visit Kuwait to meet with the president and members of the municipal council to exchange ideas and experiences on the large projects being implemented by the country, topped by Silk City. — KUNA

Disabled students’ forum

CAIRO: Assistant Undersecretary for Private and Qualitative Education at the Ministry of Education Abdulmohsen Al-Huwailah stressed yesterday the importance of scientific, cultural, educational and sport activities as well as programs in enhancing disabled talents of various disabilities. This came in a speech on behalf of Education Minister Hamid Al-Azmi at the first Arab Forum for Schools for Special Needs and Integration, held under the auspices of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi in Sharm el-Sheikh. Huwailah said the activities and programs will boost students with movement, auditory or visual disabilities, even mental disability and autism, adding that these activities are a motivation to progress. He pointed out that this forum is the first at the level of the Arab world and does not only focus on sports – it extends to the scientific, cultural and educational arenas. — KUNA

Social security forum wraps up

KUALA LUMPUR: The Regional Social Security Forum for Asia and the Pacific (ISSA) concluded yesterday its gathering, involving a delegation from Kuwait’s Public Institution for Social Security. Head of the Kuwaiti delegation Khaleed Al-Fadalah, in remarks to KUNA, expressed satisfaction at the forum outcome, namely the institution winning an excellence award and a certificate of admissibility. He indicated that the participants took part in a contest on technological applications in social services. As for Kuwait, Fadalah noted keenness on switching to electronic services, noting that state law 2014 stipulated digitizing all transactions by the government and public departments. Up to 400 personalities representing 42 Asian and Pacific countries took part in the forum. — KUNA

Diplomat hails S Korean participation in projects

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti diplomat extolled on Wednesday the role of South Korean firms in carrying out the state’s development projects. Major development and construction projects will be executed in the coming period, which need expertise and contribution of friends in South Korea, Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ambassador Ali Al-Saeed told reporters. Saeed’s remarks were made on the sidelines of his participation in a ceremony held by the South Korean embassy marking its national day. The diplomat referred to distinguished relations between Kuwait and South Korea in all domains. He stressed the importance of sharing visits by two countries’ officials to further strengthen cooperation. Asked about joint agreements with the Philippines, Saeed revealed that Kuwait’s foreign ministry has put finishing touches on an agreement to regulate contracting Filipino domestic workers. He noted that a joint meeting between officials of the two countries’ foreign ministries and relevant bodies will be held next week to discuss the workers’ file. Kuwait understands the concerns of the Philippine side and affirms that its laws protect workers, he said, noting that these laws are based on the international level. — KUNA

Head of Afro-Asian council lauds Kuwait over development

CAIRO: President of Afro-Asia Economic Council in New York Tareq Al-Obaid has praised Kuwait for implementation of visionary development. Kuwait will host the second session of the “Arab conference for governments’ vision for implementing sustainable development objectives 2030” in Nov 2019, he affirmed in remarks to KUNA yesterday. Obaid, chair of the planned conference preparatory committee, told KUNA that Kuwait had been chosen to host the conference because it had worked out multiple visionary schemes for executing mega ventures, in line with the broad strategy launched by the government themed “New Kuwait 2035”. This visionary approach is inspired by guidelines from HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Obaid affirmed, singling out Silk City and the islands’ development as some of the country’s major ventures – projected to cost more than $450 billion. Such projects are forecast to impact positively on economies and development in the GCC countries in general and the northern Gulf in particular, where Kuwait will host one of the key ports in Central Asia.

In his lengthy elaborations about Kuwait’s successful approach toward development, he singled out HH the Amir’s latest visit to China, capped with inking a number of accords, forecast to revamp investments “and quality of life in the region”. The Afro-Asia council was established in 2017 as an international, independent entity to link up Asia with Africa economically. — KUNA

Reducing inequality ‘integral’ part of SDGs: Kuwaiti envoy

NEW YORK: As stated in the tenth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world must find ways to reduce inequality globally to eradicate poverty and achieve social welfare worldwide, said a Kuwaiti diplomat late Wednesday. In the UN General Assembly’s social, humanitarian and cultural issues meeting, known as the Third Committee, Kuwaiti diplomat Abdulrahman Al-Shatti said within the GCC and Arab context, Kuwait called for nations to band together to achieve the SDGs. Shatti said his country’s efforts in achieving equity, equality, and development globally was realized through the establishment of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), which has around 960 projects in 106 nations. The fund has allocated loans worth KD 6.2 billion (around $21 billion) since its establishment in the 1960s. Within the Kuwaiti sphere, Shatti affirmed that his country has been backing youth through the establishment of the National Fund for SMEs Development – an entity geared toward developing Kuwait’s youth entrepreneur spirit – as well as the state ministry of youth and the Public Authority for Youth (PAY).

The Kuwaiti diplomat touched on the global challenges facing the SDGs, affirming that addressing inequality within the framework of family development, treatment of people with disability and lack of education were important to realize the UN plans. Shatti stressed that Kuwait will do its best to implement the tenets of the SDGs, saying that the future of the world depended on achieving this particular plan. According to the UN, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. — KUNA
Talks on Kuwait Olympic ban heading ‘in positive direction’
More issues still need to be ironed out

BUENOS AIRES: Negotiations to lift an Olympic ban on Kuwait are making progress but more issues still need to be ironed out before the country’s Olympic return, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Wednesday. Kuwait’s national Olympic committee (KOC) has been banned since October, 2015 after the government was accused of interference with a new sports law.

As a result, Kuwaiti athletes had to compete under the Olympic flag at the Rio de Janeiro Games in 2016 and they have no access to IOC funds.

With the dispute still to be resolved, Kuwait now risks missing out on a second consecutive summer Olympics with the 2020 Tokyo Games less than two years away. The issue was discussed at the IOC executive board in the Argentine capital on Wednesday, IOC spokesman Mark Adams said. "There is progress there but there is still a lot of work to be done," Adams told reporters. "But we are heading in the right direction."

The IOC, in what it said was a gesture of goodwill, provisionally lifted a ban on Kuwait two days before the start of the Asian Games in August, allowing the country to participate under its own flag. Talks in past years, however, failed to yield a result and Kuwait in 2010 repeatedly sued the IOC unsuccessfully for $1 billion as compensation for the ban.

Kuwait said at the time the ban was unjustifiable and unfair and the IOC had not conducted "an appropriate investigation". Kuwait had also been suspended in 2010 over a similar dispute but was reinstated before the 2012 London Olympics. The country has had more than 15 national sports bodies suspended in the past years, including its football federation. — Reuters

Fingerprint system must for all medics

By A Saleh and Meshal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The health ministry’s administrative sector is preparing to implement the fingerprint attendance system for all employees at primary care centers, including doctors, Informed sources said the measure comes as a result of demands by the Civil Service Commission with regards to the illegality of making any exemptions. Meanwhile, the health ministry’s information office held two awareness exhibitions at The Avenues mall. The first exhibition was to mark World Heart Day, while the second was for Alzheimer’s Day. Head of the office Dr Ghalia Al-Mutairi said the office marks several days in October, including those for breast cancer, the elderly, psychiatric health and osteoporosis. She said the office will participate in awareness activities in all health ministry sectors.

KFSD chief meets sector leaders

Director General of Kuwait Fire Services Directorate Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad met leaders of all sectors to discuss several matters related to work performance according to plans and strategies. — Hanan Al-Saadoun

Frustrated thief goes on rampage

KUWAIT: A masked man who failed to steal money from a supermarket became enraged and destroyed ATM machines and cash registers. Employees were surprised by the state of the store, so they called the police, who reviewed surveillance tapes but could not identify the suspect immediately because he wore a mask. Co-owners said the suspect may have hidden until the store closed, then carried out his acts, adding that all funds are placed in a safe in the basement and only a few people know its location.

Tweeters sought

The interior ministry sent several people to the public prosecutor because of offensive tweets against Saudi Arabia. The suspects are being sought by detectives at the prosecution’s orders, adding the tweets were made during the visit of the Saudi crown prince to Kuwait. This action was made by the interior ministry and not the information ministry because the latter is responsible for licensed sites only.

False alarm

A malfunction in a school fire alarm caused chaos. Police received a call about a fire, so they rushed there along with firemen, only to discover there was no fire.

Wanted men arrested

Police arrested three wanted men on theft charges, and one of them is wanted to serve four years in jail for a felony. The three were in a car that was pulled over and after their IDs were checked, they were found wanted. — Al-Rai

KRCS to deliver relief supplies to Sulawisi island

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) yesterday announced the dispatch of a field team to Indonesia to distribute relief aid to people affected by the earthquake and tsunami on the island of Sulawisi which caused human and material losses. KRCS Chairman, Dr Hidal Al-Sayer, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the KRCS will provide assistance and assess the needed equipment in order to meet the basic needs of all those affected on the island of Sulawisi as a result of the earthquake and devastating tsunami.

Sayer added that the KRCS sent the team to distribute emergency relief aid in cooperation with the Kuwaiti embassy in Indonesia and provide the basic needs of those affected people through purchase from local markets. He said the relief team will review and assess the conditions of the affected people in the island in preparation for providing the necessary Kuwaiti aid to them and alleviate their plight and suffering. — KUNA
Mystery surrounds journalist’s disappearance

Turkey summons Saudi ambassador over missing journalist

ISTANBUL: Mystery surrounded the whereabouts of a prominent Saudi critic yesterday after Riyadh announced he had left their consulate in Istanbul—but Turkey and his fiancee said he had not been heard from since entering the building. Jamal Khashoggi, a contributor to the Saudi newspaper Al-Hayat, said he had left his mobile phone with her. “We want to know his whereabouts. Where is Jamal?” she said. “We want him to come out of the consulate safe and sound.”

Where is Jamal?

ISTANBUL: A Saudi family waits at the barriers in front of the Saudi consulate yesterday. — AFP

“The US State Department said it was investigating the matter. “We... are very concerned about where he may be,” the Washington Post’s international opinions editor, Eli Lopez, said in a statement late Tuesday. “It would be unfair and outrageous if he has been detained for his work as a journalist and commentator,” Lopez said. Turan Kislalci, a friend of Khashoggi and head of the Turkish-Arab Media Association, told AFP: “We are certain that Jamal is being held inside unless the consulate has a tunnel.”

Hatice said Khashoggi had gone to the consulate to obtain documents for their own marriage to prove he was not married. Reporters Without Borders said Khashoggi’s disappearance was “extremely worrying,” calling on Saudi and Turkish authorities “to do everything to ensure that this journalist reappears—free—as soon as possible.” The Committee to Protect Journalists said the Saudi authorities’ pattern of quietly detaining critical journalists “is a cause for alarm given the Saudi authorities’ treatment of intellectuals and religious leaders who dare to speak their minds, and then I tell you that I’m from Saudi Arabia, are you surprised?” At about the same time, Khashoggi said he had been detained for contributing to the Al-Hayat daily, owned by Saudi Prince Khaled bin Sultan al-Saud. The writer admitted to defending the Muslim Brotherhood, which won plaudits in June for lifting a ban on women driving, has drawn heavy criticism for its handling of dissent.

Khashoggi once said that before he left the kingdom, the Saudi government banned him from Twitter for warning “against an overly enthusiastic embrace of then-president-elect Donald Trump”. He is one of the rare Saudi journalists to condemn repression in the country. In one of his last tweets, he criticized the lawsuit filed against a Saudi economist, Essam al-Zamel, after his arrest by Saudi authorities. — AFP
Merkel, Netanyahu brush past differences, promote cooperation

JERUSALEM: Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany’s “everlasting responsibility” to oppose anti-Semitism during a visit to Israel yesterday as she and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu brushed past their differences and promoted co-opera-
tion between their nations. The one-day visit by Merk el and members of her cabinet was part of German-Israeli government consultations held regular-
ly, but came after Netanyahu’s harsh criticism of European countries over their efforts to keep alive the Iran nuclear deal.

Germany and other European countries have also repeatedly hit out at Israelis’ demolition building in the occupied West Bank and warned over threats to re-
maining prospects for a two-state solution to the conflict with the Palestini-
ans. But both leaders seemed determined to have the visit run smoothly, grea ting each other warmly after Merk el’s arrival on Wednesday night and touring an innovation ex-
thibit together yesterday.

Merkel began the day with a visit to Israel’s Holocaust memorial high in the hills above Jerusalem. After laying a wreath in the Yad Vashem memorial’s solemn Hall of Remembrance, where an eternal flame burns, she spoke of Germany’s re-
sponsibility as the perpetrator of the Holocaust.

“My country has a special responsibility to remember and to honor the victims of what happened here and in all other places,” she said, reading out the message she wrote in the memorial’s guest book.

Later after receiving an honorary doctorate from Israel’s Haifa University, she answered questions from students and touched on the Iran nuclear deal. Ne-
tanyahu has urged European nations to follow the lead of US President Donald Trump and withdraw from the accord with his country’s main enemy. Germany, like other signatories to the deal, says it is preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons for now. Merk el noted the Iranian presence in neighboring Syria and how that has exacerbated the threat from Israel’s enemies. She said the nuclear deal would be discussed further with Netanyahu. “On the principle that everything must be done to prevent nuclear armament, we absolutely agree,” she said.

Why should she put her hands in the fire?

The war has triggered what the UN calls an “unprecedented humanitarian crisis,” with more than three-quarters of Yemen’s population needing aid and 8.4 million people at risk of famine.

Southern Yemen is home to both the Hadi government and separatists, whose alliance against the Huthis has become increasingly fraught. North and south Yemen were in inde pendent states until their unification in 1990. —AFP

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and German Chancellor Angela Merkel shake hands during a joint press conference at a hotel in Jerusalem. —AFP

Seven Turkish soldiers killed in bomb attack

ANKARA: Seven Turkish soldiers were killed yesterday in an improvised explosive device in southeastern Turkey, the local governor’s office said in a statement. The governor’s office in the Kurdish majority province of Batman blamed the attack on “terrorists” and said a wide operation had been launched to capture the culprits. The state has been battling Kur-
dish fighters in the southeast region after the collapse of a two-year ceasefire in 2015.

Local authorities had previously said four soldiers were killed and another five injured in the explosion as their military vehicle was passing through the Gercus district. But they updated the toll after three soldiers later died in hospital. The outlawed Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) has waged an insurgency inside Turkey since 1984 that has claimed some 40,000 lives. The PKK is blacklisted as a ter-
rorist group by Ankara, the United States and the European Union.

In its official Twitter account, the US emb-
assy in Ankara condemned the “brutal at-
tack” in Batman, offering condolences to the relatives of the dead, in a message in Turkish. “PKK terrorists must put an end to their at-
tacks. We are standing by our ally Turkey in the fight against terrorism,” the embassy said. Turkey and the United States are in recent months locked in one of the worst spasms in their history over the detention by Ankara of an American pastor, which sent the Turkish lira into a freefall against the dollar.

Ankara is also frustrated by US support for the Syrian Kurdish militia forces deemed as “terrorists” by Ankara linked to the PKK, but by Washington as an effective force in the fight against Islamic State militants. —AFP

UN envoy meets south Yemen separatists head

ABU DHABI: UN envoy Martin Griffiths held talks yesterday with the head of Yemen’s southern separatist movement, which has called for a “peaceful uprising” against Presi-
dent Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi in the war-torn country. Aisalr al-Zoubeki and Griffiths met in Abu Dhabi for talks on “the UN envoy's future negotiations”, his STC movement said.

There was however no shortage of controversy in the run up to the visit. Netanyahu's criticism of Europe related to Iran has been especially strong, and last week at the UN General Assembly he accused EU nations of “appeasement”. At the same time, Germany has remained steadfast in its support for a two-state solution and in recent weeks joined calls against Israel's planned demolition of a Bedouin village located in a strategic area of the occupied West Bank. On Wednesday, children from the vil-
lage, Khan al-Ahmar, held signs with Merkel's pic-
ture outside the German representative office in Ramallah to ask for help. Speaking to students from Haifa University, Merkel denied a report that she threatened to cancel the trip if Israel moved ahead with demolition of the village beforehand. Yoram Ben-Zeev, a former Israeli ambassador to Germany, said Merkel would likely only “go through the mo-
tions” during the visit on issues related to the con-

Merkel pledges German fight against anti-Semitism on Israel visit

JERUSALEM: Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke of Germany’s “everlasting responsibility” to oppose anti-Semitism during a visit to Israel yesterday as she and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu brushed past their differences and promoted coop-
eration between their nations. The one-day visit by Merk el and members of her cabinet was part of German-Israeli government consultations held regu-
larly, but came after Netanyahu’s harsh criticism of European countries over the war triggered what the UN calls an “unprecedented humanitarian crisis,” with more than three-quarters of Yemen’s population needing aid and 8.4 million people at risk of famine.

Southern Yemen is home to both the Hadi government and separatists, whose alliance against the Huthis has become increasingly fraught. North and south Yemen were in inde pendent states until their unification in 1990. —AFP

UN envoy meets south Yemen separatists head

ABU DHABI: UN envoy Martin Griffiths held talks yesterday with the head of Yemen’s southern separatist movement, which has called for a “peaceful uprising” against Presi-
dent Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi in the war-torn country. Aisalr al-Zoubeki and Griffiths met in Abu Dhabi for talks on “the UN envoy's future negotiations”, his STC movement said.

There was however no shortage of controversy in the run up to the visit. Netanyahu's criticism of Europe related to Iran has been especially strong, and last week at the UN General Assembly he accused EU nations of “appeasement”. At the same time, Germany has remained steadfast in its support for a two-state solution and in recent weeks joined calls against Israel's planned demolition of a Bedouin village located in a strategic area of the occupied West Bank. On Wednesday, children from the vil-
lage, Khan al-Ahmar, held signs with Merkel's pic-
ture outside the German representative office in Ramallah to ask for help. Speaking to students from Haifa University, Merkel denied a report that she threatened to cancel the trip if Israel moved ahead with demolition of the village beforehand. Yoram Ben-Zeev, a former Israeli ambassador to Germany, said Merkel would likely only “go through the mo-
tions” during the visit on issues related to the con-
UK, Australia blame Russian military for cyber attacks

Russian President Putin angrily rejects charges

LONDON: Britain and Australia yesterday blamed Russia’s military intelligence service for some of the biggest cyber attacks of recent years—including one on the Democratic National Committee during the 2016 US presidential campaign. They said the GRU military intelligence service could have only been conducting operations of such scale on Kremlin orders. Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly and angrily rejected similar charges.

He told US President Donald Trump during a July Summit in Helsinki that talk of Russia meddling in the 2016 election was "nonsense." But Britain’s National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the Australian government pointed the blame directly at alleged GRU front operations such as Fancy Bear and APT 28.

The announcement could further strain relations between Russia and Britain that began to deteriorate with the 2006 assassination with polonium in London of former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko.

"This is not the actions of a great power, this is the actions of a pariah state," British Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson said during a visit to Brussels. "We’ll continue working with allies to isolate, make them understand they cannot continue to conduct themselves in such a way." The Australian government added that Russia’s actions violated its international commitments to “responsible state behavior” in cyberspace. "Cyberspace is not the Wild West," Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Foreign Minister Marise Payne said in a joint statement.

The same attack affected Russia’s Interfax news agency and the popular Fontanka.ru news site. British sources said the third strike resulted in the release of the medical files of global sports stars in August 2017. They included tennis’s Serena and Venus Williams and Britain’s Tour de France winning cyclists Chris Froome and Bradley Wiggins. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) thinks the files’ release resulted from a data hack of its Doping Administrator and Management system.—AFP

Chile archbishop silent over abuse cover-up claims

RANCAGUA, Chile: Santiago Archbishop Ricardo Ezzati on Wednesday went before a prosecutor investigating a sex abuse scandal that has roiled the Catholic Church in Chile but declined to answer questions about accusations he was involved in a cover-up. The Catholic Church is under increasing scrutiny because of the escalating worldwide sex abuse crisis, which has seen scandals emerge in North and South America, Europe and Australia that have involved widespread claims of abuse—and cover-ups. The highest-ranking member of the church in Chile, Ezzati entered the prosecutor’s offices in the southern town of Rancagua under heavy police guard and surrounded by media. A solitary protester brandished a sign that read: “Depraved Roman Church.” After an hour being interviewed by Emilio Arias—the prosecutor investigating decades of sexual abuse of minors by Chilean priests—76-year-old Ezzati left the courthouse and vowed: “We are all going to collaborate with everything.”

No answers

Hugo Rivera, his lawyer, said the cardinal had used his right not to answer questions about accusations he covered up the sexual abuse of minors, in particular crimes committed by a top diocesan aide. “For now the cardinal has not spoken until we speak with the public prosecutor’s office about the definitive dismissal of the charges,” the lawyer said. He insisted the cardinal “is innocent.”

Arias began investigating scores of abuse cases in July after outrage over the church’s own probe into decades of abuse by priests—crimes for which it often failed to take any action or handed down lenient punishments. Pope Francis, who has removed several Chilean bishops over the scandal, admitted there was a “culture of abuse” within the Chilean church after sending investigators from the Vatican. The pontiff said after meeting abuse victims that the church had failed “to listen and react” to the allegations, and vowed to “restore justice.”

Arias’ office said in August that it was investigating 119 cases of abuse against Chile’s clergy going back to 1960. “We are going to prosecute anyone who has committed crimes,” Arias told reporters after questioning Ezzati.

“There is no witch hunt,” he said. “If there is a crime, we will prosecute... we will accuse and go to trial,” he said. Ezzati has denied allegations that he covered up cases of abuse, including those of a top aide, Oscar Munoz. Munoz, 56, is under house arrest while a probe continues into allegations he raped at least seven children. Abuse victim Juan Carlos Cruz mocked Ezzati’s stance on Twitter.—AFP

European court rejects call for British massacre probe

STRASBOURG, France: Europe’s top rights court yesterday rejected a call to probe the shooting deaths of 24 Malaysian rubber plantation workers by British troops in 1948, saying it came too late. Relatives of the workers have waged a decades-long fight for an enquiry into the “Batang Kali massacre,” which occurred on December 12, 1948 during what is known as the Malayan Emergency, when Commonwealth forces fought a communist-inspired revolt in what was then a British colony.

But the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, eastern France, which hears complaints about alleged violations of the European Convention on Human Rights, rejected the petition as “inadmissible.” “The Court found it had no competence to examine the applicants’ complaint because it did not come within its temporal jurisdiction,” a panel of seven judges ruled. The court explained that it had no jurisdiction in the matter because the deaths occurred more than 10 years before Britain allowed individuals to bring cases directly to the European court.

The judges also noted that complainants had far exceeded the six-month limit on bringing a case in the wake of significant new evidence, given that soldiers had admitted to being ordered to fire on the workers as far back as 1970. The court’s decision is final. In November 2015, Britain’s Supreme Court also rejected an appeal by relatives for a public enquiry into the killings.

The ethnic Chinese laborers were killed after British soldiers entered the Batang Kali rubber plantation about 30 kilometers north of Kuala Lumpur, where they rounded up villagers for interrogation. Communist rebels in what was then called Malaya were predominantly ethnic Chinese who had begun arriving in Malaya in the early 20th century to work as laborers.

The British government said at the time that the villagers were suspected insurgents and were shot when they tried to escape, but other villagers said the men were summarily executed. The killings have been referred to as “Britain’s My Lai” after a Vietnam War massacre by US troops, and Britain’s Ministry of Defense has called it a “deeply regrettable incident.”—AFP

This is the action of a pariah state

Airports and tennis stars

Russia is not the only nation accused of conducting aggressive cyber operations in recent years. The United States blames North Korea for hacking Sony in 2014 and launching the WannaCry ransomware attack last year. US security researchers said on Wednesday that an elite group of North Korean hackers was also behind a recent rash of cyberattacks on world banks that netted “hundreds of millions” of dollars. But British government sources said the NCSC has assessed with “high confidence” that the GRU was “almost certainly” behind the DNG hack. The independent findings by Britain and Australia may help Mueller fend off some of the accusations of political bias in his probe. British sources said the GRU was also behind BadRabbit ransomware that caused disruptions on the Kiev metro and at an international airport in the Ukrainian port of Odessa last October.
Campaigners hit the streets in bid to reverse Brexit

SOLIHULL: Campaigners for a second referendum on Brexit are braving skepticism and even hostility as they hit Britain’s streets as part of a growing movement to get Britons to change their mind. More and more politicians are calling for another vote and recent polls show some 40 percent of the population support it but reactions are very different in Brexit-voting areas.

On a recent weekend, pro-EU volunteers fanned out in the centre of Solihull, a town in central England that voted 56 percent for Brexit in 2016 — four points higher than the national result.

One of the campaigners, 53-year-old Kevin McLaughlin, said he was “a bit apprehensive” about handing out leaflets. “Not everybody is going to share my point of view and you have to be prepared for that negativity coming back,” he told AFP. McLaughlin is taking part in a political campaign for the first time, he said, because of his fears for the economy even if Britain and the European Union do strike a Brexit deal.

Solihull is an affluent town of 200,000 people that has benefited from the car industry—one of the sectors most concerned about Brexit because of international supply chains. But the local Jaguar Land-Rover plant will be shedding hundreds of jobs next year because production is being shifted to a factory in Slovakia as fears grow over a no-deal Brexit.

Despite the uncertainty, few passers-by appeared concerned or in favor of what campaigners are calling a “People’s Vote”. “We had a vote two years ago,” said Todd Bonehill, a 21-year-old employee of a local hardware store. “They say it’s a people’s vote but the people’s vote was two years ago. 17.4 million people voted for Brexit, that’s the biggest political mandate the British government has ever been given,” he said.

I just hope

Another pro-EU campaigner, IT engineer Mark Wheatley said he was not put off and would continue pushing for a second referendum for the sake of “young people who want to work around the EU, travel around the EU”. Wheatley, who took part in the Remain campaign ahead of the Brexit referendum, said he was “utterly disgusted” by the result. “The People’s Vote” campaign, which brings together various anti-Brexit groups, has gathered momentum since the summer with a string of lawmakers expressing their support.

Prime Minister Theresa May has ruled out a second referendum, arguing that it would destroy trust in politicians, but some Conservative MPs have said they would be in favor. The main opposition Labor Party has said it would only consider it if parliament votes against a Brexit deal and no general election is called in the next few months. The Liberal Democrats, a small opposition party, are the only mainstream force calling for a vote and are supporting a major demonstration planned in London later this month.

Philip Beyer, a local coordinator for the People’s Vote campaign in Solihull, said he had already bought his train tickets for the protest in the capital on October 20 — some five months before Britain is due to leave the bloc on March 29, 2019. Beyer said he was hoping for “at least a quarter of a million” people to take part. “That could change things,” he said. But he admitted: “We’ve got a lot more work to do. I just hope that as we get nearer, people start thinking of the effect of leaving, enough people will change their mind”. —AFP
WASHINGTON: US Senators prepared yesterday to review the results of the new FBI probe into the background of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh ahead of a final confirmation vote perhaps as early as tomorrow. The White House reviewed new interviews conducted by the FBI in its investigation of sexual assault allegations against the man President Donald Trump wants to secure a conservative majority on the court for the coming decades.

It sent the material to the Senate in the middle of the night and said it found nothing in them to corroborate the allegations against Kavanaugh. “With this additional information, the White House is fully confident the Senate will vote to confirm Judge Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court,” White House spokesman Raj Shah said in a statement.

Even before Senators saw the new FBI material, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell moved to end debate on Kavanaugh’s nomination, setting up a Friday procedural vote and a final vote as early as the following day. “There will be plenty of time for members to review and be briefed on the supplemental material before a Friday cloture vote,” he said. Senators will review the new material in a secure room in the Senate, or can choose to be briefed on it.

**Sex assault allegation**
Christine Blasey Ford, a university professor in California, testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee last week that Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her at a house party in the early 1980s while they were in high school. Kavanaugh vehemently denied the allegation and further sexual misconduct claims against him from two other women. One of them, Deborah Ramirez, has alleged that he showed her his genitals during a party in college.

As Senate Republicans moved quickly for a vote, as early as the following day, the controversy over Kavanaugh’s nomination comes ahead of November congressional elections in which Trump’s Republican Party will battle to keep control of Congress.

In the new background probe, the FBI contacted 10 people and interviewed nine, The New York Times reported. It was not clear why the 10th was not interviewed. They include three congressional aides, one key Republican, Jeff Flake, insisted that the FBI be allowed to reopen its background investigation of Kavanaugh. Trump relented, giving the FBI another week to investigate. The controversy over Kavanaugh’s nomination comes ahead of November congressional elections in which Trump’s Republican Party will battle to keep control of Congress.

**Austria’s burqa ban, delicate matter in Alpine resort**
ZELL AM SEE, Austria: With its pristine waters, snow-covered mountains and breathtaking Alpine views, the Austrian lakeside town of Zell am See is one of the top European destinations for visitors from the Gulf region. And it aims to remain so, even though Austria introduced a ban on face-covering burqa or niqab veils a year ago. The picturesque little town south of Salzburg with a population of 10,000 is always at pains to remain respectful. “We are never at pains to remain respectful. “We are always at pains to remain respectful. “We always at pains to remain respectful. “We always at pains to remain respectful. “We always at pains to remain respectful. “We always at pains to remain respectful. “We always at pains to remain respectful. “We always at pains to remain respectful. “We always at pains to remain respectful. “We always at pains to remain respectful. “We

**Penalties**
“I’ve heard some people say they don’t want to come back now,” said one restaurant worker who asked not to be named, even if he said he hadn’t particularly noticed a drop in business this year. Local police chief Kurt Moechli said more than 200 fines had been handed out between June and September alone. But his officers were always at pains to remain respectful. “We have been trying to implement the law with as much tact and sense of proportion as possible,” he said.

Austrian embassies and missions abroad had been working to raise awareness of the new law, Moechli said, and the police chief himself had hosted the Saudi ambassador in Zell am See to discuss the issue. Moechli estimated that in around 90 percent of cases, the women had agreed to remove their veil after police officers explained the new law to them.

Walking along the lakeside, one couple from Saudi Arabia—who did not wish to be named—said they had been approached by police during their stay. “Yes, the police did talk to us about the niqab law,” said—AFP. **US mulls withdrawal from arms treaty**
GENEVA: The United States hinted yesterday it might withdraw from a landmark Cold War nuclear arms reduction treaty if Russia does not stop “violating” the accord. Washington has complained for nearly two years that a ground-launched missile system deployed by Russia breaches the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). “This situation is untenable, and we have to take measures to deal with this continued violation of this very important treaty,” US ambassador to disarmament Robert Wood told reporters in Geneva.

He said that pushing Russia to “come back into compliance” with the INF would be a top US priority at disarmament meetings at the United Nations in New York next week. But he added: “I just don’t know how much longer we can continue to live up to our obligations under this treaty with Russia violating this treaty so blatantly and openly.” Russia has repeatedly insisted its 9M729 missile system does not breach the treaty, but Wood said Moscow had long denied breach the treaty, but Wood said Moscow had long denied.

“The Russians continue to obfuscate, deny, because this is what they do best,” he said. His comments came after the US ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, said Tuesday that Washington was looking to “take out the missiles that are in development by Russia”. She later clarified that she was not suggesting the US would launch pre-emptive strikes on Russia, but underlining the need for Western allies to find ways to counter any escalation. —AFP.
Trump shrugged off report revealing a fortune in tax dodges, parental gifts

Trump helped his father in improper tax deductions

NEW YORK: US President Donald Trump on Wednesday shrugged off a New York Times investigation that concluded he made his fortune with the help of more than $400 million from his parents, partly through tax schemes, as a horning, rehashed “hit piece.” Trump has often boasted that he built a multi-billion dollar real estate empire from a $1 million loan from his father, Fred, himself a prominent New York builder.

But the Times reviewed more than 100,000 documents including confidential tax returns and financial records that it said showed he actually received at least $413 million in today’s money, in part through schemes to avoid taxes. “They used the concept of ‘time value of money’ in doing a very old, boring and often told hit piece on me,” he tweeted. “Added up, this means that 97% of their stories on me are bad. Never recover from bad elections calling it a sham. Forbes magazine, nonetheless, estimated Trump’s fortune at $3.1 billion—the same as last year, but a third smaller than it was in 2015. Forbes ranked Trump’s fortune at 259 in the world, down from 248 the year he was elected president. The Times story said that from the time Trump was a wealthy toddler and $200,000 a year in today’s money by the time he was three years old, and was the equivalent of a millionaire by the age of eight, drew considerable attention. The assertion was pounced on by several late night talk show hosts, including comedian Stephen Colbert, the host of “The Late Show” on CBS. “So, let me get this straight: At one point, Donald Trump was an extraordinarily wealthy toddler. And today? He is still that,” he said.

Father’s favorite

And he helped devise a scheme that under-valued his parents’ real estate holdings by hundreds of millions of dollars, sharply reducing taxes on those properties when they were transferred to their children, according to the paper. “A lawyer who helped Mr. Trump grow the empire, called the account “100 percent false, and highly defamatory.” “There was no fraud or tax evasion by anyone. The facts upon which The Times bases its major conclusion are not just wrong, they’re dead wrong.” added. “President Trump had virtually no involvement whatsoever with these matters.”

Addressing a press conference, White House spokesman Sarah Sanders criticized the article’s main claims, but said it was right in one important aspect: Trump’s business acumen. “I will say one thing the article did get right is that it showed that the president is extraordinarily confident in him.”

Wealthy toddler

The paper’s contention that Trump was earning as much as $200,000 a year in today’s money by the time he was three years old, and was the equivalent of a millionaire by the age of eight, drew considerable attention. The assertion was pounced on by several late night talk show hosts, including comedian Stephen Colbert, the host of “The Late Show” on CBS. “So, let me get this straight: At one point, Donald Trump was an extraordinarily wealthy toddler. And today? He is still that,” he said.

The best possible outcome in November is that women will make up 24 percent of Congress, a record and up from the current 20 percent, a rate of representation still lagging far behind many in the developed world. “This is a marathon, not a sprint,” says Jean Sinzuk, advocate director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. “We are likely to see some gain... but we are not going to be at parity.”

Women have come forward to vent their anger over harassment and assault that for years they kept quiet, humiliated and disbelieving that they would be heard. Instead they are being heard, being believed and supported. There are signs attitudes are shifting. This year, Bill Cosby, once one of the most famous Americans in the world, was convicted of sexual assault in 2004 and sentenced to at least three years in prison.

From police reopening a rape investigation into one of the biggest soccer stars on the planet, to ex-gymnastics USA doctor Larry Nassar being jailed for life, barely a day goes by when #MeToo is not front-page news. But the resulting impact is unclear. There has been growing pushback questioning whether all sexual misdeeds should be treated with the same kick-them-to-the-curb attitude. An increasingly vocal segment believe the movement may have gone too far in ostracizing some men without the evidence to back up their accusations.

MeToo sharply polarizing US, one year on

NEW YORK: The #MeToo movement in one year has shown the United States brought down dozens of powerful men and threatens the confirmation of a Supreme Court judge, yet it has also become deeply polarizing and its long-term impact remains unclear. Accusations last October that Hollywood titan Harvey Weinstein engaged in decades of sexual assault, opened the floodgates with liberals still reeling from President Donald Trump’s 2016 election despite boasting that he groped women with impunity. But #MeToo, like almost everything in America these days, has proved divisive. And with Supreme Court pick Brett Kavanaugh accused of misconduct by three women in the 1980s, the polarization is becoming near by the day. On Tuesday, Trump was cheered by supporters in Mississippi when he mocked Kavanaugh’s accuser, Christine Blasey Ford, provoking a furious backlash from Democrats and criticism from moderate Republicans.

“It’s a very scary time for young men in America, where you can be guilty of something that you may not be guilty of,” he said earlier this week. “You have this backlash that many Republicans are feeling that if Kavanaugh is not confirmed, it allows this liberal movement to take precedence over their politics and concerns,” explained Melissa Deckman, professor of political science at Washington College in Maryland.

Research indicates a gender gap—that women care more than men about sexual misconduct—but that party is the deciding factor, with Democrats caring more than Republicans. #MeToo spurred the ouster of Democratic lawmakers such as the popular Al Franken and John Conyers, hugely respected for his civil rights work. This 20 minutes as the equivalent of a millionaire by the age of eight, drew considerable attention. The assertion was pounced on by several late night talk show hosts, including comedian Stephen Colbert, the host of “The Late Show” on CBS. “So, let me get this straight: At one point, Donald Trump was an extraordinarily wealthy toddler. And today? He is still that,” he said.

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US state left with one abortion clinic

CHICAGO: The US state of Missouri was left Wednesday with one abortion clinic for its population of six million, after a new state rule effectively barred another clinic from performing the procedure. The Midwestern state is requiring abortion clinic physicians to have admitting privileges at a hospital. Officials say the rule is aimed at patient safety. But a Planned Parenthood clinic in the city of Columbia could not meet the requirement and its license to perform abortions expired. The Kansas City Star reported.

Opponents of hospital affiliation rules say clinics often can’t meet such a standard, because abortions are generally safe and their doctors don’t hospitalize enough patients to qualify for affiliation, according to Kaiser Health News. The Columbia clinic has asked a federal judge for a temporary exemption from the Missouri rule, but the judge has not yet ruled. The Star said. In the meantime, women seeking abortion were being directed to another provider in St. Louis, 126 miles away, or to providers in neighboring states, US media reported.

The US Supreme Court in 2016 struck down a similar hospital-affiliation rule in Texas, saying in a 5-3 decision that the regulation was too burdensome, and “a substantial obstacle to women seeking abortions.” But a federal appeals court last month allowed Missouri’s requirement to take effect. About two dozen states led by conservative politicians have passed numerous measures to set limits on abortions, according to the pro-abortion rights Guttmacher Institute. The state of Iowa earlier this year passed the most restrictive abortion limit in the country.
US pours cold water on India’s efforts to avoid sanctions

NEW DELHI: Russian President Vladimir Putin headed for India yesterday looking to tie up billions of dollars in arms deals with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, likely angering the US, China and Pakistan in a one-off swoop. The Kremlin said before the two-day visit by Putin and top Russian ministers that the “key feature” would be the signing of a $5-billion deal for the S-400 air defense system, despite the risk of US sanctions against countries buying Russian defense kit.

On the eve of Putin’s arrival later yesterday, the United States poured cold water on India’s efforts to obtain a waiver to avoid sanctions under legislation called Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Upgrades in arms systems “including the S-400 air and missile defense system” would be a particular focus for CAATSA, a US State Department spokesperson was quoted as saying by India’s PTI news agency.

Last month Washington slapped financial sanctions on the Chinese military for buying Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets—and the S-400. However, the US is in a difficult position when it comes to India. It wants to bolster ties with New Delhi to counter China’s growing assertiveness, something that has also rattled India. Washington and New Delhi announced plans last month for joint military drills in 2019, and agreed on the exchange of sensitive military information. The US is now India’s second-biggest arms supplier.

But Russia remains number one, and a string of new deals—beyond the S-400—is a major win for Moscow—and a big snub to the US. Putin and Modi, who appear to enjoy a personal rapport, are also likely to discuss a deal for four Krivak-class frigates worth $2 billion and 200 light utility Ka-226 helicopters pegged at $1 billion. “It’s about time we showed that we are not going to be pushed around by Washington,” R.R. Subramanian, a Delhi-based strategic affairs analyst, told AFP.

Experts say India needs the sophisticated S-400 to fill critical gaps in its defense capabilities, in view of China’s rise and perceived threats from Pakistan, against whom India has fought three wars. Indian Air Force Chief Birender Singh Dhanoa said yesterday that the S-400, and the 36 Rafale fighter jets purchased from France—a 2016 deal mired in political controversy—represent a “booster dose” for the country.

Last year India and China had a military standoff over a Himalayan plateau claimed by Beijing and Bhutan, a close ally of India. China has also won perturbed India by loaning vast amounts of money to countries such as Sri Lanka where it has long held sway.

Pakistan urges US to resume aid

WASHINGTON: Pakistan pledged Wednesday to support negotiations with the Taliban to end Afghanistan’s 17-year war as it asked the United States to resume military aid and stop blaming Islamabad for the extremists’ strengths. Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi visited Washington to explain the Afghan strategy of new Prime Minister Imran Khan, who has long advocated talks over military action with the Taliban and other Islamist insurgents.

A month after Washington cut $300 million in military aid, Qureshi said he found Secretary of State Mike Pompeo “ready to listen” to Pakistan and said he was returning to Islamabad “slightly more hopeful” than before, Pakistan had been the main supporter of the Taliban regime which imposed an austere brand of Islam on much of Afghanistan until a US military campaign launched after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The United States has pressed for years for Pakistan to crack down on militant groups involved in Afghanistan as well as virulently anti-Indian groups that operate virtually openly.

It says the insurgents have safe havens in Pakistan’s border areas and links to its shadowy military establishment, accusations which Islamabad has repeatedly denied. Trump has accused Pakistan, where US commandos killed Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, of duplicity. Qureshi had said Pakistan would act “in good faith” to jumpstart diplomacy with the Taliban, whose representatives held a breakthrough meeting in July in Qatar with US representatives in a tentative bid to end the longest-running US war.

“Pakistan is willing and Pakistan will use all its influence to do that. We feel that Afghanistan’s stability and peace are linked to ours,” Qureshi said at the US Institute of Peace a day after meeting Pompeo. But he added: “Contrary to the largely held view here, our influence on the Taliban is diminished.” He said he believed that the Taliban’s shift to negotiations, as well as an unprecedented if temporary ceasefire, was based on the militants’ own calculations. “Even the Taliban recognize that things have changed in Afghanistan. They can at best maintain a stalemate but those days are gone when they will just go in and take over Kabul,” Qureshi said Pakistan “cannot and should not be held responsible for the failures in Afghanistan” as he pointed to disorder in the Kabul government as well as corruption: “I have seen or read a lot of criticism and think it’s unfair not to recognize the contributions Pakistan has made to the successes that you’ve had in Afghanistan—and you’ve had successes despite the challenges,” he said. —AFP

India deports seven Rohingya to Myanmar

GUWAHATI: India yesterday deported seven Rohinygs to Myanmar, despite UN warnings that the men faced persecution in a country where the army is accused of genocide against the Muslim minority. The men, who had been in detention for immigration offenses since 2012, were handed over to Myanmar authorities at a border crossing in India’s northeast state of Manipur. “Seven Myanmarese nationals have been deported today. They were handed over to the authorities of Myanmar at Moreh border post,” said senior Assam police officer Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta.

Photos showed the seven men seated in a bus bound for the border in the remote hilly state bordering Myanmar’s far north-west. The UN had voiced concern that returning the men ignored the danger they faced in Myanmar, where for decades the Rohingya have been targeted in violent pogroms by security forces. A UN special rapporteur had warned India risks breaking international laws on refoulement—the return of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they could be harmed.

Legal efforts to stymie their deportation failed when the Supreme Court yesterday rejected a petition on their behalf and upheld their status as illegal immigrants. “Even the country of their origin has accepted them as its citizens,” a three-judge bench said. The Rohingya are despised by many in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, which refuses to recognize them as citizens and falsely labels them “Bengali” illegal immigrants.

They were concentrated in Rakhine state, the epicenter of a Myanmar army offensive that over the past year has driven 700,000 Rohingya Muslims into Bangladesh. Myanmar’s army has denied nearly all wrongdoing, insisting its campaign was justified to root out Rohingya insurgents. But a UN fact-finding mission said there was enough evidence to merit prosecution of several top Myanmar military commanders for crimes against humanity and genocide against Rohingya civilians.

Indian considers the Rohingya a security threat, pointing to intelligence which it says links the minority group to extremist organizations. The government had ordered last year that all Rohingya inside India—New Delhi puts the figure at 40,000 — be deported. The Supreme Court is considering a petition challenging the order as unconstitutional. The UN says there are 16,000 registered Rohingya in India. —AFP

India urges US in a difficult position
Extortion, abuse: Myanmar workers arrive debt-laden in Thailand

Thai agents auction off jobs to highest bidder

YANGON, Myanmar: A “mafia” of recruitment agents is trapping Myanmar migrants to Thailand in debt bondage despite a 2017 law meant to fight exploitation in the kingdom’s notoriously shady job market, activists and workers say. Migrant labor—much of it from Myanmar—has propped up Thailand’s economy for years, with foreigners working everywhere from factories to fishing boats, part of a global chain to produce standard supermarket items such as frozen shrimp, ready meals and pet food.

After allegations of slave labor and trafficking prompted the European Union to threaten a ban on Thai products in 2015, the kingdom’s ruling junta has scrambled to clean up industries reliant on a migrant workforce. The new law that came into force in July last year was meant to crack down on a shady recruitment process, which left desperate migrants vulnerable to corrupt brokers and exploitative companies. But more than a year later, foreign workers and labor experts say a lack of enforcement and government oversight means migrants are no safer, often shelling out hundreds of dollars in inflated fees to agents in Myanmar or their agents—rural villagers, in some cases—when seeking a job.

Although the legislation says Myanmar migrants should pay no more than 150,000 kyat in fees to agents, many end up paying up to $800, a colossal sum for low-paid workers from one of the most impoverished countries in the world. “The agents took advantage of us,” said 40-year-old Ma Oo, who had to pay $400 for a job in an electronics factory near Bangkok and was visibly scared to speak out.

Real mafia

Thai firms usually hire local agents to scout workers from neighboring Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, although the latter is by far the largest source for labor, with more than two million migrants working in Thailand. But in many cases, Thai agents then auction off the jobs to the highest bidder among their Myanmar migrant peers, winning favor for businesses in a highly-competitive market, activists say. The Myanmar brokers—or their agents—scout rural villages for workers and transfer all the extra costs to them, leaving migrants trapped in “debt bondage” as they struggle to pay the exorbitant fees, says migrant labor specialist Andy Hall.

Thai and Myanmar agents collaborate as a “real mafia that makes a lot of money on the backs of migrants”, explains Aung Kyaw, president of the Migrant Workers Rights Network in Thailand, which acts as a de facto union. The situation is even worse, he says, for the several hundred thousand Myanmar migrants working unregistered, who are even more vulnerable. In one ongoing case, demanding kickbacks in exchange for jobs, including offering two children—trafficked into the kingdom and forced into slavery on a fishing boat, beaten, unpaid and their documents confiscated.

Finger Pointing

Thai authorities insist that they maintain strict oversight of the country’s agents and threaten them with stiff penalties if they do not respect the law. If there are problems, “they may be on the side of the Burmese recruiters”, Anurak Tossarat from the Ministry of Labor said. But agents in Myanmar blame their Thai peers for stoking the illegal trade and demanding kickbacks in exchange for jobs.

“We have to fight to get job offers from Thai agencies. The more money you give them, the more offers your agency gets,” an agent in Yangon told AFP on condition of anonymity. “They are bullying us.” Campaigners urge tighter scrutiny by officials in both countries and up the supply chain to the multinational buyers of Thai produce to bring an end to the exploitative practices. Britain’s biggest retailer Tesco, food giant Nestle and chocolate maker Mars—which all source products in Thailand—said they were working with local partners to improve practices, vowing to probe any allegations of wrongdoing. —AFP

Bangladesh kids fight climate change abroad with floating schools

CHALAN BEEL, Bangladesh: Mosammat Rekha’s older cousins grew up unable to read and write, their tiny village so frequently cut off from the nearest school by floods that would rise suddenly. They were forced to adapt as the river has turned, in the words of one villager, “wild and furious.”

In villages like Kalidahakhi on the banks of the Padma River, these forces are already reshaping lives by the hour. As much as five meters of riverbank can disappear in a single day, consuming everything in its path, local government official Azizuul Amin told AFP. More than 9,000 people have been displaced by the Padma in just five years, as the main tributary of the Ganges encroaches further and further inland. “Today my backyard is gone. I had a cowshed over there... now it is just dust,” said a local, whose home, one that could survive a flood or be easily relocated elsewhere in case of inundation, in Chalan Beel, floating schools chug along rivers and lakes swollen by floods, bringing education to students who have been denied the chance to learn in one of Bangladesh’s poorest locations. “Now, they have year-round education,” said Mohammad Rezwan, head of the Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha charity which runs the pioneering project.

Today they run more than 20 “floating schools” in the Chalan Beel area. Other charities have replicated the idea in different parts of Bangladesh, where the world’s largest river delta empties into the Bay of Bengal. Smaller models are equipped with desks, libraries and blackboards while more elaborate, twin-storey designs also boast slippery slides, monkey bars and swing sets for playgrounds. Children even learn to use laptop computers, all powered by banks of solar panels atop the boats. At night, once school is over, adults come aboard to learn new techniques for farming in an extreme climate.

Rezwan said farmers were being taught how to plant flood-resistant crops in floating seed beds, a possible lifeline for rural communities who can lose a year’s harvest when the waters suddenly rise. Bangladesh has invested more than $400 million into a new special agency for adaptation projects, including flood embankments, floating farm technology and mobile water-purification stations. It shows how seriously we are taking this, said Multikul Tran Rahman Sarkar, deputy chief of the government’s Bangladesh Climate Change Trust, of the new fund. —AFP

Six rescue divers drown in bid to save boy

KUALA LUMPUR: Six Malaysian rescue divers drowned in a freak accident while searching for a boy who had gone missing in a pool at an abandoned tin mine, emergency officials said yesterday. The 17-year-old boy had gone missing Wednesday while fishing in the pool popular with anglers in the township of Puchong west of the capital Kuala Lumpur.

Mohammad Hamdan Wahid, fire and rescue department director-general, said the divers encountered strong undercurrents that spun them around in the murky water.

Local police chief Abdul Aziz Ali said the spinning caused them to lose their diving gear. They were pulled out of the water after 30 minutes but by then they were already unconscious, he added. Fire chief Mohammad described the death of six officers in one day as the “worst tragedy” to hit his department. The search for the missing youth was continuing, he said. —AFP

“Thai agents auction off jobs to highest bidder”

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Although the legislation says Myanmar migrants should pay no more than 150,000 kyat in fees to agents, many end up paying up to $800, a colossal sum for low-paid workers from one of the most impoverished countries in the world. “The agents took advantage of us,” said 40-year-old Ma Oo, who had to pay $400 for a job in an electronics factory near Bangkok and was visibly scared to speak out.

Real mafia

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International aid effort for Indonesia swings into gear

PALU, Indonesia: An international aid effort to help tens of thousands of victims of Indonesia’s quake-tsunami disaster swung into gear yesterday after days of delays, with planes flying in vital supplies for shattered communities.

A total of 1,424 people have been confirmed dead and over 2,500 injured after the monster earthquake struck Friday, sending destructive waves barrelling into Sulawesi island. The double disaster reduced buildings in the seaside city of Palu to rubble—but aid has been slow to arrive and looting has broken out.

Yesterday, police armed with guns stood guard outside petrol stations to ensure order in long, winding queues. Trucks carrying supplies have reportedly been rammed en route to Palu. Authorities initially turned a blind eye but now police have been rounding up dozens of suspected looters and the military warned that soldiers will fire on anyone caught stealing.

While rescuers continue to comb through destroyed buildings, hope is fading that anyone will be found alive under the rubble. Authorities say over 100 people are still unaccounted for.

Hundreds have been buried in mass graves as overwhelmed authorities race to avert a disease outbreak from corpses rotting in the tropical heat. The Indonesian government initially refused to accept international help, insisting its own military could handle the response, but as the scale of the disaster became clear President Joko Widodo reluctantly agreed to allow in overseas aid. Efforts to get desperately needed aid to hungry and thirsty victims, many now homeless and sleeping in evacuation camps, were slow to get off the ground due to severed transport links.

The airport, badly damaged in the twin disaster, finally re-opened to all flights Thursday, allowing the international aid effort to ramp up. The government of Indonesia is experienced and well-equipped in managing natural disasters, but sometimes, as with all other countries, outside help is also needed,” said United Nations aid chief Mark Lowcock, announcing the UN was pledging $15 million towards the recovery effort. —AFP

Wife of ex-Malaysian leader Razak charged with money laundering

Rosmah Mansor pleads not guilty to 17 charges

KUALA LUMPUR: The luxury-loving wife of Malaysia’s former prime minister was yesterday charged with money laundering and tax evasion linked to a multi-billion-dollar scandal that helped bring down the country’s previous government.

Rosmah Mansor, the 66-year-old wife of former prime minister Najib Razak, pleaded not guilty to 17 charges that could see her spend the rest of her life in prison.

Reviled in Malaysia for her lavish overseas shopping sprees and fetish for Birkin handbags as well as dazzling jewelry, Rosmah was released on bail after spending the night in detention at the office of the country’s anti-corruption agency. Her husband is also on bail on more than two dozen charges linked to the alleged plunder of state funds during his nine years in power.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, 93, who came back from retirement to challenge Najib, has launched a crackdown against corruption in the previous government. “There is no idea of revenge and anything like that... If you steal money, you will be charged in court,” the official Bernama news agency quoted him as saying. In the previous government, “There is no idea of revenge and anything like that... If you steal money, you will be charged in court,” the official Bernama news agency quoted him as saying.

Rosmah, wearing an orange dress and scarf, arrived under heavy security at the court complex yesterday after being arrested the previous day and held overnight at the headquarters of the country’s anti-corruption agency. In court, she sat quietly in the dock and did not look at the gallery, where family members were seated. Meanwhile her husband made a separate court appearance yesterday in connection with some of the more than two dozen charges lodged against him.

Najib, 65, has denied any wrongdoing despite revelations that hundreds of millions of dollars ended up in his bank accounts. Lawyers said the disgraced former first couple face protracted legal battles as they are being tried in ordinary courts. “For the trial and all subsequent appeals to conclude, this may take some years,” said N. Surendran, a lawyer who advises the rights group Lawyers for Liberty. —AFP

S Korea proposes US-North Korea tradeoff

WASHINGTON: An end to the Korean War in return for the verified dismantling of its major North Korean nuclear facility: South Korea’s foreign minister on Wednesday proposed this tradeoff to unblock stalled negotiations between the United States and North Korea. North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump held a groundbreaking summit in Singapore in June, where they reached a vague agreement to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, but there has been little movement since.

The North, which is under United Nations sanctions, has carried out six nuclear tests and says it has missiles that can hit the United States. “What North Korea has indicated is they will permanently dismantle their nuclear facilities in Yongbyon, which is a very big part of their nuclear program,” Seoul’s Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said in an interview with The Washington Post. Her comments came ahead of a visit on Sunday by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to North Korea, where he will meet strongman Kim Jong Un in an effort to further the denuclearization effort. During a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae-in in September, Kim expressed his readiness to close the Yongbyon facility, which is capable of uranium enrichment, if Washington took “corresponding measures.” —AFP
A model presents a creation by Junko Shimada during the Spring-Summer 2019 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. —AFP

Asia’s stars grace the red carpet at Busan Film Festival

See Page 20
The looming threat of Typhoon Kong-Rey failed to cloud a glittering opening to the 23rd Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) yesterday, with a parade of the region’s brightest stars gracing the red carpet. South Korean K-pop singer-turned-actress Choi Soo-young was joined at the festival’s opening gala by the likes of Hong Kong actress Sammi Cheng, here with the drama “First Night Nerves”, and China’s Zhao Tao, who stars in the latest Jia Zhangke feature “Ash is Purest White”. Veteran Japanese composer and pianist Ryuichi Sakamoto, in town to collect the Asian Filmmaker of the Year award, took to the stage to perform the theme song from his Oscar-winning score for “Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence”.

Sakamoto also scored the animated feature “My Tyranno Together, Forever”, a Korean-Japanese-Chinese co-production having its world premiere in Busan. The composer said he hoped its themes of peace and tolerance would resonate with recent political developments in the region. “It seems finally that peace is coming to the Korean peninsula and as an Asian this fills me with immense joy,” said Sakamoto. “Film helps connect people and this is also what this film festival does.”

Noted international filmmakers attending this year’s event include Hollywood producer Jason Blum (“Whiplash”, “Get Out”) and Indian hit-maker Rajkumar Harani (“3 Idiots”). Festival organizers were bracing for the imminent arrival of Typhoon Kong-Rey tomorrow, as the storm front was projected to close in on the South Korean coast over the next 48 hours. After being downgraded from Super Typhoon status on Thursday, organizers hoped the storm would weaken further as it moved north. Regardless, the local weather bureau has suggested there was an 80 to 90 percent chance of a direct hit on Busan, with winds of up to 110 kilometers per hour (68 mph) and heavy rain.

Meet-the-public events scheduled for the city’s Haeundae Beach, featuring the likes of local star Moon So-ri, have been moved under cover at the Busan Film Centre over the next few days, with memories of the havoc wrought by Typhoon Chaba in 2016 still fresh in the minds of organizers. This year they are taking no chances after that storm uprooted stages and lay waste to festival displays. The world premiere of the South Korean drama

Asia’s stars grace the red carpet at Busan Film Festival
T his year's Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) opened yesterday with a movie portraying the plight of a North Korean defector and the unlikely family she formed during her harrowing journey. South Korean feature film “Beautiful Days” centers on Zhen Chen, a young Korean-Chinese man who visits Seoul to find the mother who abandoned him 14 years ago, in a bid to fulfill his dying father’s wish to see her. The college student is left disappointed by the cold reception from his mother, played by top South Korean actress Lee Na-young—a bar waitress who lives in a decrepit house with her gangster lover.

But Zhen Chen soon finds out his mother’s dark secret—she was a defector from the North sold by human traffickers to his father, a poor Korean-Chinese farmer living near the border.

Once full of resentment over her fate, she eventually finds peace with her newfound family but her dark past continues to haunt her, leading to tragic events that leave her separated from her husband and son. The sombre, 104-minute film borrows many bleak details from the reality of the border between North Korea and China, home to a booming trade in human trafficking, drugs and prostitution.

Those fleeing poverty and repression in the North must first cross this border—but many women who do so are sold by human traffickers to rural Chinese men as brides or forced into sex work. Many endure a life akin to slavery, fearing harsh punishment at home once full of resentment over her fate, she eventually finds peace with her newfound family but her dark past continues to haunt her, leading to tragic events that leave her separated from her husband and son. The sombre, 104-minute film borrows many bleak details from the reality of the border between North Korea and China, home to a booming trade in human trafficking, drugs and prostitution.

Despite the bleak plot, “Beautiful Days” ends with cautious optimism, which Yun said was a metaphor for hopes of reconciliation and a better future between the two Koreas. The flashpoint Korean peninsula is the last frontier of the Cold War, where hundreds of thousands perished during the 1950-53 war that sealed the division between North and South. The two rivals have occasionally clashed over the heavily-fortified border, and the North has staged nuclear tests for decades. But ties have warmed to a level unseen for decades after three historic summits between the North’s leader Kim Jong Un and the South’s dovish President Moon Jae-in. “One of the key messages I wanted to convey through this movie is ‘starting anew,’ regardless of what happened in the past,” Yun told reporters. “And the two Koreas coincidentally are moving closer to each other these days as if starting their once-fraught relationships anew... I find the whole development very positive,” he said. — AFP

"Beautiful Days" opened the festival yesterday, starring acclaimed actress Lee Na-young in her first role for six years. Lee plays a North Korean mother reunited with her family after escaping to the South looking for a better life. Director Jero Yun told the festival’s opening press conference the film’s themes of reconciliation were a direct response to his personal hopes that relations between North and South Korea would continue to thaw. “Like in my film, dialogue is the first step,” Yun said. “I wanted to send a positive message to the audience and the hope that we see the dialogue continue.”

Festival organizers are positioning the 2018 edition as a fresh start for the influential event, which has endured government funding cuts and backroom turmoil ever since screening the controversial “The Truth Shall Not Sink with Sewol” documentary in 2014. That film was critical of Seoul’s handling of the tragic April 2014 sinking of a ferry which left more than 300 people dead-

most of them schoolchildren. “Of course we are excited to be back and we are excited about the future for Busan and for Korean film,” said festival director Jay Jeon. Jeon and BIFF organizing committee chairman Lee Yong-kwan were removed from their previous posts at BIFF during the Sewol documentary turmoil, but both have been reinstated for this year’s event. Expected highlights include the world premiere Friday of acclaimed Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan’s theatrical-themed drama “First Night Nerves”, along with the world premiere of the Philippine triptych “Lakvakayan.”

That film’s premiere—combining the talents of leading filmmakers Brillante Mendoza, Lav Diaz and Kidlat Tahimik—will launch the festival’s “Cinema as a response to the nation” program, which is helping celebrate 100 years of Philippine film. BIFF runs until October 13 and will feature 323 films from 79 countries, including 115 having their world premiers. — AFP

Chinese actress Zhao Tao

Japanese musician Ryuichi Sakamoto (left) and director Kobun Shizuno (right) pose on the red carpet.

South Korean actress Kim Gyu-ri

Martine Therouanne (left) and Jean-Marc Therouanne (right), the founders of the Festival International des Cinemas d’Asie (Vesoul International Film Festival of Asian Cinemas), pose on the red carpet during the opening ceremony.

‘Beautiful Days’ portrays N Korea refugee’s past and hope

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Reconciliation

Director Jero Yun said his earlier chronicle of North Korean defectors—and many people he had met at the frontier between the North and China—inspired the latest film. “Madam B” — his documentary released in 2016 — told the story of a married North Korean refugee sold to a poor Chinese farmer, who she lived with for more than a decade before escaping to the South. “I was always interested in telling stories of those at the margins of society... including those marginalized by the division of the two Koreas,” the French-educated director told reporters. “I wanted to pose questions about ‘What is the true meaning of family?’ by portraying (a) family that is unconventional in many aspects,” he added.

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Fresh start

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The opening film ‘Beautiful Days’ for the BIFF at Busan Cinema Center in Busan yesterday. — AFP

(From left to right) Jay Jeon, director of the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF), South Korean director Jero Yun, actor Lee Yu-jun, actress Lee Na-young, actor Jung Dong-yoon, actor Oh Kwang-rok and actor Seo Hyun-woo pose for photographs during a press conference of the opening film ‘Beautiful Days’ for the BIFF at Busan Cinema Center in Busan yesterday. — AFP
Cabello leads in nominations for MTV Europe Music Awards

U.S. singer Camila Cabello leads in nominations for the MTV Europe Music Awards, according to a list released yesterday. Even before the ceremony to be held November 4 near Bilbao in northern Spain, it has been a banner year for the 21-year-old singer born in Cuba. Her hit song “Havana” reached the top of the US charts in late January in the US, as did her album “Camila” that same week. The album version of the song, without video, has been heard more than 5.3 billion times on YouTube.

In August Cabello won two of the prestigious prizes at the MTV Video Music Awards-artist of the year and video of the year. Last year the former member of the band Fifth Harmony was named best pop artist at the MTVMurope Music Awards. This year she has been nominated in six categories including best song, best video and best artist. Next are singer Ariana Grande and rapper Post Malone with five nominations, followed by Canadian artist Drake and Britain’s Dua Lipa with four. Camodian singer Shawn Mendes, winner of three last year, was nominated for three awards this year. — AFP

EgyptAir stands by ‘surreal’ Drew Barrymore interview

EgyptAir stood by its story yesterday after US actress Drew Barrymore’s spokesperson denied she took part in an interview with the airline’s in-flight magazine that went viral over its bizarre content. “This interview with Drew Barrymore in the EgyptAir inflight magazine is, umm, surreal,” journalist and Yemen expert Adam Baron wrote on Twitter. The post, which included pictures of the three-page interview in the print edition of the magazine, has been liked or shared more than 10,000 times since Baron tweeted it on Tuesday.

A spokesperson for Barrymore told the Huffington Post website that the actress “did not participate” in the interview and that her team was “working with the airline PR team”. But EgyptAir insisted the interview was legitimate. “The interview was ‘surreal’ because the version of the song, without video, has been heard more than 5.3 billion times on YouTube.” — AFP

Will Bollywood brush #MeToo claims under the red carpet?

The first time Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta accused her co-star of sexually harassing her on set a decade ago, she was threatened with violence and then ignored. When she repeated the accusation in an interview last week - a year after reports of sexual misconduct engulfed Hollywood - it unleashed a wave of sympathy that some are predicting could launch India’s own #MeToo moment. “Woah, looks like the code of omerta in Bollywood is finally cracking,” film writer Radha Rajahyashada said on Facebook, using the Italian word for the Mafia’s code of silence.

Veteran actor Nana Patekar has denied harassing Dutta on the set of the film “Horn OK Please”. Patelkar’s lawyer was not immediately available for comment, but has previously said he would take legal action over what he called “false allegations”. Among those who have backed the actress are Priyanka Chopra and Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, daughter of one of Bollywood’s best-known actors and a top star in her own right. Ahuja urged others to come forward, saying many of her colleagues had been harassed and bullied. “If we don’t encourage their voices and instead vilify and question them, how will victims ever become survivors? Let them speak up! Stand up with them!” she tweeted.

Meanwhile, Anushka Ratchan’s refusal to respond to a journalist who asked if it was “completely false”. A spokesperson for EgyptAir told AFP yesterday that the article was authentic, without giving further details. The journalist Telda also defended the story. “This interview with Drew Barrymore in the EgyptAir inflight magazine is, umm, surreal,” journalist and Yemen expert Adam Baron wrote on Twitter. The post, which included pictures of the three-page interview in the print edition of the magazine, has been liked or shared more than 10,000 times since Baron tweeted it on Tuesday.

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New York seeks to claw back ‘Big Oyster’ past

O ne sunny morning in New York, a dozen biologists and volunteers stand in knee-deep water, chucking net sacks of oyster shells down a human chain, before planting them in containers on the riverbed. Why? To build an oyster reef. The goal? To restore a billion oysters by 2035 to America’s largest city—not as a delicacy for the dinner table but in an environmental bid to clean up its notoriously filthy harbor water and generate greater biodiversity. Dressed in waders, the group battles under the hot morning sun on the Brooklyn shoreline, the Statue of Liberty and iconic skyscrapers of New York’s Financial District rising up on the horizon. The net sacks contain empty oyster shells, or ones that have been assiduously cleaned or “cured”—then inserted with oyster larvae—and placed into containers planted on the seabed that will form a reef.

“This was the Big Oyster before it was the Big Apple,” jokes Mike McCann, an urban marine ecologist with the non-profit group The Nature Conservancy. “That’s a history that has been forgotten by a lot of New Yorkers and this project brings it back,” explains the 32-year-old. When English explorer Henry Hudson sailed into New York harbor in 1609, he had to navigate 89,000 hectares of oyster reefs that fed Lenape Indians for generations, writes Mark Kurlansky in his 2006 book “The Big Oyster.” The Dutch colonists who followed knew today’s Ellis Island and Liberty Island as the Island of the Little Oyster and the Island of the Great Oyster. “Oysters are ecosystem engineers and they build (a) three-dimensional reef habitat,” explains Katie Mosher, restoration manager of the Billion Oyster Project (BOP), which was set up in 2014.

‘Immediate improvement’

“It’s full of different shapes and sizes of oysters that other species love to hunt in and live in and to search for prey,” she adds. Oysters also filter and clean the water when they breathe, making it clearer. This enables light to penetrate more easily to the bottom and allows more plants to grow on the seabed. The molluscs also recycle nutrients and nitrogen, and can even mitigate the energy of large waves, reducing flooding and preventing erosion during storms or hurricanes.

But New York’s original oyster population was almost extinct by the dawn of the 20th century, a victim of overfishing, industrial age pollution and sewage. The waters of New York became too toxic to cultivate much marine life until the Clean Water Act of 1972 prohibited the dumping of untreated wastewater and garbage. Since then, life has slowly returned. “I had no idea there were oysters in New York City!” exclaims Emma Latham, 22, one of the volunteers and recent ecology graduate from Princeton University.

“I think it’s just great that we are able to take any small piece of land and make it do more, because there’s such a dire environmental impact by having so many people in such a small space with so much concrete.” The BOP works with dozens of partners, schools and hundreds of volunteers to build oyster reefs throughout the five boroughs of New York, and is already reaping the first rewards.

In just four years, they have already created 28 million oysters, estimating that the harbor waters have never been better in 150 years. “We definitely noticed an improvement when we put oysters down on the bottom,” said Mosher. “There’s more fish, more crabs. And it happens right away.” The reefs have also fueled a growth in wild oysters. Every so often a whopper is found, such as one measuring 20 cm (8 in) in August—the largest known oyster in the city in a century—on Pier 40, in the Hudson River at Greenwich Village. — AFP
Bangladesh seeks revival of silk industry

Bangladesh’s silk industry is one of the oldest in the world, with farmers in the northwestern border district of Rajshahi producing some of the most sought-after silk yarns. They specialize in high-quality mulberry silk—widely known as Bengal or Rajshahi silk—produced by the larvae of moths fed on fresh mulberry leaves and used for luxurious items of clothing. After around 40 days, the worms start to form cocoons by spitting out saliva around their bodies—which are then placed in bamboo frames before being harvested. The cocoons are then boiled in hot water, killing the worm inside and separating the ultra-thin threads, which are coiled on huge bobbins and hung out to dry.

“Each cocoon contains around 500 meters (1,600 feet) of thin thread,” said Akhi Akter, a supervisor at the Sopura silk factory, one of the country’s key silk producers. The dried threads are sent to a mill where workers join several threads together and put them onto looms to make cloth. This material is then boiled, washed and waxed before being sent to tailors to make mostly sarees, tunics and “dupattas”, a kind of shawl-cum-scarf. Bangladesh’s silk industry was hit hard in the 1990s and 2000s by what officials called faulty government policy which flooded the market with cheap Chinese silk imports.

But now the country has initiated a multi-million-dollar plan to revitalize the industry and create hundreds of thousands of new jobs. “Sericulture has a huge prospect if we could nurture it properly,” Abdul Hakim, the head of the country’s Silk Development Board, told AFP. He said the number of silk farmers has plummeted to around 2,000 from 10,000 only a few years ago.

“Our plan is to bring in Chinese experts and train our farmers. It will increase our silk production,” he said. With the booming of the Bangladesh economy—it grew over 7.5 percent last year—demand for Rajshahi silk has increased several fold, Akter said. An average quality Rajshahi silk saree now sells for some $100 and premium silk items can go for over $250 in the local market. “There is a huge potential export market for our silk,” she said. “We just need to do it right.” — AFP

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Tsukiji: It’s not all about the fish, says Michelin chef

When two-starred Michelin chef Lionel Beccat reminisces about Tsukiji, the world’s biggest fish market in Tokyo, it is not the ocean’s bounty that stirs memories but the fishmongers themselves. “The story of Tsukiji is quite simply a story about human relationships,” Beccat tells AFP as he browses through the market at the crack of dawn in search of prawns and fish for his lunchtime service. Beccat, 42, is executive chef at Esquisse, a restaurant in the Japanese capital’s ultra-chic Ginza district, and he has been making the short journey to the market for the past 12 years.

But all that will come to an end on October 6 when Tsukiji closes after 83 years, moving to a purpose-built site at Toyosu, eight kilometers east. Now a veteran of the market, he says it has taught him most in his life. A page of his professional life is turning. “So many fish”

One of Beccat’s suppliers, Masatake Ayabe, has enjoyed a 30-year career in Tsukiji and fears that business might suffer when the market moves to Toyosu. “There is no other market in the world which brings together so much fish, and people do us the honor of coming to shop here,” said Ayabe. “But I am sure we will have fewer customers at Toyosu.” He said he was sad to leave Tsukiji and “was not really looking forward to going to Toyosu”.

“Tsukiji is addictive: if you do not go in the morning, you will have such good relationships with them. There are also quite a few question marks over deliveries, access,” said Ayabe, who runs the Kamemoto Shoten fishmongers. Tsukiji critics say the 83-year-old market is no longer fit for the modern world, pointing to questionable hygiene standards in the narrow streets and insufficient protection against fire.

Tokyo mayor Yuriko Koike, who has championed the move, says the new market, on the site of a former gas plant, will use cutting-edge technology to provide a modern environment for selling fish. Beccat himself acknowledges “it will be better from a sanitary point of view” and the fishmongers will suffer less from extremes of cold and heat, but he too points to a difference in atmosphere. “Tsukiji is addictive: if you do not go in the morning, the day is not quite the same,” he said. “It is the place that has taught me most in my life. A page of my professional life is turning.” — AFP

Thai bay made famous in ‘The Beach’ shut indefinitely

The glittering Thai bay immortalized in the movie “The Beach” will be closed indefinitely to allow it to recover from the impact of hordes of tourists, an official said Wednesday, as a temporary ban on visitors expired. Maya Bay, ringed by cliffs on Ko Phi Phi Ley island, was made famous when it featured in the 2000 film starring Leonardo DiCaprio.

It was initially shut for four months in June due to beach erosion and pollution as the white-sand paradise sagged under pressure from thousands of day-trippers arriving by boat.

But a survey of the problem during the temporary ban made clear that the short-term fix was not going to work and that the damage was worse than originally thought. “We have evaluated each month and found out that the ecological system was seriously destroyed from tourism of up to 5,000 people daily,” Songtiam Sukjawang, director of the National Parks office, told AFP. “It’s very difficult to remedy and rehabilitate because its beach was completely destroyed as well the plants which cover it,” he said, adding it was “impossible” for recovery to occur in the allotted time.

He provided photos to AFP showing the degradation of Maya Bay’s shores, where trees and smaller vegetation have been gradually uprooted as its white sands receded. Thailand’s Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation announced the indefinite closure in a royal gazette published on October 1. It said the restrictions on tourism would not be lifted until the ecosystem “fully recovers to a normal situation”.

Besides beach erosion, heavy traffic around the azure waters can also damage sensitive coral reefs, already vulnerable to rising sea temperatures and climate change.

Arunard Simons of Ocean Quest Global, an environmental organization assisting the government with coral recovery around Maya Bay, said the bay’s rehabilitation could “last for four years at least” and the indefinite closure is “very good news”. “Over the last few months, the monsoon season and rough sea conditions have indeed hindered the efforts of coral rehabilitation, but we have no doubt that the longer term objectives... will be met.”

Tourism overload

Thailand attracted up to 35 million visitors last year, many of whom flocked to Krabi town where boat trips carried visitors to nearby island destinations—of which Maya Bay is a key attraction. Nanthapat Borbut, who runs a four-star company in Krabi, was “disappointed” by the closure as his company had promised Maya Bay to customers booked for Thailand’s tourist high season which begins in November. “All tourists... want to see Maya Bay, both Chinese and western tourists alike,” Nanthapat said. Paul Pruengkarn of Pacific Asia Travel Association—a non-profit working with Thai operators to promote responsible tourism—said the decision was a double-edged sword for local communities. “You need to also consider the livelihoods,” said Pruengkarn. “They still have to feed themselves and support their families.” The government has to consider how then can they assist them.” — AFP
Poor old Macau. When this 30.5-square-kilometre region is not overshadowed by brasher neighbour Hong Kong, it’s associated only with its Vegas-style casino-stuffed Strip. But this Special Administrative Region of China was a Portuguese colony for more than 400 years, and thanks to this history has developed a unique culture that blends European and Chinese values, cuisine and architecture.

Nowhere is this unique fusion more obvious than Taipa Village, a cultural district on the island of Taipa, which in spite of rampant development by casino resorts on the next-door Cotai Strip, has managed to cling onto its pastel-coloured houses, quiet backstreets and traditional restaurants. So if you’re looking for a slice of old Macau, here’s what not to miss in Taipa Village.

Rooftop Macau
You’ll recognize Rooftop Macau by its gaggle of hipsters sunning themselves on the roof. They’ve gathered in this white-walled boutique to browse its printed t-shirts, playful stationery and trinkets - but most importantly, to drink its tiny drip coffees on the mini rooftop that overlooks Rua do Cunha.

Taipa Village Art Space
Down pretty Rua Dos Clerigos (itself one of Taipa’s most Instagrammable streets, with houses in a range of birthday-cake shades) is the Taipa Village Art Space. This narrow, two-storey gallery anchors the arty side of Taipa Village. The space showcases the work of a range of artists (both local and from further afield) and hosts a number of hands-on workshops and classes.

Antonio
The eponymous restaurant of Portuguese chef António Coelho is a Macau institution. Not because the kitchen churns out excellent Portuguese and Macanese favourites (although that it does: try the fried codfish cakes and classic octopus salad), or because its blue, white and yellow-tiled walls make it feel like a proper Lisbon tasca (local restaurant), but because at weekends, the atmos-

Authentic Macau: Exploring old Taipa Village
phere gets kicked up a gear with live music and (sometimes) riotous sabrage. If you can't get a table at Antônio, try nearby La Famiglia, which fuses Macanese favorites with Italian flavors.

**Rua do Cunha**

Unofficially known as Macau’s ‘food street’, Rua do Cunha is a pedestrianised avenue that runs through the spine of Taipa Village. As the (unofficial) name suggests, it’s chocka with snack shops, restaurants and hawkers peddling Macanese favorites (expect plates of almond cookies, beef jerky, egg tarts) as well as Chinese dishes.

Must-visit eateries along this street include historic Lord Stow’s Bakery, which sells Macau’s favorite egg tarts; and O Santos, a traditional Portuguese restaurant whose walls are lined with football memorabilia. A few streets over is the owner’s O Santos Loja Portuguesa delicatessen, which sells all kinds of Portuguese delights – from tinned sardines and olive oil to wine from the Douro Valley. The pastel blue exterior of a building. The Taipa Houses Museum offers a glimpse into colonial Macanese life.

**Avenida da Praia**

In the shadow of the mammoth Venetian and Galaxy casinos is relaxed, tree-lined Avenida da Praia, bracketed by a giant lily pad-covered pond on one side and pastel green Portuguese houses on the other. The houses are part of the Taipa Houses-Museum, five colonial residences that offer a window into what life was like in Macau in the first half of the 20th century. (You’ll find another example of this mint-green Portuguese architecture at the Museum of Taipa and Coloane History, formerly a municipal building and now home to archaeological artefacts and handicrafts explaining the history of Macau.)

**Pak Tai Temple**

Pak Tai was an emperor who was believed to be able to withstand fire and flood. He’s commemorated with this tiny Taoist temple, dating back to 1843, which is filled with incense and on the fringe of one of Taipa’s prettiest squares. Time your visit with a Chinese opera performance – they take place on the third day of the third lunar month of the year.

**Quarter Square**

This three-level design shop, coffee bar and all-round hip hangout provides the design cool in traditional Taipa Village. On the edge of quiet square Largo Maia de Magalhaes, Quarter Square sells all the things you want to buy but don’t need, such as design trinkets and beautiful toiletries. There’s excellent coffee, and don’t leave without saying hi to the PR director, French bulldog Copper. (www.lonelyplanet.com)
48 hours in Singapore:
Making the most of SE Asia’s travel hub

Singapore may look small, and geographically speaking it is, but this tiny island city-state is jam-packed with a myriad of things to do, see, buy and devour. The sleek and efficient public transport system makes zipping around a breeze, allowing you more time to dip your toes into this melting pot of cultures, religions, food and architecture. With just 48 hours on your clock, here’s an itinerary to make sure you experience the best that the Lion City has to offer.

DAY ONE
Morning

Begin your Singapore adventure with an early morning trip to one of the city’s wet markets. At the Chinatown Wet Market, ensconced in the basement of the Chinatown Complex, you’ll be greeted by the raucous sounds of enthusiastic home cooks and high-end restaurant chefs haggling for the finest and freshest produce. There’s a mind-boggling array of colourful fruits, vegetables and seafood, plus more exotic offerings that include black chickens and bullfrogs. To take a taste of Singapore home with you, visit Anthony the Spice Maker - his meat rendang blend is a showstopper.

Recover from the sensory overload with a traditional Singaporean breakfast at nearby Nanyang Old Coffee. The ‘breakfast set’ comes with two runny eggs, kaya (coconut jam) toast and a cup of caramel-noted lop (coffee). Mix the eggs with a swirl of soy sauce and dash of white pepper, and use the toast to scoop up the creamy goodness. Finish off the morning by delving into the area’s colorful history at the interactive Chinatown Heritage Centre, then go temple hopping down South Bridge Road. Must-stops include the imposing Tang-styled Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, the colorful and ornately decorated Hindu Sri Mariamman Temple and the mint green Jamae Mosque.

Afternoon

If you’re feeling peckish after a full morning, make your way to Maxwell Food Centre and join the queues for lip-smacking hawker grub. Worthy mentions include Tian Tian Hainanese Chicken Rice and Rojak, Popiah & Cockle. Make sure to chope (save) your seat before ordering by laying a packet of tissues on the table in front of a vacant spot. As is the case at all hawker centres, it is customary to share tables, which also gives you an opportunity to mingle with locals.

Once refueled, spend the afternoon wandering through the Colonial District, dipping in and out of some of Singapore’s best museums, including the Asian Civilisations Museum, National Museum of Singapore and the Peranakan Museum. Take a moment to stand at the landing spot of Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore, and ponder the view over the Singapore River. Here, the towering skyscrapers dwarf the line of riverside heritage shophouses, a testament to the Lion City’s incredible journey from fishing village to world-renowned financial powerhouse.
Evening
After freshening up from your day of exploring (Singapore is notoriously hot and humid), pull up a seat at one of the city’s chic rooftop bars. For a sky-high view, head to trendy C-LA VI perched atop Marina Bay Sands Hotel, or the microbrewery Level33, which lays claim to being the world’s highest craft brewery. For a lower vantage point, but no less spectacular view, Lantern at swanky Fullerton Bay Hotel, and sophisticated cocktail bar Smoke and Mirrors located above the acclaimed National Gallery of Singapore fit the bill. From each of these locations, you’ll get a knockout view of the nightly Marina Bay Sands’ light and laser show, Spectra.

Now it’s time for dinner. Singapore’s iconic chilli crab cannot be missed, and Jumbo Seafood at Riverside Point serves up one of the city’s best versions. Don the complimentary bib and don’t be afraid to use your fingers. Order a side of mantou (fried buns) to mop up every last bit of the sublime sauce. If you’ve still got fuel in the tank, the DJs and dance floors of mega-club Zouk are just steps away. Otherwise, a wander along the Quays of the river will help you digest your dinner before falling into bed after a full day in Singapore.

DAY TWO
Morning
On your second day, leave the buzz of the city behind and spend the morning at the spectacular Unesco World Heritage Site, the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Here, hours can easily slip away as you discover themed gardens, sprawling lawns and dense rainforests. When you’ve finished ambling through the greenery, head for a coffee at local expat favorite, Cluny Court, opposite the Botanic Garden MRT.

Take the MRT a few stops to frenetic Little India. Armed with an empty stomach, slip into the Tekka Centre and order buttery roti prata (dough-flour pancake) and murtabak (savory stuffed pancake). Happily sated, head to the second level of the Tekka Centre for a bird’s-eye view of row upon row of brightly colored saris on display. Then, head out into the surrounding lanes to discover the area’s aromatic spice stores, colorful temples and burgeoning street art scene.
Afternoon

Move on from your morning in Little India and hurtle at full pelt into the future at space-age Gardens by the Bay. The two cooled bio-dome conservatories offer both tropical and dry environments to explore, as well as a welcome respite from the midday heat. Together with the towering high-tech Supertrees and surrounding art-studded gardens, this urban planning masterpiece is an awe-inspiring sight to behold. If you’ve got time and energy to spare, spend the latter part of the afternoon exploring the brightly painted laneways of Kampong Glam. Here, hip boutiques share the scene with traditional oriental carpet and textile shops, with many live music venues and cocktail dens hidden along the way.

Evening

If you’re looking to splash out, Singapore is not short on world-class fine dining restaurants. Among the most renowned are Waku Ghin, Odette and Whitegrass. Slightly easier on the wallet are trendy hotspots Ding Dong, Neon Pigeon, Artichoke and Cheek by Jowl. For budget-friendly chow, head to smoky Satay Street, where the melt-in-your-mouth satay pairs perfectly with a jug of ice-cold Tiger soda.

Cocktail connoisseurs can spend the rest of the evening ducking in and out of the hidden drinking dens of Amoy Street, or seek out the neon pink ‘Psychic’ sign that marks the entrance to Employees Only, or go bar hopping along trendy Club Street.

If the nightlife scene isn’t your thing, instead get up close and personal with nocturnal critters at Night Safari, next door to the acclaimed Singapore Zoo. Enjoy being whisked around in an open-sided shuttle tram through what feels like a wild, animal-filled jungle. Don’t worry, there are hidden barriers between you and the more dangerous beasts. Finally, if you’ve got room for one last meal on the island, head to late-night institution Swee Choon, where delectable dim sum has been dished up for over 40 years. — www.lonelyplanet.com
Yesterday's Solution

ACROSS
1. Make or move along with a sound as of a horse’s hooves striking the ground.  
2. A brown cap of Scottish origin.  
3. An organization of countries formed in the first half of the 20th century. 
4. A member of a Slavic people who set meat on a skewer usually with vegetables. 
5. That are used. 
6. On or toward the lee. 
7. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked made from aba cloth. 
8. A loose sleeveless outer garment. 
9. Inability to coordinate voluntary movements. 
11. A unit of inductance equal to one billionth. 
13. A specific instance of feeling hopeful. 
14. English economist noted for his studies of international trade and finance (born in 1907). 
15. Goddess of criminal rashness and its punishment. 
16. Titmice and chickadees. 
17. In bed. 
18. Goddess of criminal rashness and its punishment. 
20. A predominantly in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar. 
21. A port city of northeastern Brazil on the Atlantic. 
22. A capacitive unit equal to one billion farads. 
23. A hawthorn or a hawthorne, a shrub or bush with white flowers. 
25. Tear down so as to make flat with the ground. 
26. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves. 
27. A unit of inductance equal to one billionth of a henry. 
28. An ancient and South American. 
29. A mythical Greek hero. 
30. A Greek mythological hero. 
31. A Titan who was forced by Zeus to bear the sky on his shoulders. 
32. A mythical Greek hero. 
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**TV Listings**

**Friday, October 5, 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
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Taurus (April 20-May 20)

This is a very nostalgic time for you. Maybe a talk with an older relative and just sitting down and learning more about your family history could be very satisfying to you. Learning of the struggles of others may make you more determined than ever to ensure your personal growth, not only on a personal level but also in the career place. Hearing this history brings a sense of mortality to you. You may realize it will be you who told others all you know and you will be a story of great success, Taurus. The way you handle very sensitive issues today can set the tone for your future. Take time to be analytical and do not act on haste.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Today finds you yearning to surround yourself with all things beautiful. You may direct much of your energy on your marriage or partnership. This is a great time for you to spend that extra time with someone you love. This will bring great harmony and peace into your world. Focus on tuning your dreams into reality. You need a strong support system and your loved ones will be just the one for you. Feed your relationship daily and you will reap great reward in the long run. A strong support system and your loved ones will be just the one for you.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You may feel as if you are the center of attention today. All eyes are on you. You have begun to excel in the workplace and your superiors have taken notice to this. You may find much support from someone close to you that has your best interests at heart. Your eyes are on you. You have begun to excel in the workplace and your superiors have taken notice to this. You may find that this is the job that you have been waiting for. A new you side of you is coming to light. This will be a great day to re-evaluate all the information and insight you can. But, your focus today is on the home. A new you side of you is coming to light. This will be a great day to re-evaluate all the information and insight you can. But, your focus today is on the home. You may desire to make a change in your living situation. You are full of optimism and faith. Your self-confidence is at an all-time high. You may desire to make a change in your living situation. You are full of optimism and faith. Your self-confidence is at an all-time high.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is a time others may find you marching to the beat of your own drum. There are times you long to be surrounded by friends and family times that the only thing that appeals to you is time alone. This is a time you crave independence. You seem drawn to everything that is unique and different. A great day for a new outfit, a new hair color, or even time to make some cool new additions to everything that is unique and different. A great day for a new outfit, a new hair color, or even time to make some cool new additions to everything that is unique and different.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You have always been taught to treat others as you want to be treated. It seems as if this is beginning to pay off for you. You find yourself surrounded by some really caring and thoughtful friends. Being showered for your talents is a comforting feeling. You find this a time you not only are able to enjoy your life but truly love and appreciate the position you find yourself in.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

You are always quick to gather all the information possible on new friends and new acquaintances. You have been known to be quite the detective. Today finds you fascinated with gaining all the information and insight you can. But, your focus today is on the job. You desire to have a better self-understanding. What exactly led you down the path you took? You have put some thought into this before, but today you are determined to figure it out. Finding yourself is a mission you are on. You not only want to know who you really are but what exactly caused you to be this way, Libra? The answers are held in your heart. Today could be a great day to make amends.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You have learned to appreciate and love yourself and all you stand for. It is rare that you are not your own worst critic but today, through clear eyes, you are able to appreciate who you are and what you have accomplished. You create self-respect and self-confidence. Those around you sense this and are drawn to you today. You are able to truly identify all in your life that is important and of lasting value. You feel driven and motivated and can offer much assistance to friends and family today. You feel deep connections with your family today and place much value on these relationships. You may find that today is a great day to reach out to someone close to you that you have lost touch with. Reconnect with this someone special. Today is a great day to work towards accomplishing this goal.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You have begun to search for beauty in all that surrounds you. Life takes on a different meaning to you. You seem to see a new way of life. Seeing others may make you more determined than ever to ensure your future. Reach for the stars. You feel as though you are invincible. Today that may be true. If it can go your way, it does. What a wonderful feeling! You are full of optimism and faith. Your self-confidence is at an all-time high. You may desire to make a change in your living situation. Leave this decision for a later date when your head comes down from the clouds.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may face a difficult decision this week. You may feel led to pass up a very profitable career opportunity because it truly conflicts with your morals and values. This is a road to success you may choose to take a detour around. The easy way is not always the right way. You may find in the long run you will reap great reward from doing the right thing.
PORTLAND, Oregon: Three years ago, a group of eighth graders came before Portland’s City Council to ask for something unusual: a ban on new facilities to transport or store fossil fuels in the city.

Quoting Dr. Seuss, singing Bob Dylan’s “The Times They Are A Changing” and performing a short play set 200 years in the future, they told the officials fossil fuels had no place in a world struggling with climate change - or in Portland’s future. Later that day, city officials unanimously voted for the first-in-the-nation ban. “This is the first stone in a green wall of resistance against fossil fuel facilities on the West Coast,” promised then-Mayor Charlie Hales, who heralded the ordinance as an example of how cities can take action against climate change.

Today, more than 70 cities around the world - including green-leaning Portland - have pledged to become “carbon neutral” by 2050, meaning they will eliminate nearly all fossil fuel emissions and offset what they cannot, through actions such as planting carbon-absorbing trees. Each city is pushing toward the goal in its own way, to help meet the emissions-cutting goals of the 2015 Paris climate agreement, which aims to hold off the worst impacts of climate change.

“We are disappointed that the Oregon Supreme Court declined to review this case,” said Kara Siepmann, a spokeswoman for the Western States Petroleum Association, one of the original challengers. “This matter remains very important to our industry, the city of Portland, and all Oregonians who rely on terminals for safe and reliable access to fuel,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation via e-mail. “The Portland Business Alliance, another challenger, declined to comment. The ruling now clears the way for Portland to put its new law into effect - but only after years of delay.

“People in Portland fight to defend what we love from dirty fossil fuel projects like oil train terminals,” said Dan Serres, conservation director for Columbia Riverkeeper, an environmental non-government organization that joined the city’s court appeal.

“The city of Portland made history when it adopted the fossil fuel ordinance. With these challenges from the oil industry and the Portland Business Alliance out of the way, Portland can move forward toward putting this policy into practice,” he said.

Legal challenge
After passing its landmark policy, which banned construction of new, large-scale fossil fuel facilities in the city, Portland was hit by a legal challenge from petroleum trade groups and a local business coalition The groups argued the city had overstepped its constitutional bounds by effectively blocking interstate commerce, an argument the state land use court upheld in July 2017. The city then appealed and won - a decision ultimately upheld by the state Supreme Court in July.

“Portland doesn't aim to phase out fossil fuels entirely just yet. While it pledged last year to aim for 100 percent renewable energy - on the day US President Donald Trump said he would withdraw the United States from the Paris agreement - Portland for now still needs existing oil and natural gas distribution networks to heat homes and fuel automobiles.

“Pinch point
The constellation of oil tanks, propane terminals and liquid natural gas plants along Portland’s Willamette River lies just a few miles from the city’s downtown, with its trendy food trucks and artisanal doughnut shops. Serres - and city planner Armstrong - say they have noticed an increase in oil trains moving through the city, some carrying fuel from Canada’s Alberta tar sands bound for ships to Asia and elsewhere.

Serres believes Portland’s geography at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers - along the flattest route between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean - makes it uniquely positioned to slow down worldwide distribution of fossil fuels.

“No one wants a fossil fuel terminal exploding in their backyard,” Mia Reback of 350PDX, the local chapter of a climate activist organization, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. — Reuters
Classifieds
Friday, October 5, 2018

Airlines

Kuwait Airways 171
Jazeera Airways 177
Wataniya Airways 22 066 536
American Airlines 22087425
Jet Airways 22087426
                           22924455
FlyDubai 22414400
Qatar Airways 22423888
KLM 22425747
Royal Jordanian 22418064/5/6
British Airways 22425635
Air France 22430224

STATE OF KUWAIT
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT

Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 6819 - 6817
Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Hot with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h with a chance for blowing dust over open areas.

BY NIGHT: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 10 - 32 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING

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<th>MAX. EXP.</th>
<th>MIN. REC.</th>
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<td>ABDALY</td>
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SFC. CHART 04/10/2018 0000 UTC

4 DAYS FORECAST

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday 10/05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 10/06</td>
<td>Hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas with a chance for mist forming at night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday 10/07</td>
<td>Hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas with a chance for mist forming at night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 10/08</td>
<td>Hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas with some scattered clouds will appear</td>
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Temperatures

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Wind Direction

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Wind Speed

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PRAYER TIMES

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RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

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TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR: 0 mm

REQUIRED

Experienced Tailors needed
Can create designs from sketches. Required to have their own sewing machines and equipped.

Interested candidates contact on Whatsapp 97839455

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Xavier Fernandes, holder of Indian Passport No: J5550444, Civil ID No: 258082100643, hereby change my name to Xavier Fernandes. (C 5425) 2-10-2018

Nationality Indian, PP No. N5195063, my name John Constance Peter Consalves to John Constance Gonsalves, father's name Peter Francis Consalves to Pedro Francisco Gonsalves, mother's name Annie Francis Consalves to Anna Francisco Gonsalves. (C 5424) 1-10-2018

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center 25716707
Rawda 22517733
Adaliya 22517144
Khaldiya 24848075
Kafan 24849807
Shamiya 24848913
Shuwaikh 24814507
Abdullah Salim 22549134
Nuzha 22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh 24814764
Qadsiya 22515088
Dasmah 22532265
Bneid Al-Gar 22531908
Shaab 22518752
Qibla 22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla 22451082
Mirqab 22456536
Sharq 22465401
Salmiya 25746401
India is cutting prices of gasoline and diesel by 2.50 rupees ($0.03) a liter, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said yesterday, as the government’s latest step to tackle the impact of a sharp rise in crude oil prices and a weak currency.

The cut includes a reduction in excise duty of 1.50 rupees per liter, which will reduce government revenue by 105 billion rupees, Jaitley said. State-run refiners will also cut the price they charge by 1 rupee per liter.

Jaitley also asked state governments to cut value added tax on fuel by a further 2.50 rupees per liter. Taxes on gasoline and diesel, which account for more than a third of retail fuel prices, are one of the biggest sources of income for the government, which is seeking to keep the country’s budget deficit in check.

“It certainly has fiscal implications. If the government wishes to stick to its glidepath of fiscal consolidation, then it will have to cut its expenditures significantly,” said Rupa Rege Nitsure, chief economist at L&T Finance Holdings.

Shares in Indian Oil Corp, the country’s biggest oil refiner, dropped 11.4 percent in reaction to the news. The price cut is likely to result in a loss of margin of 70-72 billion Indian rupees on auto fuel sales, according to K Ravichandran, senior vice president, corporate ratings, at ratings agency ICRA Ltd.

Among other state-run companies, shares in Hindustan Petroleum Corp closed down 13.5 percent, and Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd lost 12.4 percent. The Nifty Energy Index fell 6.14 percent. Global crude prices hit near 4-year highs on Wednesday, and a weak rupee has added to the woes of Indians, who have been hit by record high fuel prices.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is facing a tough election in three key states this year, followed by a national election which is due by May.

Asked by a reporter about the economic implications of the move, Jaitley said the decision was “good economics” as it won’t impact the fiscal deficit and will allow consumers to boost spending on other goods.

Devendra Kumar Pant, chief economist at India Ratings and Research, said the move could act as a “minor comforting factor” for the central bank during its monetary policy meeting scheduled today, as a fuel price cut will ease retail inflation. — Reuters
Sudan to set daily exchange rate, cancel import curbs: CB

KHARTOUM: Sudan will begin using a body comprised of bankers and exchange bureaus to set its daily currency exchange rate as part of a package of measures designed to tackle an economic crisis, the central bank governor said. Sudan is also cancelling import restrictions imposed last year on 19 selected foods and other items, central bank Governor Mohamed Kheir al-Zubeir said.

The currency measures mean the Sudanese pound is ceded in 2011, taking with it three-quarters of oil output. Worsening hard currency shortages have led to strict withdrawal limits and a booming foreign exchange black market, where dollars have been trading for a premium over the official rate.

Sudan's economy has been struggling since the south of the sprawling northeast African country seceded in 2011, taking with it three-quarters of oil output and depriving Khartoum of a crucial source of foreign currency. The currency measures mean the Sudanese pound is likely to lose value against the dollar initially before later stabilising, Zubeir said. The new exchange body will also set purchase price of gold to counter smuggling, he said.

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**Business**

**Toyota and Softbank unveil tie-up, eye autonomous vehicle services**

**‘New mobility services’ include meal deliveries**

**TOKYO:** Japanese car giant Toyota and conglomerate SoftBank yesterday announced they would create a joint venture to provide “new mobility services” including autonomous vehicles for services such as meal deliveries.

The new company will be called “Monet” — short for “mobility network” — and will own 50.25 percent owned by SoftBank, with the remainder held by Toyota. Monet would be created by April 2019 and would have an initial capital injection of 2.0 billion yen ($17.5 million), rising eventually to 10 billion yen, said the new firm’s CEO Junichi Miyakawa.

By the second half of the next decade, the new firm would be rolling out autonomous services using Toyota’s battery electric vehicles.

“Possibilities include demand-focused just-in-time mobility services, such as meal delivery vehicles where food is prepared on the move, hospital shuttles where onboard medical examinations can be performed, mobile offices,” said the two firms in a statement.

Toyota’s president Akio Toyoda has pledged to transform the auto behemoth from a car manufacturer to a mobility company “to face what he described as a ‘once-in-a-century challenge’ to an industry undergoing profound change.”

Under tycoon CEO Masayoshi Son, SoftBank, which started as a software firm, has increasingly been an investment firm, ploughing funds into a broad range of companies and projects outside its core business. In recent years it has completed deals with the likes of French robotics firm Aldebaran and Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba.

“SoftBank alone and Toyota alone cannot do everything so we should maybe team up,” said Miyakawa.

He acknowledged that rivals in the United States, China and Europe were “further down the road” but stressed: “We’re not giving up. We believe we can catch up.” —AFP

**India bank chief Kochhar steps down amid probe**

**MUMBAI:** The chief executive of one of India’s largest banks, and a rare woman at the top of male-dominated corporate India, resigned yesterday amid a 19-year corruption probe.

ICICI-India’s second-largest private bank by assets — said in a statement that Chanda Kochhar was immediately stepping down as CEO. She has been the subject of an investigation over a conflict of interests, facing charges that she favored loans to a company linked to her husband.

“The board of directors... accepted the request of Ms Chanda Kochhar to seek early retirement from the Bank at the earliest. ‘The Board accepted this request with immediate effect,’ said in a filing to the Bombay Stock Exchange.

The bank announced that head of its insurance operations, Sandeep Bakhshi, would become its new chief executive, sounding shares rising by almost five percent.

ICICI added that its investigation into the conflict of interest allegations against Kochhar would be unaffected by her departure.

Kochhar, 56, is accused of sanctioning a loan worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the Videocon Group conglomerate, which had investments in her husband’s renewables energy firm.

The ICICI board initially slammed the allegations, which were first made in the Indian Express newspaper as “malicious”, but later opened a probe against her.

Kochhar, who had headed ICICI since May 2009, went on leave in June as the investigation got underway. She is one of the few women to have headed up an Indian bank—Axis Bank’s Shikha Sharma is another, while Arundhati Bhattacharya retired last year as the head of the State Bank of India.

India’s public and private sector banks are grappling with ballooning bad loans and falling profitability as the government attempts to clean up their books. —AFP

**IMF chief urges ‘revamp’ of Japan’s economic policy**

**TOKYO:** The head of the IMF yesterday called for an overhaul of Japan’s economic policy, as the world’s third-biggest economy battles stubborn low inflation, sluggish growth and a rapidly ageing population.

Christine Lagarde called for a “fresh look” at “Abenomics”, the economic policy of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which combines ultra-loose monetary policy with fiscal stimulus and structural reforms.

“We believe that it will require a revamping of policies. The basic principles in our view are still valid but need to be broadened, sustained and accelerated,” said Lagarde.

She warned that the economic challenges facing Japan will “only grow as Japan’s population continues to age and shrink,” noting that both the size of the economy and the population would contract by a quarter over the next 40 years. The IMF predicted a growth rate of 1.1 percent this year, declining to 0.9 percent next year in the former Asian powerhouse. —AFP

**Saudi agrees to invest in new oil refinery in Gwadar**

**ISLAMABAD:** Saudi Arabia has agreed in principle to invest in a new oil refinery in Pakistan’s deep-water port of Gwadar, the South Asian nation’s petroleum minister said yesterday. State-owned Pakistan State Oil will partner with Saudi state oil giant Aramco on the project, Petroleum Minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan told reporters. “They showed an interest to immediately invest in the refinery,” Khan said, describing a visiting Saudi delegation.

“We sat down and held initial discussions with them and it was principally decided by both sides that it will be a government-to-government agreement.” Details of the refinery’s costs and scope are to be worked out later. —Reuters

**Stocks selloff grinds on as US bond yields surge**

**LONDON:** Most major stock markets fell back yesterday as a global selloff persisted on mounting anxiety over rising US bond yields, dealers said. London and Paris stocks shed a little less than one percent in value while Frankfurt eked out a modest gain following a German holiday closure the day before.

The Dow and Nasdaq indices were also in the red in early New York trading.

The dollar continued to brush aside other currencies except for the pound after more proof of the booming US economy sent Treasury yields surging, but Asian equities sank with more Federal Reserve rate hikes looking certain. A forecast-busting private jobs report, a surge in activity in the services sector and optimism in the retail market were the latest evidence that the world’s top economy is firing on all cylinders, helping send the Dow to a record close for the second day in a row.

However, the news also saw a sell-off in haven Treasuries — a sign of confidence — sending the cost of borrowing to its highest level in seven years, in turn fuelling a surge in the dollar, helping it hit an 11-month high against the yen.

“There’s a pretty broad based selloff seen in stock indices this morning with markets in Europe and US futures both declining as investors grow increasingly concerned about the recent rise in yields,” said XTB analyst David Cheetham.

“Solid (US) employment data and a 21-year high in a widely viewed service sector survey from across the Atlantic on Wednesday... saw US bond yields rise to multi-year highs and this makes stocks relatively less attractive.” —AFP
Wave of worries takes shine off Motor Show

Cutting-edge concept cars, self-driving lounges paint bright future for industry

PARIS: Cutting-edge concept cars and promises of self-driving "lounges" painted the picture of a bright future as the Paris Motor Show got under way on Tuesday, but that’s not the message being sent by industry chiefs.

From Brexit and transatlantic trade tensions to the challenges posed by China and electric vehicles, executives see plenty of reasons to worry. "Making forecasts is becoming more and more difficult," BMW’s chief Harald Kruger told journalists, "Profitability is obviously under pressure.

It was enough to keep plenty of key players at home: Ford, Fiat-Chrysler, Nissan, VW and Mazda were among the notable absences at this year’s show. Faced with the reluctance of some industry giants to spend millions of euros on marketing, organizers responded by cutting back the show’s length to 11 days from 16.

And in a bid to attract crowds who can just as easily compare models on the internet, they set up test tracks where visitors can take electric scooters and bikes for a spin. The show also teamed up with CES Las Vegas, the huge consumer electronics fair, to host dozens of tech start-ups eager to turn cars into the internet-connected "mobility solutions" of tomorrow.

But some analysts say such changes aren’t enough, citing a similar absence of major carmakers at the industry’s other top shows in Detroit, Geneva or Frankfurt in recent years.

"The concept needs to be redone from scratch — up to now these shows were just for putting cars next to young girls," said Ferdinand Dudenhofer of Germany’s Centre for Automotive Research.

"Frozen"

Such marketing costs have also become harder to justify as carmakers invest billions in autonomous driving and electric motors, even as the outlook for sales darkens. Dudenhofer is expecting global sales to fall 1.4 percent next year, with declines of 4 percent in the US and China. But the more immediate worry for European manufacturers is Brexit and the possibility of new duties between Britain and the continent.

"Today we’re in a situation where everybody's frozen, we're all waiting to see what's going to happen," said Carlos Ghosn, head of the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance.

"I don’t think that there's any carmaker who’s not prepared for the worst. We don’t like it but we’re prepared," he added. BMW’s Kruger said Brexit’s effects were already being felt. "The market is shrinking, and we’re selling fewer cars," he said, adding that he was "too was bracing for a difficult situation.

Yet executives still hope a last-minute breakthrough will avoid a "hard Brexit", similar to the deal reached over a revised Nafta following US President Donald Trump’s threat to scrap the trade pact.

"Frankly, we’re very happy that we have an agreement. I can tell you that no agreement would have been much more devastating for the development of our operations in North America," Ghosn said.

'Stress tests'

The threats haven’t stopped carmakers from investing: BMW "will spend more money than ever, seven billion euros ($8.1 billion) on research and development this year," mainly on electric and digital technologies, Kruger said. Both BMW and its German rival Daimler have trimmed profit forecasts for this year, not least because of charges associated with the "dieslgate" emissions cheating scandal. Strict EU limits on CO2 emissions from 2020 have contributed to plunging diesel sales, as has the prospect that many cities could start banning their use to combat smog. That has accelerated the shift to electric, along with the prospect of supplying the huge Chinese market, where officials are strongly encouraging the use of zero-emissions vehicles.

Renault announced this week a low-cost SUV, the K-ZE, specifically for the Chinese market.

But in developed markets electric cars are still a loss-making proposition. "The amount of technology onboard is going to get bigger and bigger, and the costs higher and higher," said PSA Group chief Carlos Tavares.

He suggested that developing car-sharing systems could be a way of making them more accessible. For Maxime Lemerle, an auto specialist at the risk insurance group Euler Hermes, the wave of challenges has carmakers facing "stress tests" like those applied to banks after the 2008 financial crisis.

"The question is whether they will be able to adapt to the deep changes in the automotive world," he said. —AFP

Nissan and RBS join chorus of warnings over disorderly Brexit

LONDON: Japanese carmaker Nissan and Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) have become the latest companies to warn about damage to the economy if Britain fails to secure a trade deal before leaving the European Union. Less than six months before Britain is due to exit the bloc, Prime Minister Theresa May has yet to find a proposal for economies that pleases EU negotiators and both sides of her divided Conservative party.

The government has stepped up planning for a so-called no-deal Brexit when the world’s fifth-largest economy leaves the EU on March 29, 2019, a step that could spook financial markets and dislocate trade flows across Europe and beyond.

Nissan, which operates the country’s largest automotive factory, said leaving without a deal would have “serious implications” for Britain’s manufacturing industry. In the two years since the Brexit vote, Nissan has been restrained in public about the referendum. But its warning now shows the growing alarm among business executives.

“Today we are among those companies with major investments in the UK who are still waiting for clarity on what the future trading relationship between the UK and the EU will look like," Nissan said in a statement.

“We urge UK and EU negotiators to work collaboratively towards an orderly balanced Brexit that will continue to encourage mutually beneficial trade," the company said. RBS Chief Executive Ross McEwan said Britain's economy might fall into recession without a deal. McEwan said companies were scaling back investment due to the uncertainty and RBS was more cautious about lending to the retail and construction industries in particular as Brexit approached. —Reuters

Paris: A Lego made Bugatti Chiron model is presented during the press days of the Paris Motor Show on Tuesday. — AFP

PARIS: German automaker Daimler AG chairman of the Board of Management Dieter Zetsche (L) and chairman and CEO of Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi Carlos Ghosn give a press conference during the press days of the Paris Motor Show. — AFP
**US weekly jobless claims drop to near 49-year low**

Continuing claims decline 13,000 to 1.65 million

WASHINGTON: The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits fell to a near 49-year low last week, pointing to sustained labor market strength, which should continue to underpin economic growth.

The labor market, which is viewed as being near or at full employment, is steadily boosting wage growth, which could help to support consumer spending as the stimulus from the Trump administration’s $1.5 trillion tax cut package fades. Initial claims for state unemployment benefits dropped 8,000 to a seasonally adjusted 207,000 for the week ended Sept 29, the Labor Department said yesterday.

Data for the prior week was revised to show 10,000 more applications received than previously reported. Claims fell to 202,000 during the week ended Sept 15, which was the lowest level since November 1969.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast claims slipping to 213,000 in the latest week. The Labor Department said claims for South and North Carolina were affected by Hurricane Florence, which lashed the region in mid-September.

The four-week moving average of initial claims, considered a better measure of labor market trends as it iron out week-to-week volatility, rose 500 to 207,000 last week. US financial markets were little moved by the report.

The claims data has no bearing on September’s employment report, which is scheduled for release on Friday. According to a Reuters survey of economists, nonfarm payrolls likely increased by 185,000 in September after surging 201,000 in August. The unemployment rate is forecast falling one-tenth of a percentage point to 3.8 percent, an 18-year low first hit in May.

Payrolls growth could, however, surprise on the upside as data on Wednesday showed an increase in hiring by private companies in September and a jump in private sector jobs. The Federal Reserve raised interest rates last week for the third time this year and removed the reference to monetary policy remaining “accommodative.”

Thursday’s claims report also showed the number of people receiving benefits after an initial week of aid fell 13,000 to 1.65 million for the week ended Sept 22. The four-week moving average of the so-called continuing claims decreased 15,250 to 1.66 million, the lowest level since October 1973. — Reuters

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**With tiny Russian pensions, work for many never ends**

ULAN-UD, Russia: From Siberia to central Russia and elsewhere, elderly people are often forced to work past retirement age to supplement their miserly state pensions. A new bill raising the state pension age by five years to 65 for men and 60 for women, which could be signed into law soon, has provoked a rare outburst of raw anger, as many Russian men do not live long enough to celebrate their sixtieth birthday. Here are portraits of two Russian retirees who told AFP about their living and working arrangements.

**Dancing through retirement**

On Revolution Square in the eastern Siberian city of Ulan-Ude a Latin dance lesson is in full swing. Anastasia Aksayeva, a 61-year-old pensioner, is leading a dozen pupils as passers-by watch in amusement.

Twice a week the energetic retiree with a blonde bob teaches fellow pensioners dance routines. Her classes are very popular and one of her pupils has recently won a contest among seniors, she said. Aksayeva has a dream: one day she would like to throw a street party that would see a hundred people dance together in the centre of the city. Her only son does not think it will happen.

"We live in the 21st century. With a positive attitude and some time on our hands, we can do anything," said Aksayeva. Her other dream is to travel to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower and dance with French seniors.

"I am sure there are like-minded people in France," she said. "I’d like to meet them, hug them and dance with them. I’d like that very much."

**From Arctic port to odd jobs**

Around Igor Drovnikov’s wooden cot and weeds have invaded the gardens. The 70-year-old is one of a handful of permanent residents of the nearly deserted village of Boboli some 150 kilometers (93 miles) southwest of Moscow.

There is no running water nor mains gas here and the nearest paved road is 12 kilometers away. Drovnikov, a tall, fit man who bought his house in 2005. His wife died three years later. A former mechanic at the Arctic port of Severodvinsk, home to nuclear submarine shipyards, Drovnikov ekes out a threadbare living on a monthly pension of 14,000 rubles ($213). "That’s awfully little," said the blue-eyed, mustachioed pensioner who buys gas cylinders for cooking.

He said pensioners like himself have "enough for food" but cannot afford to travel or buy expensive things. He draws water from nearby wells and grows his own tomatoes, potatoes and garlic. "My neighbours also give me vegetables and fruit in exchange for odd jobs and a little money if I water their plants when they leave." Drovnikov does not complain. "I like to work the land. Where I lived before, this was not possible," he said. A year ago the pensioner suffered a stroke and the ambulance took four hours to arrive, with the nearest hospital some 30 kilometres away. — AFP

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**RBS warns no-deal Brexit could spark UK recession**

LONDON: A no-deal Brexit risks sending the British economy into recession in 2019, the head of the Royal Bank of Scotland warned yesterday. The lender’s consensus economic forecast for “next year says about 1.0-1.5 growth in the economy if we get an okay Brexit scenario,” chief executive Ross McEwan told the BBC. “But if we get a very hard Brexit scenario... it actually will be less than that.

And the economy may well go down to zero or negative growth next year if that Brexit relationship is very very bad.”

This would hurt the bank’s profitability and share price, he cautioned.

The technical definition of a recession is two successive quarters of negative economic growth.

“If we don’t get the (economic) growth, that reflects into... the growth of our business which may be zero or negative,” the boss added. The Edinburgh-based bank remains 62.4-percent owned by the government after it received a vast bailout during the global financial crisis.

In the face of Brexit uncertainty, RBS lending was becoming more cautious-while companies were also delaying investment decisions, according to McEwan.

“We are seeing the very large corporates just pausing in their investment into the UK because they are sitting saying: Do we wait for another six months to see what the outcome is? And that is what they are doing,” he said. “And they can say: In six months’ time, we can come back and invest, or if things are really bad we will stay away from investing here.

““That is the reality of what is happening today,” he warned. McEwan added that small businesses had “no impact on them whatsoever” and were continuing as normal because they are “very local businesses”. He added: “It’s the larger businesses that are just paused. Because-do I invest here, do I invest in Europe or do I invest somewhere else. That’s the decision making process they are going through.”

McEwan had already revealed last month that RBS was planning for the worst amid increasing worries that Britain will exit the European Union in March without a deal in place with Brussels.

The bank is meanwhile setting up a new European subsidiary in Amsterdam to serve customers on the continent, and awaiting approval of its licenses. — AFP
**Sports**

**Fighters flock to Russia’s Dagestan where wrestling is a way of life**

It is immensely popular with local children

**Kayakent, Russia**: Eyes focused on each other, boys in colorful singlets practice wrestling takedowns as others watch from the side of the modest studio, leaning against walls covered with peeling paint and splintering wood paneling. The sports hall in Kayakent, a small town in Russia’s Dagestan region in the Caucasus, has seen better days. But it is immensely popular with local children, who come from humble origins and one day hope to repeat the triumphs of their older peers in bringing home world championship medals.

And in Dagestan, successful wrestlers can gain almost iconic status. Such was the excitement about homegrown celebrity Khabib Nurmagomedov when he became the first Muslim or Russian national to win a UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) title in April that he was mobbed by about 2,000 people at the airport and needed a police escort for him and his father. The 30-year-old mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter is set to apply his wrestling techniques on Saturday when he defends his title against MMA star Irishman Conor McGregor in Las Vegas in the headline UFC fight, arguably the most anticipated in the sport’s history. Nurmagomedov, known as The Eagle, grew up wrestling and was initially mostly coached by his father, before moving to Dagestan’s main city, Makhachkala, to train with a coach there.

**Humble beginnings**

With Dagestan becoming a steady supplier of world and Olympic champions, the mountainous region’s training grounds have even started attracting foreign athletes. “After we opened this school in 1996, we saw the first results already in four-five years,” said Magomed Arragereyev, who coaches at the Kayakent sport school. “After six years... our boys started winning in Europe, then world championships. The facility initially didn’t even have mats.”

Arragereyev had to work on concrete floor until a fire wrecked a larger town’s sports school, which closed down and gave him some equipment. Now, he says, the school is over capacity, with 60 young boys sometimes coming to practice, in the town of just 11,000 people. “We can no longer accommodate everyone since we have no space,” he told AFP in an interview at his office, lined with dozens of trophies and photos of local wrestlers who have reached success internationally. In Dagestan, wrestling is the “number one sport”, Arragereyev said, not football or hockey popular in the rest of Russia.

**Best in the world**

Different ethnic groups in the diverse region historically practiced traditional wrestling, making the area a fertile ground for the modern sport. “This tradition is over 100 years old. Our great-grandparents wrestled, and we have national wrestling high in the mountains,” said Gaidar Gaidarov, who coaches at a famous wrestling school in Makhachkala. The success of wrestlers trained in Dagestan has now made the region a top draw for the sport. Gaïdarov no longer just trains local young men but also ambitious athletes from all over the world who are not afraid to move to Dagestan, a region that borders war-scarred Chechnya and has itself been a hotbed of Islamic extremism. One wrestler now training with Gaïdarov and running trails in the surrounding hills is Cuban-born Italian national Frank Chamuoz, who last year became a world champion in his category.

Training in the Gamid Gamidov school in Makhachkala where Gaïdarov works, French national Safedine Alekma said he came to Dagestan after his progress stalled at home. “Here you find the best wrestlers in the world,” he said, during practice in the large gym. “Even just in this room this evening you can find 20 or 30 world and European champions, junior or senior.” —AFP

**Hamilton still split’ about Russia win**

**Suzuka**: Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton said yesterday he still had mixed feelings after being gift-wrapped a controversial victory by Mercedes in Russia last weekend. The runaway championship leader stretched his advantage to Ferrari’s Sebastian Vettel, the team would have not done it. It will really blister, if he didn’t have that much pressure from Sebastian, the team would have not done it. It will really be case by case.

Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff said he was “happy to be the baddie” in order to strengthen Hamilton’s grip on the world championship. And former world champion Fernando Alonso backed the Austrian’s decision yesterday, “All the bad stuff people are saying about Mercedes is just jealous,” said the Spaniard. “For them, what people say goes in one ear and out the other. They’re not doing anything wrong.”

Hamilton paid tribute to Bottas, pointing to the outpouring of love shown to his team mate on a visit to the Mercedes factory in Brackley, England, earlier this week; “I was at the factory on Monday and I am sure 50 percent of the guys have the same vibe, but generally the support was quite amazing and also the respect for Valtteri,” he said. “We all did a toast to Valtteri — 900 people or whatever it was standing there, it was pretty awesome!” —AFP

**All Blacks start Goodhue against S Africa**

**Johannesburg**: All Blacks coach Steve Hansen handed rising star Jack Goodhue a start in the centers for Saturday’s Rugby Championship Test against South Africa, demoting veteran Ryan Crotty to the bench. Goodhue, 23, will partner Sonny Bill Williams as New Zealand look to avenge last month’s shock 36-34 loss to the Springboks in Wellington.

Hansen, whose side has already won the southern hemisphere tournament, said he wanted to see how the Goodhue-Williams combination worked, no doubt with one eye on next year’s Rugby World Cup defense in Japan. “We know a lot about Ryan and Jack but we don’t know a lot about Sonny and Jack,” he said. “All year we’ve been trying to work out what’s our best combination in that area for the future and this is an opportunity to do that.” The inclusion of Goodhue, Crotty’s team-mate at the Crusaders, is one of four changes to the starting XV that beat Argentina 35-17 to seal the title last week. Captain Kieran Read, halfback Aaron Smith and prop Owen Franks all return after being rested against the Pumas. Hansen said New Zealand needed to maintain their intensity in front of a sold-out crowd of 52,000 in Pretoria, even though they had already won the tournament. With South Africa riding high after back-to-back wins over the All Blacks and Australia, Hansen admitted the New Zealanders had a point to prove.

“Nothing changes for us. It’s a Test match that everyone in New Zealand expects us to win,” he said. “South Africa are playing with a lot of confidence and after their two recent wins, their confidence levels will be even higher. So we need to respond with real purpose, composure, belief and intensity.” New Zealand (15-1) Ben Smith: Waisake Naholo, Jack Goodhue, Sonny Bill Williams, Rieko Ioane; Beauden Barrett, Aaron Smith; Kieran Read (capt), Sam Cane, Shannon Frizell; Scott Barrett, Sam Whitelock; Owen Franks, Codie Taylor, Karl Tu’ukufu. Replacements: Nathan Harris, Tim Perry, Ofa Tuungafasi, Patrick Tuipulotu, Ardie Savea, TJ Perenara, Riechie Mo’unga, Ryan Crotty. —AFP
The army of tiny Tigers driving China’s young golfing boom

Budding interest in a game that was once banned

GUANGZHOU: Lai Runci practices every day and looks very much the golfer as she pings the ball effortlessly off the tee. She is aged six. Lai Yiyian has won so many tournaments that she has lost count. She is nine. The two girls — who are not related — represent China’s growing army of child golfers and the country’s budding interest in a game that was banned under Mao Zedong because it was “for millionaires”.

The sport was allowed to breathe again in the 1980s, but under current President Xi Jinping scrutiny has increased with authorities closing scores of golf courses in recent years after they became synonymous with corrupt officials and extravagant lifestyles. None of that appeared to matter when a gaggle of snazzily dressed boys and girls aged between six and 10 competed at Guangzhou’s Dragon Lake Golf Club in southern Guangdong, a province that considers itself the home of golf in China.

Star in the making?

As their parents and grandparents sipped tea or lattes in the Spanish-themed clubhouse and discussed how to get into China’s top universities, the children out on the 18-hole course that played techniques that professionals would not be ashamed of. Yiyian, who also uses the name Yvonne, soared to victory in her category, negotiating nine holes in 42 shots to win by a hand-some eight strokes.

Hidden beneath a red cap and sun glasses, Yiyan practises up to five times a week, “When I grow up I’d like to become a professional golfer,” said Yiyan, who with her confidence, ability and golf attire already has the air of a star. Looking on approvingly is her grandmother Zong Jinyong, who also looks the part with her cap and golf top displaying the Chinese flag prominently. “When I was young I didn’t know what golf was, I only knew what it was in 2002,” says Zong, underlining how previous generations had no idea what golfing meant.

China Golf Association had just 400 registered junior golfers in 2013, but that exploded to 35,000 by the end of last year and the organisation expects 100,000 within five years.

Stiff competition

There are a growing number of Chinese on the professional men’s and women’s tours, and last year Feng Shanshan became the first player from her country to become a world number one; Charles Wu, general manager of Dragon Lake Golf Club, which opened in 2004 to adult and junior players, treads carefully in attempting to explain golf’s ambiguous status in China, emphasizing that it is not about hobnobbing among the elite.

“We do youth golf here because our club has always regarded golf as a sport,” he stresses, saying that the cost of playing is declining, though it remains the domain of the wealthy in China. Wu appreciates that pushing a child as young as six to play golf every day is unpalatable to many — even if little Runci, who like many her age is extremely shy, intimates that she enjoys it.

“Just one reason — China has too many people,” he says, asked why some parents push their children to play so often, so early. “You have a very (great) challenge in the same age — one million, two million, 10 million (rivals). How can you play (to be) number one?”

‘Be like Tiger’

Wu does question whether someone as young as Runci should be out on the golf course practising every day; “Normally a six-year-old will go to bed about 8.30-9pm, but they don’t, they go out to play golf until 11pm,” he says. “For a Westerner that is a Chinese ‘miracle’ because you can’t let your child keep playing golf until 11pm and not sleep. “Chinese kids can do this because they are both willing and made to be willing to accept this kind of education.”

The last word should rightly go to Runci — it would, if she was not so quiet. Asked if she has any other hobbies aside from golf, she shakes her head. She is upset that — with her father looking on — she came only second of four in her group. Asked what she wants to be when she grows up, a woman’s voice pipes up in the background. “Be a golf star like Tiger Woods.” — AFP

MotoGP riders praise first female superbike champ

BURIRAM: The world’s top-ranked MotoGP riders hailed yesterday the barrier-breaking victory of Ana Carrasco, a week after the Spaniard earned glory by becoming the first woman to enter the record books on September 30 up from 25th to finish 13th at the season decider, the French circuit of Magny-Cours.

Riding a Kawasaki, Carrasco fought her way up from 25th to finish 13th at the season decider, calling her achievement “unbelievable”. MotoGP’s three leading riders were full of praise when quizzed about her win ahead of the inaugural Thailand Grand Prix. “I was very happy, it was so important for the motorcycle world,” said MotoGP frontrunner and fellow Spanish rider Marc Marquez. “It’s not a man’s world, women can be very fast on the bike. It’s not only about the physical condition, also it’s about skill and mentality,” added Marquez.

His sentiments were shared by Italians Andrea Dovizioso and Valentino Rossi, who both trailed Marquez on points going into Sunday’s race. Dovizioso called it an “important result” while Rossi said it was a “great achievement” that could inspire other women. “I hope that for Ana it is good for the future of her career,” Rossi said. “Maybe this result can push some other girl to race.” When pressed if she could compete at the MotoGP level, Rossi said it was a big leap but that the difference had nothing to do with gender. “For me from the 300 (division) to the MotoGP is still a long way,” she said. The riders also fielded questions about the hot weather and the new track, which was built only a few years ago in Buriram, a sleepy Thai town that is pouring investment into sports. — AFP

‘Finally clicked’: Osaka says better focus behind stellar run

BEIJING: Her chopstick skills might not be the best but Naomi Osaka says an improvement in her focus is behind a run of success that culminated in winning the US Open. The 20-year-old, who stunned Serena Williams to win her maiden Grand Slam last month, was devastating against 10th seed Julia Georges of Germany on Thursday, winning 6-1, 6-2 in 65 minutes to speed into the China Open quarter-finals.

Osaka, the eighth seed in Beijing, similarly thrashed unseeded American Danielle Collins 6-1, 6-0 in the previous round and is showcasing the ruthlessness that saw her beat Williams in a controversial New York final. The Japanese will face home hope Zhang Shuai in the last eight in the Chinese capital after Zhang pulled off a shock in defeating three-time Grand Slam champion Angelique Kerber. China Open organisers have had the players competing in a “chopstick challenge” and Zhang and the German Kerber are currently winning. Told that she was well behind both with her score, Osaka joked: “We’re not talking about that. ‘Come on, with Shuai, let’s face it... But the thing is, I hold chopsticks in a weird way anyways.” Turning more serious, the world number six, said: “On the court I have to think ‘focus’ because it’s not something that’s natural to me. — AFP
RAJKOT: Teenager Prithvi Shaw became the youngest Indian to score a century on Test debut as the hosts took opening day honors in the first match against the West Indies yesterday. Shaw, 18, also became India’s second-youngest century maker after Sachin Tendulkar as he blasted his way to a century in 99 deliveries in Rajkot.

India were 364 for four at stumps after electing to bat first in Rajkot. Skipper Virat Kohli, on 72, and Murali Vijay and Shikhar Dhawan opened for India at the start of the recent five-test series in England but both were overlooked after the 4-1 defeat, handing a chance to Shaw, who was a Duleep Trophy debut, a record previously held by Tendulkar. The similarities do not end there. Shaw scored a hundred in his first-class debut in a Ranji Trophy semi-final last year and then became the youngest player to score a century on his Duleep Trophy debut, a record previously held by Tendulkar.

Shaw reached the landmark with two runs off Shannon Gabriel in his first over off Gabriel.

Indonesia’s second-youngest century maker after Sachin Tendulkar

Shaw’s chance

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He could not have been more impressive in his maiden test knock, scoring his first runs with a punch off the back foot through covers off his second delivery, reminding everyone why he had been tipped for a bright future in national colors. Shaw, who hit 19 fours, was often a tad flashy for an opening batsman with his shot selection but showed stunning fluency in scoring on both sides of the wicket.

“First I was a bit nervous but when I got in I was quite comfortable and I was just trying to play my natural game, what I do in first-class cricket and in India A, and I just kept on going,” Shaw told broadcaster Star Sports. “I was not thinking about it as my first game, I was just thinking that it’s another game and it just happened.” —Reuters

IOC warns boxing could be thrown out of Olympics

LOS ANGELES: Boxing risks being thrown out of the Olympics unless the sport’s ruling body addresses “grave” concerns regarding its governance, the International Olympic Committee executive board said on Wednesday. A strongly worded IOC statement warned that the International Boxing Association (AIBA) must tackle governance issues at its upcoming congress or it could face sanctions.

“The Executive Board of the IOC today expressed its ongoing extreme concern with the grave situation within the International Boxing Association (AIBA) and its current governance,” the board said in a statement. “These include the circumstances of the establishment of the election list and the misleading communication within the AIBA regarding the IOC’s position.”

In attempting to force change at the AIBA this year, the IOC had already suspended financial contributions from the IOC to the AIBA. Even though the IOC believes sweeping change is needed at the AIBA, the governing body voiced support for boxers themselves. “At the same time we would like to reassure the athletes that the IOC will — as it has always done in such situations and is currently doing at the Youth Olympic Games Buenos Aires 2018 — do its utmost to ensure that the athletes do not have to suffer under these circumstances and that we will protect their Olympic dream.” —AFP
Ronaldo denies allegations, calls rape ‘abominable’

‘I firmly deny the accusations being issued against me’

LAS VEGAS: Cristiano Ronaldo on Wednesday denied accusations by a former American model that he raped her in a Las Vegas hotel in 2009 and said his conscience is clear. Ronaldo’s denial came as lawyers for his accuser said they had obtained damning correspondence between the footballer and his legal team. The case has threatened the reputation of the Portuguese superstar, arguably the world’s best footballer, with Las Vegas police this week saying they would reopen their file on the matter.

“I firmly deny the accusations being issued against me,” he tweeted in Portuguese and English. “Rape is an abominable crime that goes against everything that I am and believe in,” said the 33-year-old Juventus forward. “My clear conscience (sic) will thereby allow me to await with tranquility the results of any and all investigations,” he added on his Twitter feed.

In July 2017, France’s highest court, the Court of Cassation, annulling the earlier decision to send Benzema to trial and ordered the Paris court to review the original ruling. The affair began in June 2018, when Valbuena received a call from a blackmail who threatened to release an intimate video. Valbuena contacted the police, who assigned an undercover officer to the case. Investigators accused Benzema of acting as an intermediary between the presumed blackmailers and Lyon midfielder Valbuena.

Benzema was dropped from the French side before Euro 2020 and has not been recalled since. Benzema and three of the other suspects had asked for the case against them to be dropped. They say police used “disincentive” methods by posing as a friend of Valbuena in a telephone conversation with one of the accused, Younes Houass, and urging the payment of a ransom. Their appeal to the Court of Appeal in Versailles in December 2016 failed, but the Court of Cassation then annulled that decision and instructed the Paris Court of Appeal to hear the case again.

The Court of Cassation questioned the legal validity of the recordings of phone conversations which were central to the case against Benzema and the other suspects. “No financial quid-pro-quo and no threat, which are the elements constituting the offence of blackmail, were mentioned before the police got involved,” said Samim Bolaky, Houass’s lawyer, after Thursday’s hearing. Valbuena’s lawyer, Paul-Albert Iweins, said “the police officers behaved perfectly normally.” In such blackmail cases, the lawyer said, “most often, it is a police officer who substitutes as negotiator.”

PARIS: The Paris Appeal Court said yesterday that it will rule next month on the validity of a blackmail case against Real Madrid star Karim Benzema and five other men. At a long-awaited hearing on Thursday, prosecutors asked the court to confirm the validity of a police investigation into Benzema for his role in an alleged attempt to blackmail Mathieu Valbuena over a sex tape.

In July 2017, France’s highest court, the Court of Cassation, annulling the earlier decision to send Benzema to trial and ordered the Paris court to review the original ruling. The affair began in June 2018, when Valbuena received a call from a blackmailer who threatened to release an intimate video. Valbuena contacted the police, who assigned an undercover officer to the case. Investigators accused Benzema of acting as an intermediary between the presumed blackmailers and Lyon midfielder Valbuena.

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Southgate rewarded for World Cup run with new contract

LONDON: Gareth Southgate has been rewarded for guiding England to this year’s World Cup semi-finals with a new contract, the Football Association (FA) announced yesterday. The 48-year-old’s new deal will see him through to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and see his pay rise to a reported £3 million ($3.8 million) per year.

“I am delighted to have the opportunity to lead the national team through the next two major tournaments,” said Southgate, whose previous deal was due to expire after the Euro 2020 finals. “The job remains an incredible privilege and a true honour. Experiencing at first hand how the nation united behind the team this summer was something special and it will be great to see how far this young squad can go in the years to come.”

Southgate, who ultimately saw England beat 2-1 by Croatia in their first World Cup semi-final since 1990, said he was fortunate to have a great back-up team — his assistant Steve Holland was also awarded a new contract, and the players performing on the pitch. “I must acknowledge the hard work and commitment of my staff and the players over the last two years,” said Southgate. “I have learned a great deal from them and their passion and professionalism in representing England has been an inspiration to my own work.”

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Barcelona outgun Spurs as Insigne scores winner

PARIS: Lionel Messi struck twice as Barcelona inflicted more Champions League pain on Tottenham with a 4-2 win at Wembley on Wednesday, while Neymar hit a brilliant hat-trick in Paris Saint-Germain's 6-1 rout of Red Star Belgrade. Philippe Coutinho scored after just two minutes for Barcelona, who arrived in London winless in three La Liga matches, with Ivan Rakitic drilling in a magnificent second.

Messi, who had earlier hit the post, then got on the scoresheet in between goals from Harry Kane and Eric Lamela, before the Argentina superstar grabbed his second late on to seal victory. "After a few bad results it was important to do well today. Our response was very good," said Barca coach Ernesto Valverde. Barca head Group B on six points alongside Inter Milan, but Mauricio Pochettino's side face a vital double-header against PSV Eindhoven after failing to collect a point from their opening two matches.

The Tottenham boss admitted Spurs had few answers for Messi as his team was left with an uphill struggle to reach the knockout stages. "He's a fantastic player," said Pochettino. "His average hill struggle to reach the knockout stages. "He's a fantastic player," said Pochettino. "His average performance is this type of game. He's always above everything." Inter, the last Italian club to reach the knockout stages, have not lost since 2016 and the club's Slovakian captain, Marek Hamsik, was held up at gunpoint in the centre of the city four years ago.

PSG rebounded from their 3-2 defeat by Liverpool with an attacking masterclass against 1991 European Cup winners Red Star at the Parc des Princes. Neymar curled in a sublime free-kick to open the scoring on 20 minutes, quickly doubling his tally before Edinson Cavani, Angélique Matan and Kylian Mbappe also found the target. Former Germany international Marco Reina popped up with a consolation for Red Star, with Neymar completing his hat-trick from another stunning free-kick. "I really liked the effort made by the whole team, but Neymar was sensational," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel. "He is one of the best players in Europe and that is very, very important for us."

Napoli striker Milik robbed at gunpoint after Liverpool win

NAPLES: Napoli's Polish striker Arkadiusz Milik was robbed at gunpoint on his way home after his team's Champions League win over Liverpool, Italian police said yesterday. The 24-year-old was in his car heading towards his home at Varcaturo on the Dominican Coast 20km west of Naples at around 2am when his car was stopped by a high-powered motorcycle blocking the road. The two assailants — whose faces were entirely covered by helmets — approached the footballer's car and pointed a gun at him, ordering him to hand over his Rolex. A total of more than 7,000 euros were taken.

The robbers then sped into the countryside towards Licola, police said according to the AGI news agency. As soon as he recovered from the shock, Milik went to the nearest police station to report the crime. Attacks on professional players in the southern Italian city are frequent. Italian international Lorenzo Insigne was robbed of jewelry, cash and a luxury watch in 2016 and the club's Slovakian captain, Marek Hamsik, was held up at gunpoint in the centre of the city four years ago.

Marco Reus fired in a third from a Brum Larsen cross, leaving Dortmund and Atletico on six points apiece ahead of their upcoming home- and-away meetings. In Group D, American international midfielder Weston McKennie hit an 88th-minute winner as struggling Schalke edged Lokomotiv Moscow 1-0. Porto are joint-top with Schalke following a 1-0 win over Galatasaray courtesy of Moussa Marega's second-half goal in Portugal. —AFP

No one to blame but ourselves, says Klopp

NAPLES: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said his side could only blame themselves after the last year's Champions League runners-up were overrun by Napoli before Lorenzo Insigne's late winner gave the Italians a 4-0 win to go top of Group C on Wednesday. "We were not good enough and if you are not good enough, you'll lose and that happened to us tonight. That's it," said Klopp. "Napoli made a really good game, we didn't, and that's why they deserve the three points." Lorenzo Insigne scored after 90 minutes in a game Napoli dominated from the start with substitute Dries Mertens also rattling the crossbar. The hosts had the better chances throughout as Insigne, Jose Callejon, Fabian Ruiz and Arkadiusz Milik all threatened under-pressure Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson. Napoli owner Aurelio De Laurentiis, who hired three-time Champions League winning coach Carlo Ancelotti this season in place of Maurizio Sarri, hailed the success at the Stadio San Paolo.

"Big win against a great team! Ancelotti worthy of his fame," wrote De Laurentiis on Twitter. Last season Napoli's style of football under Sarri impressed against Manchester City but the team lost 4-2 at home before exiting the competition in the group stage. Insigne's winner ensures they are top of Group C with four points, one more than Liverpool and Paris Saint-Germain.

"I think we timed it well," said former Chelsea and Real Madrid coach Ancelotti. "If Mertens had scored a few minutes earlier, it would've been more time suffering. "We interpreted the game well. We had an extra central defender and were able to build the game from the back. There was a perfect balance." Napoli needed a win on Wednesday after their opening match ended 0-0 at Red Star Belgrade. Liverpool, meanwhile, played as if they would settle for a point after they beat Paris Saint-Germain 3-2. The Reds' strike force of Roberto Firmino, Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane were a shadow of the trio who terrorised Europe last season, with Napoli goalkeeper David Ospina not called upon for a single save. Liverpool's best effort came when Egyptian Salah shot wide after the break. —AFP

LONDON: Barcelona's Argentinian striker Lionel Messi is tackled by Tottenham Hotspur's English midfielder Harry Winks (R) during the Champions League group B football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Barcelona at Wembley Stadium. —AFP

MATCHES ON TV

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Brighton & Hove Albion v West Ham United
beIN SPORTS HD 2
22:00
SPANISH LEAGUE PRIMERA
Athletic de Bilbao v Real Sociedad
beIN SPORTS HD 3
22:30
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE
Torino v Frosinone Calcio
beIN SPORTS HD 4
21:30
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA
Werder Bremen v Wolfsburg
beIN SPORTS HD 5
21:30
FRENCH LEAGUE
Toulouse v OGC Nice
beIN SPORTS HD 6
22:45
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Napoli beat last year's Champions League finalists 1-0 with a 90th-minute Insigne goal to go top of Group C. —AFP

Francisco Hidalgo for the match between Barcelona and Tottenham on Wednesday. —AFP

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‘I said it last season and I’ll say it again’

MADRID: Diego Simeone hailed Antoine Griezmann as the best player in the world after the Frenchman’s double fired Atletico Madrid to victory over Club Brugge on Wednesday. Griezmann scored twice and set up a third for Koke as Atletico won 3-1 in the stadium they hope to return to for the Champions League final next year.

“Arnaud Groeneveld’s stunning long-range effort had pulled Brugge level shortly before half-time but Atleti, and Griezmann, were too good,” said Simeone afterwards. “It was the Europa League, World Cup, Super Cup and finished second in a league with Barcelona and Real Madrid.”

Lionel Messi, who was simultaneously tearing Tottenham apart at Wembley, may have something to say about that but there is no doubting Griezmann’s importance to Atletico. He has now been involved in 17 of their last 19 La Liga wins and is the best player in the world,” Simeone said afterwards. “It was the Europa League, World Cup, Super Cup and finished second in a league with Barcelona and Real Madrid.”

Keane opens fire on Man United ‘cry babies’

MANCHESTER: Former Manchester United captain Roy Keane has called some of the club’s current players “cry babies”, saying they should put aside any differences with under-fire manager Jose Mourinho and improve their own performances.

“Mourinho’s man-management has come under scrutiny amid a reported rift with record signing Paul Pogba, while the club have been dismal on the pitch this season, collecting 10 points from seven league matches to sit 10th in the Premier League. Keane, who won seven league titles during his spell at United, said the players had to start taking responsibility for the club’s worst start to a season since 1980-90.

“There’s a lot of cry babies out there. When you walk out on that pitch you’re playing for your pride, you are playing for your family, you’re playing for your city,” Keane was quoted in the Irish Independent as telling Notts TV. “I’m not talking about Pogba. I’m talking about players in general. Players who get upset with a manager or coaching staff and think ‘I’m not going to train properly because somebody upset me’.

Ireland assistant manager Keane, who famously fell out with former United boss Alex Ferguson before leaving the club in 2005, said clashes with the club’s authority figures should not influence what a player does on the pitch. “I don’t care what fallout you’ve had with your manager, I don’t care if you’ve been at each other’s throats. That is part of the industry, People do fall out,” Keane added.

VAR once again causing debate in Serie A

MILAN: The use of video replay technology to help referees has again become a contentious issue in Serie A following a series of incidents in the opening few weeks of the season. Referees and the pitchside monitors are again likely to be in the spotlight as Serie A resumes at the weekend with leaders Juventus visiting Udinese on Saturday and second-placed Napoli hosting Sassuolo on Sunday.

Juventus, already six points clear, have a 100 percent record this season with seven wins in Serie A and two in the Champions League. The debate is centering not so much on whether the VAR (video assistant referee) system should be allowed, but how often. The use of VAR was authorized in March by soccer’s law-making body IFAB after a series of trials around the world, including in Serie A last season.

It was adopted and used by FIFA at the World Cup and was generally hailed as a success, especially in objective decisions such as offside. However, the World Cup largely managed to avoid some of the issues which plagued Serie A last season, such as long delays in referees making decisions which were often reversed two or three minutes after a goal had been awarded.

Italian media say Serie A referees have been told to make less use of the system this season and follow the IFAB protocol that it should only be used to correct “clear and obvious mistakes”. Yet they now find themselves under fire from fans for failing to review incidents frequently enough. “I have always considered it a very positive innovation for football,” said Torino president Urbano Cairo. “But I have started thinking that VAR is not the right tool if it’s only used partially.”

“The VAR was used much more last season,” added Cairo, who also suggested that coaches should have been allowed to challenge a certain number of decisions as in tennis. “We should use it more often, not just for serious mistakes.”

Torino were involved in one of the biggest VAR disputes of the season when Alejandro Berenguer had a goal disallowed for offside at Udinese last month. Their complaints were two-fold – the referee Paolo Valeri blew for the infringement before the ball had entered the net, preventing the incident from being reviewed.” —Reuters

Griezmann is best in the world: Simeone

Another smooth combination created the goal as Griezmann played in Costa, who could have shot but instead turned back and returned to Griezmann. He made no mistake. It was Costa’s last contribution. Denswil could have snatched Brugge a point but headed over from six yards and instead, Griezmann added a final flourish. He stormed down the left flank and teed up Koke to slot home from close range. —AFP
LONDON: Barcelona's Argentinian striker Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring their third goal during the Champions League group B football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Barcelona at Wembley Stadium. — AFP

Messi rocks sloppy Spurs

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