Almost expired market: A place to bag a great deal

Iraq revolution dramatized, written, read, and painted

Bahrain beat Iraq 7-5 on penalties after 2-2 draw

Arson suspected as inferno guts electronics warehouse

SEE PAGE 9
Disability is any deficiency in the physical, mental or sensory abilities of the individual, and it takes many forms, such as mental, hearing or visual or physical impairment. Last week the Kuwait Society for Human Rights carried out a humanitarian activity on the occasion of the International Day of Disabled Persons, which falls on Dec 3 every year. The event included sitting in a wheelchair and touring the venue to experience firsthand the suffering of people with disabilities and live their reality and the difficulties they face.

The importance of this activity is that it sends clear and targeted messages about the role of the community and its members towards people with disabilities that force them to use wheelchairs, and that they are no less or different.

I agree with these campaigns because I believe that in Kuwait people who use wheelchairs suffer a lot, whether due to disabilities or old age, especially when moving from one place to another, as not all places are equipped with wheelchair ramps. Worse, some healthy people use the parking spaces for disabled people, or ATM machines in some local banks that are allocated for people on wheelchairs.

Another form of suffering for people with disabilities is a lack of signs and walkways for pedestrians. I don’t know of any street people with wheelchairs can use safely, except a few places near the beaches. I am often surprised to find emergency exits do not have a ramp for people on wheelchairs, as most of these exits only have stairs. I wonder how those people can get out in case of fire or necessity.

In April, the Kuwait Society for Disabled Persons organized a seminar on wheelchairs to highlight the problems experienced by a large number of people with motor disabilities - the lack of suitable wheelchairs for them. The participants pleaded for a new wheelchair every year. So, not only the problems of people with disabilities here is the difficulty in mobility, but even the possibility of obtaining a new wheelchair every year is difficult, and I hope that this problem is resolved once and for all.

The chairman of the Kuwait Society for Human Rights said persons with disabilities face obstacles that may seem very easy and simple to others, but constitute a barrier that may lead to isolation and a desire to not go to public places to avoid these difficulties, which is psychological suffering for them. I really believe that we need an activity like this every month throughout the year to remind healthy people that people with disabilities are no less or different and we need to support them, because anyone can become disabled at any time for any reason.
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Local

Desert Camping: Kuwait’s favorite winter pastime

PHOTO FEATURE
Kuwait’s desert camping season is off to a great start. Desert camping offers a fun, relaxing way for families to gather, enjoy the great outdoors during the best weather of the year. Around 1,000 licenses have been issued by the municipality this season, with each applicant receiving an area of 1,000 square meters.

But there are also many dangers and campers should be aware of their environment, make sure not to leave fires unattended or sleep in sealed tents with heaters on. Campers are also responsible for protecting the environment and cleaning up after themselves. People should avoid building any structures with cement at their campsites and must not litter or damage the soil. According to environment law no. 42/2016, environmental violations can result in heavy fines – up to KD 5,000.

— Photos by Yasser Al Zayyat
Almost Expired Market:
A place to bag a great deal

By Ben Garcia

The rising cost of living has hit everyone, especially lower- and middle-income families. So markets like Souq Turki (Turkish Market) in Shuwaikh have sprung up to fill the gap in family budgets. This market is a legitimate market for foodstuff close to their expiry date. It is located in Shuwaikh Industrial Area behind London Shopping Center off Canada Dry Street. Frozen items include minced chicken/beef, whole chicken and parts, mutton and even fish. Since they are nearly expired, they are sold at half price or even cheaper.

Products being sold at the Turkish Market usually come from supermarkets and grocery stores across Kuwait. "In supermarkets and hypermarkets, items that are nearly expired must be discarded before municipal inspectors see them. If they are displayed on shelves, grocery stores are told to remove them or they will be penalized," said a salesman at the Turkish Market who asked that his name be withheld.

There are approximately 20 stores in the area buying and selling nearly expired items. The relatively compact area is frequented mostly by low- and medium-income families and people searching for a better deal. But according to the salesman, the market is now being visited by customers from all walks of life from as far as Fahaheel and Jahra.

In one store you can find chocolates, candies and nuts, while another store sells a variety of cooking oil, spices, pasta, sugar and salt at a very cheap price. There are plenty of choices - cold cuts, sausages, mortadella, salad dressing, frozen fruit, dry products like rice, shampoos, body soaps, detergents and much more.

"I come to buy items here once in a while, especially items I know I can use right away. These are all consumable items - they're not harmful to health because they are not expired yet and can be consumed immediately," said a shopper. But be warned - all items should be examined carefully and dates studied. If frozen items are not stored properly, they can pose a health hazard. Nonetheless, there is a large selection of food items in the market and it's up to customers to buy them or not.
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Kuwait Owl Team: Unique group in the Middle East

The Kuwait Owl Team, established in 2016, is one of few groups in the Middle East dedicated to the protection and proliferation of owls in the region. The team, consisting of 30 members with 30 owls of 15 different species, is dedicated to owl rearing. The members import owls from Europe and elsewhere and are devoted to the fight for protecting this bird. The Kuwait Owl Team is eager to spread awareness and educate people on owls and their habits. — KUNA

Kuwait funds projects worth $4bn in Africa

Senegalese Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulahad Mbacke yesterday lauded the vital role of Kuwait in supporting Africa via the Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), which has financed 324 projects worth around four billion dollars. Mbacke said at a press conference held on the occasion of the Africa Day that KFAED established strong ties with Africa under the wise directives of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah by financing projects and programs according to the 2063 plan. He expressed hope for more cooperation for the Kuwaiti private sector to invest in Africa.

The African Union has witnessed many challenges and changes since its inception, although Africa survived to prove to the world that the people on their own could achieve much, added Mbacke. He pointed out that Africa is rich in resources, such as agriculture and natural resources; however, it suffers from living conditions, where nearly 60 percent of youth are forced to migrate in search for better living conditions.

The African Development Bank and the Arab African International Bank as well as number of committees have helped with security and development advancement of the continent, said ambassador. In addition, during the 50th anniversary of the formation of the African Union in 2013, the union adopted the African Development Strategy Vision 2063, which includes seven aspirations for a better future for younger generations.

Kuwait is in constant steps to achieve 2035 agenda, under the directives of HH the Amir in 2017, he noted. The African Agenda 2063 aspires to expand cooperation between world and Africa, he added.

Egypt's Ambassador to Kuwait Tariq Al-Qouni said that the celebration of Africa Day this year has a special impact on every Egyptian especially that the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi officially take over the post of ceremonial head of the African Union. The African Union has witnessed a number of regional and international achievements that have contributed to the development of the continent, said ambassador.

Egypt has supported infrastructure projects in Africa, especially the Cairo-Cape Town Highway and seeks to rehabilitate the Nile to increase trade volume with the Nile river basin countries, he noted. In the medical field, Qouni said that numerous initiatives have been launched to promote public health in Africa. — KUNA

Winter is coming

Astronomer and historian Adel Al-Saadoun said the winter Marbaaniya season (40 days) will start tomorrow and end on Feb 14, adding it has the name Marbaaniya because it is 40 days long. Marbaaniya is one of the year's 12 seasons, starting with Suhail and ending with “Kalbain. Saadoun said Marbaaniya is divided into two periods - the first is of 20 days and continues till Dec 27, and the second from Dec 28 until Feb 14, adding the second period sees colder weather and temperatures may reach zero degrees Celsius. — A Saleh

Fintas clean-up

The Municipality’s public relations department said its Ahmadi branch carried out a field campaign to clean Fintas as part of the “Keep it Clean” drive. Director of Public Cleanliness and Road Occupancy in Ahmadi Faisal Al-Otaibi said 101 cu m of rubbish was removed, in addition to removing 10 abandoned cars. — Meshal Al-Enezi
Arson suspected as inferno guts electronics warehouse

Nine teams control fire in Rai industrial area

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The public relations and information department at Kuwait Fire Service Directorate said an investigation team conducted technical inspections immediately after extinguishing a massive fire in an electronics workshop in Rai. There is a suspicion of criminal intent in the incident, which means it was caused deliberately. After the completion of all investigation procedures, the technical report on the incident will be sent to concerned authorities in the ministry of interior and the public prosecution, supported by evidence indicating criminal suspicions.

The fire had spread to eight industrial lots of around 10,000 sq m. Industrial Shuwaikh, Ardiya, Hilali, Mishref, backup, Salmiya, Subhan, Mina Abdullah and Sulahibkhat centers participated in fighting the fire under the command of Director General Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad and his acting deputy Brig Mohammad Al-Mahameed. No one was injured but material damage is extensive.

Meanwhile, Subhan firemen succeed in rescuing an Asian worker who was trapped under a construction crane which had flipped over. The worker was taken by paramedics for treatment for leg injuries. Also, Sulahibkhat and Ardiya fire centers rushed to put out a fire in Andalus. The fire was in a ground floor room and smoke had spread throughout the house. Firemen evacuated the house and put out the fire in record time.

Kuwaiti commander awarded US Order of Saint Barbara

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti army announced yesterday Artillery Commander Brig Gen Khaled Al-Shaala was awarded the US military’s Order of Saint Barbara medal. A statement issued by the directorate of moral guidance and public relations of the Kuwaiti army said in a statement that Shaala is the first officer in the Middle East to receive this US order.

It added that the awarding of Brigadier Shaala came during the conclusion of the joint exercise Spartan II. The exercise, which took place between the artillery of the Kuwaiti ground force and its American counterpart from Dec 1-5, was aimed at enhancing and developing joint planning, unifying concepts and coordinating fire against hostile targets. This exercise was also designed to raise the level of training and combat readiness of the participants. — KUNA

Japan to send 270 sailors to guard ships

TOKYO: Japan is working on a plan to send about 270 seamen to the Middle East to guard ships supplying Japan under a law that allows military deployments for research and intelligence gathering, the Nikkei business daily said. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is considering a January visit to the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the paper added.

Japan maintains friendly ties with both the United States and Iran, and has said it would not join any US coalition to protect merchant vessels in the region. The Nikkei said the government would propose deploying one escort ship and a patrol aircraft from the Maritime Self-Defense Force on a one-year mission that could be renewed annually. It plans to finalise the plan by year-end, the Nikkei said.

Global commodity trading has been rocked this year by attacks on international merchant vessels that Japan’s Western allies have blamed on Iran, Tehran denies involvement. Tensions have heightened since Tehran and Washington since last year, when President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of Tehran’s 2015 nuclear deal with six nations and re-imposed sanctions on the country, crippling its economy.

Japan, which has stopped buying oil from Iran because of US sanctions, is eager to see stability in the Middle East, where it gets the bulk of its oil imports. Abe has tried unsuccessfully to ease tensions between the two countries. Iran has criticized US efforts to build an alliance to protect shipping in the Gulf, and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told Japanese public broadcaster NHK this week after meeting with Abe that Tehran was opposed to any foreign forces in the region.

In mid-November the US aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln sailed through the Strait of Hormuz in a show of force aimed at reassuring allies worried about the Iran threat. In October Defense Secretary Mark Esper announced that two fighter squadrons and additional missile defense batteries were being sent to Saudi Arabia, for a total of about 3,000 new troops.

Earlier Wednesday Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said the country was willing to return to the negotiating table over its nuclear program but the US must give clear program if the United States first drops sanctions, which the country was willing to return to the negotiating table over its nuclear program. Speaking at a defense conference in Manama, Bahrain on Nov 23, General Kenneth McKenzie, commander of US Central Command, said the US does not have all the resources it needs to cover the Middle East region. “There is a lot of water to cover. Simply put, we don’t have sufficient resources to be where we want to be in the right numbers all the time,” he told the annual Manama Dialogue on regional security. — AFP

Pentagon denies US mulling 14,000 more troops for Mideast

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon on Wednesday denied a report that the United States was weighing sending up to 14,000 more troops to the Middle East in the face of a perceived threat from Iran. The Wall Street Journal reported that the possible deployment would include “dozens” more ships and double the number of troops added to the US force in the region since the beginning of this year, citing unnamed US officials. The paper said President Donald Trump could make a decision on the troop boost as early as this month.

But the Pentagon disputed the accuracy of the report. “To be clear, the reporting is wrong. The US is not considering sending 14,000 additional troops to the Middle East,” spokeswoman Alyssa Farah tweeted. The region has seen a series of attacks on shipping vessels and a drone and missile attack on Saudi oil installations in September blamed on Iran. Washington has already ratcheted up its military presence in the Gulf and expanded economic sanctions on Tehran, elevating tensions across the region.

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Dems to draft impeachment articles

Pelosi says no one is above the law as Trump fumes

WASHINGTON: US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told congressional leaders yesterday to draft articles of impeachment against Donald Trump, saying the president’s abuse of power “leaves us no choice but to act.” By asking the House Judiciary Committee chairman to draw up the charges, Pelosi, the top congressional Democrat, signaled that a formal impeachment process against the 45th president is all but assured.

With a majority of members in the Democratic-controlled chamber already expressing intent to back the deeply divisive procedure,Trump is likely to become just the third president in US history to be impeached by the House of Representatives. “Sadly, but with confidence and humility, with allegiance to our founders and a heart full of love for America, today I am asking our chairman to proceed with articles of impeachment,” Pelosi said in a short, somber televised statement.

“Trump has engaged in abuse of power, undermined our national security and jeopardized the integrity of our elections,” she said, adding that “the president leaves us no choice but to act.” Pelosi did not announce the charges, but Trump could face impeachment for abuse of power, obstruction of Congress and obstruction of justice.

Trump ‘abused his power’

She said that “the president abused his power for his own political benefit” by withholding military aid to Ukraine and a White House meeting in exchange for Kiev’s commitment to investigate Trump’s political rival Joe Biden. “If we allow a president to be above the law, we do so merely at the peril of our republic,” added the speaker, Trump’s chief nemesis in Congress.

Trump’s spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham shot back, saying Democrats should be “ashamed” for pulling the trigger on impeachment. Trump goaded his Democrat opponents, saying that if they wanted to impeach them they should press ahead now so that he can have a “fair trial” in the Senate, where his Republican Party holds power. The defiant president continued his online rant, saying Democrats were seeking to impeach him “over NOTHING.” The good thing is that the Republicans have NEVER been more united,” Trump tweeted. “We will win!”

The impeachment process is expected to proceed rapidly, with articles likely presented for a full House vote later this month after weeks of hearings. “If you are going to impeach me, do it now, fast, so we can have a fair trial in the Senate, and so that our country can get back to business,” Trump tweeted, Trump’s re-election campaign weighed in too, saying the Democrats have long pushed impeachment as a way to negate the results of the 2016 election. “They should just get on with it,” Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale said in a statement.

Democrats want a timely process too, as they do not want an impeachment to drag into their voting process that decides the 2020 presidential nominee. Democrats have been building a case that Trump should be impeached for trying to leverage a White House meeting and military aid to pressure Ukraine for dirt on Biden, Trump’s potential rival in the 2020 election.

On Wednesday, three constitutional scholars told the House Judiciary Committee that the president’s actions seeking foreign interference in US elections were clear grounds for removal. A Democrat on the panel, Steve Cohen, said the articles of impeachment will “certainly” include abuse of power and the obstruction of Congress. “It’s possible we’ll get to obstruction of justice,” Cohen told CNN. — AFP

Iraq paramilitary demonstrators flood protest camp

BAGHDAD: Several thousand men backing a paramilitary force close to Iran flooded the Iraqi capital’s main protest camp yesterday, worrying anti-government demonstrators who have denounced Tehran’s role in their country. The men arrived in Tahrir (Liberation) Square in apparently coordinated marches from different parts of the capital, waving sticks, Iraqi flags and the logo of the Hashed al-Shaabi armed network.

Some carried portraits of Hashed fighters killed in fighting against jihadists, as well as pictures of the country’s top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. The Hashed had backed the Iraqi government but after a dramatic intervention by Sistani last week, it dropped its support. The embattled prime minister, Adel Abdel Mahdi, resigned at the weekend. Many units within the Shiite-majority force have been trained or equipped by Iran.

The demonstrators occupying the square for weeks have explicitly criticized Iran for backing an Iraqi political elite they see as corrupt and inept. They have insisted that all current figures in power are tainted with graft and have been wary of political parties seeking to coopt the youth-dominated movement. The new arrivals yesterday mixed in with thousands of other protesters in the square, who appeared worried although no confrontation or skirmishes took place. “They’ve ruined it,” one protester said, as another muttered, “It’s going to get messy.” — AFP
Washington welcomes new reformist civilian leader

WASHINGTON: The United States said Wednesday it would name an ambassador to Sudan for the first time in 23 years as it welcomed the country's new reformist civilian leader. The United States hailed early steps taken by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok to “break with the policies and practices of the previous regime,” whose ties with radical Islamists and brutal domestic campaigns had made Sudan a pariah in the West.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States would appoint an ambassador to Khartoum, subject to Senate confirmation, and that Sudan would restore full-level representation in Washington. “This is a historic step to strengthen our bilateral relationship,” Pompeo wrote on Twitter. In an accompanying statement, Pompeo praised Hamdok’s civilian-led transitional government for launching “vast reforms.”

Hamdok has “demonstrated a commitment to peace negotiations with armed opposition groups, established a commission of inquiry to investigate violence against protesters, and committed to holding democratic elections at the end of the 39-month transition period,” Pompeo said. Hamdok, a British-educated former diplomat and UN official, is the first Sudanese leader to visit Washington since 1985.

However, he had a low-key welcome, meeting the State Department’s number-three, David Hale. Both Pompeo and President Donald Trump were away on foreign travel. Hamdok also met with senior lawmakers and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who said he welcomed the new government’s “stated commitment to respecting human rights, fighting corruption and reforming Sudan’s economy.” Hamdok took charge in August after months of demonstrations led by young people that brought down veteran strongman Omar al-Bashir and then a military council that had tried to stay in power. The protests were triggered by discontent over the high cost of bread and other economic concerns.

Still seeking removal from terrorism blacklist

The United States had tense relations with Bashir, who took power in 1989 and embraced Islamism, including welcoming Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. After the 1998 attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the United States fired a missile that destroyed a major pharmaceutical factory in Sudan over allegations, still fiercely disputed since, that it produced a nerve agent. In its legacy that still tarnishes relations, the United States classifications Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, a designation that the new government calls a severe impediment to foreign investment.

US officials, while voicing sympathy for Sudan’s appeals, say that removal of the designation is a legal process that will take time. In talks at the US Congress, lawmakers pledged support for the new government but said Sudan must reach a settlement with families of the victims of the embassy bombings as well as the 2000 attack on the USS Cole, allegedly backed by the then-regime.

Lawmakers “raised lingering concerns about the need for financial transparency within the security sector and about remaining elements of the old regime who may still support international terrorism,” said a statement by the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Hamdok addressed the issue in a statement from his office. “A key program of the new transitional government is to fight terrorism, and in order to have stability in the region there has to be a regional and international program to fight terrorism,” he said.

Mnuchin meanwhile spoke to Hamdok about combating money laundering and terrorism financing, the Treasury Department said. Tensions also soared over Bashir’s scorched-earth crackdown in the parched western region of Darfur, a campaign that the United States described as genocide as it pressed for the prosecution of Bashir. The United Nations estimates that about 300,000 people were killed and 2.5 million displaced in the conflict, as Sudanese troops targeting ethnic groups suspected of supporting rebels raped, killed, looted and burned villages. Hamdok last month traveled to Darfur where he met hundreds of victims of the conflict and assured them that he was working on their demands for lasting peace.

Khamenei orders
Iran unrest victims treated as ‘martyrs’

TEHRAN: Iran’s supreme leader has agreed that people killed in nationwide unrest last month who had no role in formulating it should be treated as “martyrs” with their families compensated. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s decision marked a significant softening of position by the Iranian authorities towards those killed during the protests that erupted on November 15 following a surprise hike in fuel prices. He was responding to a report on the protests he commissioned from Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, his official website said Wednesday. He ordered that its recommendations “be implemented as soon as possible”.

Iran has yet to give overall figures for the number of people killed or arrested when security forces moved in to quell the unrest that saw buildings torched and shops looted. London-based human rights group Amnesty International said on Monday that at least 208 people had died. But Iran has dismissed the high death tolls reported by foreign sources as “utter lies” and has so far confirmed only five dead - four members of the People’s Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK), an exiled former rebel group which it considers a “terrorist” cult.

Khamenei said that families whose loved ones “lost their lives in any way during the demonstrations” would be paid “blood money as restitution”. Blood money is an Islamic legal term for financial compensation payable by law to the families of murder victims. Even the families of those “killed while armed and in clashes with security forces” would not be held accountable for their loved ones’ actions but would be shown “Islamic clemency” and “compensated proportionally”, Khamenei’s statement said.

‘Innocents’

The recommendations contrast with the firmness shown by the government from the very beginning of the unrest, during which they ordered a near-total internet blackout that lasted for more than a week. Iran has blamed the violence that broke out during the protests on “thugs” backed by its foes the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia. It has singed out exiled royalists and the People’s Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK), an exiled former rebel group which it considers a “terrorist” cult.

The people foiled a deep, vast and very dangerous conspiracy on which a lot of money was spent for destruction, viciousness and the killing of people,” Khamenei said on state television. Last month, the Revolutionary Guards praised the “timely” action taken against “rioters”. The Guards’ deputy commander Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi called for the severe punishment of “mercenaries” arrested in connection with the violence.

But as Internet connectivity was gradually restored, Iranians on social media mourned loved ones who had nothing to do with the riots and were killed simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. President Hassan Rouhani acknowledged Wednesday that “innocents” could be among those imprisoned in waves of mass arrests during and after the protests. “All those people who have been arrested, of course some of them are innocent and should be freed,” Rouhani said in an address broadcast by state television.

Dozens of migrants

Drown as boat sinks

NOUAKCHOTT: At least 58 migrants heading to Europe died as their makeshift boat sank off the coast of Mauritania, but 83 survivors managed to swim to shore, the International Organization for Migration said.

The migrants “were mostly clandestine immigrants trying to reach Spain, coming from Banjul in Gambia,” Mauritania’s interior ministry said in a statement released Wednesday night. “At least 58 people are confirmed dead after a vessel carrying migrants sank as it approached the coast of Mauritania,” the IOM said in a statement. “Eighty-three others swam to shore and are receiving assistance.”

The migrant vessel sunk some 25 km north of the town of Nouadhibou, near the border with Western Sahara, a Mauritanian security official told AFP. “The craft hit a rock in the middle of the sea, it started taking on water and the engine fell apart,” the official said. “They weren’t far from the shore, but a large swell stopped them from reaching the coast by boat.”

The official added that there was nothing aboard and that the migrants were hungry and cold so they jumped into the sea and started swimming. The IOM said survivors had said the boat left The Gambia on Nov 27. Attempted migrant crossings to Europe along the coast of West Africa – known as the “western route” - have grown in number in recent years.

Survivors of Wednesday’s sinking in Mauritania told the IOM there were at least 150 people aboard when the craft went down, including women and children. Mauritania’s interior ministry also said the vessel was carrying between 150 and 180 people, adding that most of the passengers were between the ages of 20 and 30. “Unfortunately, we counted 58 dead,” the ministry said, adding that 10 survivors needed emergency medical treatment.

WASHINGTON: Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok (right) meets House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Eliot Engel on Capitol Hill on Wednesday. — AFP
Netanyahu presses Pompeo for more pressure on Iran

LISBON: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Portugal on Wednesday and called for increased pressure on the “tattling” Iranian government. “I think we have been fortunate that President Trump has led a consistent policy of pressure against Iran. Iran’s aggression is growing, but its empire is tottering,” Netanyahu said in Lisbon. “And I say, let’s make it totter even further,” he added.

Netanyahu stressed that Iran was the main subject of his meeting with Pompeo, adding “the second subject is Iran, and so is the third”. Pompeo, in a tweet, said it had been a “productive meeting”.

The question of how to create Middle East stability when there are “anti-Iran protests taking place in Baghdad, anti-Iranian protests taking place in Beirut,” was a key issue in talks held on the margins of a NATO summit which ended in London earlier Wednesday. Pompeo told reporters before leaving Lisbon, Israel, which is widely believed to have the Middle East’s sole but undeclared nuclear arsenal, has for years accused Iran of seeking to obtain nuclear weapons and strongly opposed a 2015 agreement designed to address the concerns of major powers.

‘Should be ashamed’

Trump, a strong Netanyahu ally, unilaterally pulled the United States out of the deal in May last year and reimposed crippling sanctions. Netanyahu, who is fighting for his political life after an indictment on graft charges, has hailed the Trump sanctions. Israel believes they have squeezed the Iranian economy, prompting the government to raise fuel prices - sparking nationwide protests.

Lebanon and Iraq, both countries where Iran has significant influence, have also seen major demonstrations. Netanyahu criticized European governments that have signed up to a barter system that would allow Iran to trade without fear of US sanctions. Six new European countries agreed to support the Instex system and Netanyahu said that “instead of supporting American sanctions, they are weakening them. That’s not right”. “They should be ashamed of themselves. While people are risking their lives and dying on the streets of Tehran, they are giving sustenance and support to this tyrannical regime,” he said before meeting with Pompeo.

Graft charges

Netanyahu, who was last month indicted on a variety of graft charges and faces a third election within a year after deadlocked polls in April and September, has been bolstered by a number of landmark steps taken by Trump. He is Israel’s longest serving prime minister but he is serving in a caretaker capacity after the inconclusive elections. Wednesday’s meeting was the first between the two men since Pompeo announced last month that the United States no longer considered Jewish settlements in the West Bank to be illegal. The announcement broke with decades of international consensus that the settlements are illegal and a major barrier to peace with the Palestinians. The US position offered a boost to Netanyahu as he threatens to annex much of the West Bank, a step that would severely impede the long-held Palestinian hope for a separate state.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in settlements in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, alongside around three million Palestinians. Among previous steps, Trump earlier recognized bitterly contested Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and cut off US funding for the UN body that supports Palestinian refugees. Pompeo also met Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa and Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva before flying on to Morocco yesterday. — AFP

Vaping linked to rare lung disease

PARIS: Doctors treating a patient with a rare lung disease usually caused by exposure to industrial metals set it may instead be the first case linked to vaping. Electronic cigarettes are sold as safer alternatives to traditional tobacco products and as aids to stop smoking. But they have been implicated in a growing number of recent deaths and health alerts, especially in the United States.

Researchers at the University of California San Francisco said the patient had hard-metal pneumoconiosis, typically found in people exposed to such substances, but also saw them used in tool sharpening or diamond polishing. It causes a persistent cough and breathing difficulties, and leaves tell-tale scarring on lung tissue. Kirk Jones, Clinical Professor of Pathology at UCSF, said “this patient did not have any known exposure to hard metal, so we identified the use of an e-cigarette as a possible cause.”

The case study, published in the European Respiratory Journal, said that when researchers tested the patient’s e-cigarette, which was used with cannabis, they found cobalt in the vapor it released, as well as other toxic metals - nickel, aluminium, manganese, lead and chromium. This was similar to other studies, suggesting that the metals were coming from the heating coils found in vaping devices, rather than from any particular type of refill - as has been previously thought.

“Exposure to cobalt dust is extremely rare outside of a few specific industries,” Rupal Shah, assistant professor of medicine at UCSF, was quoted as saying. “This is the first known case of a metal-induced toxicity in the lung that has followed in vaping and it has resulted in long-term, probably permanent, scarring of the patient’s lungs,” he said.

An accompanying European Respiratory Society editorial on stopping smoking rejected the use of e-cigarettes as an aid, saying it was “based on well-meaning but incorrect or undocumented claims or assumptions”. Editorial co-author Jorgen Vestbo, Professor of Respiratory Medicine at the University of Manchester, said “E-cigarettes are harmful, they cause nicotine addiction and can never substitute for evidence-based smoking cessation tools.” — AFP
Europe’s oldest nuclear plant not ready to retire

BEZNAU, Switzerland: Europe’s oldest functioning nuclear reactor, at Switzerland’s Beznau plant, will turn 50 next week – a lifespan deemed dangerously long by environmentalists who are demanding that it be shut down immediately. Commercial operation began at the plant in the northern canton of Aargau, near the German border, on Dec 9, 1969 – back when The Beatles were still together and a man had just walked on the Moon.

Fifty years later, a message in German is printed in white letters on a bright blue wall of the building housing Reactor 1: “Anniversary 1969-2019, 355,000 hours of service”. Beznau 1 is one of the very oldest reactors in operation today, following only reactors 1 and 2 at Tarapur in western India, which went online in Oct 1969, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

“It’s a privilege to work here,” Michael Dost, director of the plant run by Swiss power company Axpo, said during a media tour of Switzerland’s first nuclear plant earlier this year. He said he was proud to work at such a productive monument of industrial history. The plant’s two ageing reactors (Be-now 2 began operating in 1971) together still pump out around 6,000 gigawatts per year – equivalent to twice the electrical consumption of Switzerland’s largest city, Zurich. Showing off a command centre with large control panels and colorful buttons reminiscent of the 1960s, Dost insisted that the plant’s age was not an issue.

Johnson plans for victory with Brexit Party boost

LONDON: One week before Britain’s election, Prime Minister Boris Johnson was confident enough to publish a plan yesterday for his first 100 days in office, bowed by an endorsement from Brexit Party MPs. Jeremy Corbyn’s main opposition Labour party is struggling to close the gap in opinion polls with Johnson’s governing Conservatives, which remains at around 10 points. Meanwhile the electoral threat posed by Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party receded further with the decision of four of its European Parliament MPs to endorse the prime minister. Johnson has promised to get Britain out of the European Union on Jan 31, after years of turmoil sparked by the 2016 referendum vote for Brexit. But he says this would only be possible if he wins a majority of MPs in the December 12 election, allowing him to get his EU divorce deal through parliament. “If there is a Conservative majority next week, we will get Brexit done by the end of January, 2020 will then be the year we finally put behind us the arguments and uncertainty over Brexit,” he said.

He also announced an unspecified tax cut for “hard-working families”, which he said would be unveiled in a post-Brexit budget in February. Within 100 days of taking office, he also vowed to pass laws to increase school funding and toughen sentencing laws, as well as beginning moves to shake up the immigration system. Labour is offering a fresh referendum on Brexit, but has sought to focus on a radical agenda to address inequality, from nationalizing key industries to borrowing heavily to fund a huge investment drive.

It challenged Johnson’s claim to represent change, given the Conservatives have been in power since 2010 and introduced huge public spending cuts. “The Tories have had 3,494 days in office, and in those days we’ve seen child poverty soar, rising homelessness, rising food bank use, and violent crime is up too,” said Labour MP Andrew Gwynne.

Brexit Party fragmentation

The Brexit Party has been riven at the heels of the Conservatives for months, threatening to take the holding a message of a clean break with Brussels. But the party has suffered a series of setbacks and four of its MEPs - elected on a huge show of support for the party in May’s European elections - announced they were backing the Conservatives. Among them is Annunziata Rees-Mogg, the sister of Jacob Rees-Mogg who is a leading Brexit supporter and member of Johnson’s cabinet.

She said the premier’s EU divorce deal, which Farage has rejected as “Brexit in name only”, would get Britain out of the EU and return its sovereignty. “That is what most Brexiteers I’ve ever met have been fighting for decades,” she told reporters. With Labour backing a second referendum, she added that “Boris’s deal is the only Leave option we have”.

Jacob Rees-Mogg has been absent from the election campaign since suggesting the victims of the deadly 2017 Grenfell Tower blaze lacked common sense in heeding official advice to stay in their homes. The departures are another blow for Farage, who began the campaign threatening to stand against the Conservatives in every seat, only to back down. He said he was “disappointed” they were leaving.

But he noted the Brexit Party was winning over voters in many traditional Labour areas of England, making it easier for the Conservatives to win there. Len McCluskey, the head of the Unite trade union who is close to Corbyn, this week admitted Labour was struggling to win over Brexit-backing voters. Labour has also been grappling with a long-running row over claims of widespread anti-Semitism in the party, something it strongly denies. It was hit by a new row yesterday after lawyers said it had state-ments from former and current Labour staffs alleging “interference” into investigations into complaints against members. —AFP

Labour challenges PM’s claim to represent change

BERLIN: Headed by a new leftist leadership duo, Germany’s struggling Social Democrats are gearing up for a crunch congress from today that could decide the future of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s fragile centre-left coalition government. As SPD members gather to discuss their demands for keeping the coalition afloat, here’s a look at four possible scenarios for the months ahead.

‘Jamaica’ coalition

If the SPD walks away, Merkel’s CDU/CSU alliance could try to woo the liberal FDP and the left-leaning Greens into a tie-up nicknamed “Jamaica” because the parties’ colors match those of the Caribbean country’s flag. A 2017 attempt at such an alliance broke down when the FDP abruptly quit talks, but the party has signalled it would be ready to play ball now. The Greens, however, have less incentive these days to join in such coalition partner. Spurred by growing concern about climate change, they have surged in the polls and are poised to be-come Germany’s second-largest party in the next elections - putting even the chancellery within reach.

Snap elections

Snap elections are seen as the least likely out-come by local media - but they also wrongly predicted that the SPD would choose another, more moderate leadership duo last month. The move would require Merkel to call, and lose, a confidence vote in the Bundestag lower house of parliament. At-ention would then shift to President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who would embark on complex negoti-ations to try to cobble together another coalition. If that failed, he would dissolve parliament and fresh elections would follow within 60 days. Voters could well punish the SPD and the CDU for sending them to the polls early, while the far-right AfD and the Greens stand to make gains. —AFP

Four scenarios as Merkel partners debate future

If it fails to push through its demands, the SPD could pull the plug on the partnership with the CDU/CSU, triggering the coalition’s collapse. Merkel, keen to shape her own political exit after 14 years in power, could then try to head a minority government - a first in postwar Germany. Merkel has in the past said she was “very skeptical” about leading a government without a stable parlia-mentary majority, but observers say the prospect may be less daunting now. Several senior CDU figures have voiced their preference for this scenario, in-cluding Merkel critic Friedrich Merz, who said the “experimental nature” of a minority government “has its charms”.
Bloodshed unleashed by ‘drug wars’

MEXICO CITY: As Mexico struggles to stop the bloodshed unleashed by its “drug wars”, the violence casts a long shadow over ordinary life for many Mexicans. On Nov 22, AFP deployed a team of photo and video journalists across the country to document the daily brutality for 24 hours. These are their reflections on covering the deadly onslaught gripping the country, where more than 250,000 people have been murdered since the government deployed the army to fight drug cartels in 2006.

‘Constant contact with death’

“Everything in Ciudad Juarez is extreme: The arid climate of the Chihuahuan desert, the stark contrasts of the US-Mexican border, the violence. It was once dubbed the “murder capital of the world”, before other cities overtook it. To photojournalist Herika Martinez, 36, it is home. “My images tell the stories of mothers who have lost a daughter, victims of massacres, communities that have been deserted because of the violence,” she says.

Death can come for anyone, anytime here - in cartel turf wars or anti-narcotics operations. Sometimes innocent civilians are caught in the crossfire. “Being a photojournalist in Ciudad Juarez means being in constant contact with death and suffering. It means living other people’s pain, and then having it become your own, against a backdrop of tears, bullets, blood,” she adds. Raul Morales, 41, is a video journalist in the city. “The toughest part of the job, he says, is separating his work chronicling the violence from “my feelings as a father, brother, son or husband.”

‘Red pages’

Pedro Pardo, 44, says he never really wanted to cover “la nota roja,” or “red pages” – the stories of daily violence that are a fixture of the Mexican press. But working for nine years in the southern state of Guerrero, one of the most violent in Mexico, the “nota roja” came looking for him. He had to learn to live with the trauma of photographing mutilated remains, charred bodies and severed body parts. “As photojournalists, we couldn’t just ignore the violence. We had a responsibility to inform people,” says Pardo, who is now based in Mexico City. But he adds: “It pains me sometimes to look at my own pictures. I’m human.”

‘You breathe death’

Ulises Ruiz, 42, is based in Mexico’s second city, Guadalajara. He says a Mexico without narco-violence is “a very distant idea.” “The authorities are overwhelmed. Every day there are murders, kidnappings, people tortured and their bodies dumped in public, mothers looking for their missing children, investigators searching in mass graves,” he says. “It’s impossible to cover it all.”

News brief

Eight dead in gas explosion

WARSAW: Eight people, including four children, were killed after a gas explosion destroyed a house in a ski resort in the south of Poland late Wednesday, local authorities said. Around 200 rescuers had scoured the debris of the house in Szczyrk yesterday morning to find the bodies. No one else is believed to have been inside when the explosion occurred. “It appears that this is the final toll,” local prefect Jaroslaw Wieczorek told reporters, but added that rescuers will continue looking just to make sure. The local gas distributor, PGS, said that the explosion had been preceded by a sudden drop in pressure in the gas pipeline, which could indicate that the pipeline had been accidentally punctured during nearby construction works. —AFP

Man burnt to death in church

LAGOS: A man was burnt to death yesterday after a pastor mistook petrol for water during a healing service in Lagos, the emergency services said. “The pastor picked a keg believing it contained water not knowing it was filled with petrol,” said the head of the Lagos emergency Management Agency. “In the process of emptying the contents on the man, a lit candle nearby sparked fire that engulfed both of them,” Faminloye told AFP. The church fire in the Baruwa area in the north of the sprawling city spread to nearby oil pipelines, which burst into flames, he added. “We have recovered the body of a man. He was burned beyond recognition, while another person (the pastor) was injured with severe burns,” Faminloye said. —AFP

Trayvon Martin’s killer sues teen’s family in US court

MIAMI: George Zimmerman, who fatally shot Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012, is suing the teenager’s family, their attorney and the US state and others for more than $100 million, his lawyer said Wednesday. Zimmerman said he shot Martin – an African American – in self-defense, but the teen’s family and friends insisted it was an “unfounded and reckless” killing, and that it was “a shameless attempt to profit off the lives and grief of others”.

Zimmerman “would have us believe that he is the innocent victim of a deep conspiracy, despite the complete lack of any credible evidence to support his outlandish claims,” Crump said in a statement. “This tale defies all logic, and it’s time to close the door on these baseless imaginations,” he added.

While serving as a neighborhood watch volunteer in a gated community in Florida in February 2012, Zimmerman fatally shot high school student Martin as he was walking home with iced tea and candy. Zimmerman insisted he had been following the teenager on suspicion he was involved in robbery, and that he shot him in an act of self-defense. His trial and subsequent acquittal exposed deep racial divides in US society, in a case that sparked nationwide protests. —AFP

US cop under investigation for fondling corpse

LOS ANGELES: An officer with the Los Angeles Police Department is under investigation after his body camera allegedly caught him fondling a deceased woman’s breasts. A police spokesman confirmed the probe to AFP on Wednesday but would not discuss details of the case. “We are aware of it and an administrative investigation has begun,” Lieutenant Chris Ramirez said. “We cannot discuss the case because it’s a personnel matter and because of litigation issues.”

An official familiar with the case who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity said the incident unfolded after the officer and his partner responded to a call about a woman who was possibly dead in a residential unit. Once the pair determined the woman was deceased, one of the officers left the room, the official said. “The one who is accused went back in to where the deceased woman was and allegedly fondled her breasts,” he added. Although the officer had turned his body camera off, a two-minute buffer on the device captured the incident.

The official said the footage was uncovered during a random inspection and reaction among the force has been “utter disgust”. “This has no place in law enforcement or anywhere,” he said. “There needs to be and there always has been a reverence of respect for folks who have died, and from the rank and file all the way up to the chief, it’s just total disgust at this.”

In a statement, the Los Angeles Police Protective League, the union that represents officers, said the allegations are “extremely disturbing”. “If this allegation is true, then the behavior exhibited by this officer is not only wrong, but extremely disturbing, and does not align with the values we, as police officers, hold dear and these values include respect and reverence for the deceased,” the statement said. Police said the officer has been placed on leave pending the outcome of the probe. —AFP
WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has shattered norms and niceties on the world stage in his nearly three years in office as he enters an election year. Trump is unlikely to slow down as he seeks what has largely eluded him - a headline-grabbing victory. The tycoon-turned-president closes 2019 with a new stride after what was perhaps his most unambiguous achievement - the US commando raid that killed the leader of the Islamic State group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

But the year was also full of losses and turns for Trump. On his ambition to end the war in Afghanistan, he startled Washington by inviting the Taliban to talk, then declared the talks dead, and finally resumed them. On North Korea, where Trump has hoped to secure a landmark accord, a highly anticipated summit with leader Kim Jong Un ended in stalemate.

Trump left a suburb of diplomacy with a hastily arranged new meeting, only to see the talks languish as Pyongyang fires rockets and issues threats. Even more tumultuous has been Trump’s aggressive trade push on China. Expectations have repeatedly risen and then waned that the world’s two largest economies can reach a deal that would cancel tariffs on billions of dollars worth of goods.

In a rare issue that has drawn criticism from his Republican allies, Trump also sent mixed messages on Turkey, ordering a US troop withdrawal from Syria that paved the way for Ankara to attack US-allied Kurdish fighters before Trump pressured the NATO ally with sanctions. Beyond the hotspots, Trump may have broken the most ground with his style, hobnobbing with some of the world’s most autocratic leaders even as he clashes with many close allies, as seen in his testy exchanges at the December NATO summit.

He has torn through the international consensus by withdrawing from the Paris climate accord and a European-backed denuclearization pact with Iran, and by unabashedly seeking to boost Israel’s right-wing leader, Benjamin Netanyahu. In a mirror of his domestic agenda in which slashing immigration is a top priority, Trump has cast himself as the unique leader who stands up to the long-accepted status quo. Heading on his NATO trip, Trump spoke first not of the security challenges of Russia, Syria or Afghanistan but of allies he says contribute less than their fair share.

Eying successes

The 2020 White House campaign opens under the shadow of impeachment, with House Democrats saying Trump abused his power by delaying aid to Ukraine as he pressed Kiev to investigate domestic opponent Joe Biden. But Brian Katulis, a senior fellow at the left-leaning Center for American Progress, said foreign policy “is a reality-TV presidency. Even if he doesn’t achieve major successes, he will claim that he has,” he said. “He will use other countries and their leaders as props in his re-election campaign.”

Nile Gardiner, a former aide to British prime minister Margaret Thatcher who is now at Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington think-tank, argued that Trump had achieved “significant successes.” “We have seen 99 percent of ISIS territory taken away in Iraq and Syria. There’s still a job to be done but this is a very, very big-scale achievement,” he said. “Trump’s foreign policy is forward-looking and not isolationist,” Gardiner said, adding that European leaders “are preparing for the very strong possibility of Trump’s re-election.”

Two killed in shooting at Pearl Harbor

LOS ANGELES: A US sailor fatally shot two people and wounded a third at the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in Hawaii on Wednesday before taking his own life, a senior Navy officer said. The base was locked down for more than an hour after the shooting, according to a statement issued by the facility, while Navy officials said they were investigating what prompted the attack. “I can confirm that there were three shooting victims. We have confirmed that two are deceased, one is in stable condition in a local hospital,” said Rear Admiral Robert Chadwick.

He added that the shooter - “tentatively” identified as a sailor assigned to the USS Columbia, a Los Angeles-class attack submarine - had also died after “an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound.” One witness told local media he was sitting at his computer when he heard shots fired and rushed to the window, where he saw three victims on the ground. The witness, who did not want to be identified, said he then saw the gunman, who was wearing a sailor’s uniform, shoot himself in the head. White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said that US President Donald Trump had been briefed on the shooting and was monitoring the situation. Hawaii governor David Ige tweeted that the “White House has reached out to offer assistance from federal agencies, and the state is standing by to assist where necessary.” “I join in solidarity with the people of Hawaii as we express our heartbreak over this tragedy and concern for those affected by the shooting,” Ige wrote.

Pearl Harbor anniversary

The shooting took place at 2:30 pm local time near the south entrance of the sprawling base located on the southern shore of Oahu. The base hosts both the Navy and Air Force. It unfolded three days before the 78th anniversary of the 1941 Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor that left more than 2,400 US service members dead. The worst shooting in Hawaii history took place just over 20 years ago when a Xerox employee killed seven of his colleagues.

While gun violence is common in the United States, shootings at American military facilities in the country are relatively rare. In July 2015, Mohammad Youssuf Abdulazeez carried out an attack at two military installations in the US state of Tennessee that killed four Marines and a sailor, with the FBI concluding that the violence was inspired by a foreign terrorist group.

Two years earlier, Aaron Alexis killed 12 people and wounded eight others at the Washington Navy Yard, just three kilometers from the US Capitol building, before being shot dead by officers.

In recent years, US warships have intercepted and seized Iranian arms likely bound for Houthis. The official said this was different, citing the advanced nature of the parts. Under a United Nations resolution, Tehran is prohibited from supplying, selling or transferring weapons outside the country unless approved by the Security Council. A separate UN resolution on Yemen bans the supply of weapons to Houthis.

WASHINGTON: A US Navy warship seized advanced missile parts believed to be linked to Iran from a boat it had stopped in the Arabian Sea, US officials said on Wednesday, as Trump administration pressures Tehran to curb its activities in the region. In a statement, the Pentagon confirmed that on Nov, 25 a US warship found “advanced missile components” on a stateless vessel and an initial investigation indicated the parts were of Iranian origin. “A more thorough investigation is underway,” the statement said.

US officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the guided missile destroyer Forrest Sherman detained a small boat and a detachment of US personnel boarded the vessel, where the missile parts were found. The crew on the small boat have been transferred to the Yemeni coast guard and the missile parts are in the possession of the United States, the officials added. One of the officials said they believed from initial information that the weapons were bound for Iran-aligned Houthi fighters in Yemen.

WASHINGTON: A US Navy warship seized advanced missile parts believed to be linked to Iran from a boat it had stopped in the Arabian Sea, US officials said on Wednesday, as Trump administration pressures Tehran to curb its activities in the region. In a statement, the Pentagon confirmed that on Nov, 25 a US warship found “advanced missile components” on a stateless vessel and an initial investigation indicated the parts were of Iranian origin. “A more thorough investigation is underway,” the statement said.
WASHINGTON: Three constitutional scholars on Wednesday bolstered Democrats’ case for impeaching Donald Trump by saying the president’s actions seeking foreign interference in US elections were “evidence of a ‘high crime and misdemeanor’ necessary for removal.”

The trio was invited by Democrats to testify. Americans tuning in to the eight-hour live broadcast witnessed clashes between Democrats and Republican Trump loyalists on the panel, who repeatedly forced procedural votes to stall the process. The new phase of impeachment began a day after a congressional report on the high-stakes inquiry detailed “overwhelming” evidence of abuse of power and obstruction by the president.

The report mapped out a months-long scheme by Trump, his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, senior diplomats and White House staffers to pressure Ukraine’s president into investigating Joe Biden, the current favorite to win the Democratic nomination for the 2020 election. Trump “was willing to compromise our security and his office for personal, political gain,” said Judiciary Committee chairman Jerry Nadler.

“Proof, not presumptions”

Trump’s alleged political crimes, including bribery and obstruction of justice and Congress, “are worse than the misconduct of any prior president,” Gerhardt said. “If what we’re talking about is not impeachable, then nothing is impeachable.” Feldman added that if Trump is not held to account for his offenses “we live under a dictatorship.”

White House spokesman Stephanie Grisham hit back in a statement, saying that “the only thing the three liberal professors established at chairman Nadler’s hearing was their political bias against the president.” It did nothing to change the fact that, despite weeks of hearings in this sham process, the president did nothing wrong,” Grisham said.

The fourth academic who testified, George Washington University Law professor Jonathan Turley - the only expert invited by Republicans - argued there was “no evidence” that Trump acted with corrupt intent. He warned that partisan “rage” was compromising the inquiry. “Impeachments have to be based on proof, not presumptions,” he said, adding that Democrats were rushing the process so quickly that they were not hearing from key players in the Ukraine scandal. Turley and Republicans did not, however, mention the White House’s stonewalling. Despite Democratic requests, 12 current or former administration officials have refused to testify.

US first lady wades into impeachment fight to defend son

WASHINGTON: US First Lady Melania Trump on Wednesday publicly rebuked a scholar who used her 13-year-old son’s name to make a point during a hearing as part of the impeachment inquiry into the president. Constitutional law professor Pamela Karlan invoked Barron Trump, the son of Donald and Melania Trump, to demonstrate how the constitutional imposition imposes distinctions between a monarch’s power and that of a president.

“The constitution says there can be no titles of nobility,” Karlan told lawmakers during the House Judiciary Committee’s first hearing on impeachment, which featured four constitutional scholars. “So while the president can name his son Barron, he can’t make him a baron.” The pun led to chuckles in the congressional hearing room, but Melania Trump made clear it was no laughing matter.

“A minor child deserves privacy and should be kept out of politics,” the first lady tweeted shortly afterwards. “Pamela Karlan, you should be ashamed of your very angry and obviously biased public pandering, and using a child to do it.” President Trump retweeted his wife’s message to his 67 million followers.

As the row snowballed, Karlan quickly tried to stem the damage by expressing her regret. “I want to apologize for what I said earlier about the president’s son,” she told the panel. “It was wrong of me to do that” she said, before adding that she also wished she could have phrased it differently.

Retweeting her remarks to his 67 million followers, President Trump said: “Melania’s son is a very special young boy. He should never have to read such negative things written about him.”

‘Impeachable offense’

The president himself, in London for a NATO summit, lambasted his opponents for proceeding with impeachment hearings. “What they are doing is a very bad thing for our country,” Trump said. “It’s a joke.” Karlan asserted that Trump’s alleged effort to withhold military aid until Ukraine committed to investigating Biden was grounds for removal - even though Kiev never conducted the probe. “Soliciting itself is the impeachable offense,” she said. —AFP
Destination Pyongyang: 50-yr search after N Korean hijack

Search for missing father has defined son’s life

SEOUL: Half a century ago a North Korean agent hijacked the flight carrying Hwang In-cheol’s father. Pyongyang never returned him, and the search has defined his son’s life. Hwang was just two when he last saw his father. He knows him only through photographs, but he has spent much of his adult life campaigning for him. A producer for South Korean broadcaster MBC, Hwang won a starting business trip on a domestic Korean Air flight from Gangneung to Seoul’s Gimpo airport on Dec 11, 1969.

Minutes after takeoff North Korean agent Cho Chang-Hee slipped into the cockpit and diverted the plane to Pyongyang at gunpoint. Survivors say three North Korean fighter jets escorted it in to land, and that Cho was met by army officers and driven away. The 50 passengers and crew were blindfolded with handcuffs before they were taken off the plane. The incident sparked international outcry, prompting a UN resolution denouncing the hijacking, and two months later 29 of those on board were repatriated, but Hwang’s father was not among them.

Returning passengers said Hwang Won had been dragged away after resisting efforts to disinfect him and questioning him on the North’s ideology. The Red Cross has long demanded the return of the remaining 11 South Koreans, but Pyongyang has repeatedly denied abducting them. Hwang Chang-hee had chosen to stay. The plight soon dropped from public attention, but his son, knowing him only through photographs, has never given up. "My life has been a cycle of misery," said his son.

"It’s been a long time since I’ve thought about my father’s disappearance. I knew it was going to happen," he said. "I still feel I should have done something to prevent it from happening." Hwang’s search for his father has defined his life, his father’s detention in Kim Jong-un’s Communist North has been "a major handicap", the mere fact he was in Pyongyang making the son stumble on background checks for decent jobs.

In 2001, at one of the government-arranged reunions periodically allowed by Pyongyang for families separated by the Korean War, one of the flight attendants, Sung Kyang-hee, met her mother for the first time in more than 30 years. The sight of the pair’s tearful reunion inspired him to embark on a search for his father, quitting his job, using the stolen company to travel across the South to raise awareness about the incident. "I started with the simple thought that I should meet my father too," Hwang said. He would now be 82, but he is sure he was still alive as recently as 2017, when an intermediary gave him answers to questions that only his father would know.

Diplomatic dawn?

After some research, Hwang seized on the United Nations’ Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft, ratified by the North in 1983. "Since the crew members and passengers have not arrived at their final destination, the plane is still in flight according to the treaty," he said. Seoul could demand the North abide by the international agreement and free the abductees, Hwang said — but his pleas for government action have gone unanswered.

Initially Seoul had encouraged the hijacking victims’ families to keep a low profile, saying their actions could complicate their relatives’ lives in the North. Inter-Korean relations have gone from warm to cold and back again in his years of campaigning, but the diplomatic process has made no difference to his quest. South Korean President Moon Jae-in met three times with the North’s leader Kim Jong Un last year, but Hwang remained a bitter onlooker.

"It was just an extension of the empty calls for reunification that I’d heard during the previous liberal administrations," Hwang said. "Humanitarian issues - by far the most important - have always been left out. The ignorance and indifference of the South Korean government has turned into a huge pain for me."

Sydney smoke crisis ‘longest on record’

SYDNEY: Australian bushfires have caused unprecedented pollution in Sydney and along the country’s east coast, officials said yesterday, with smoke and dust burning residents’ eyes and prompting a spike in respiratory complaints. Hundreds of bushfires have burned out of control since September up and down the eastern seaboard, blanketing cities from Sydney to Brisbane in thick smoke for weeks on end. The extent of the crisis was made clear yesterday, with the New South Wales department of environment declaring bushfires and dust had caused “some of the highest air pollution ever seen” in Australia. The region “has experienced other periods of poor air quality that lasted several weeks, including the 1994 Sydney bushfires and the Black Christmas bushfires of Dec 26-Jan 2002,” a spokeswoman told AFP. “This event, however, is the longest and the most widespread in our records.” New South Wales Rural Fire Service said more than a dozen fires were burning near Sydney on Thursday, including three that carried an emergency warning.

For three weeks the city has seen almost daily air quality warnings. Bushfires are common in Australia, but scientists say this year’s season has come earlier and with more intensity due to a prolonged drought fuelled by climate change. New South Wales health officials said more people with asthma were turning up at hospitals, and ambulance call-outs for breathing problems were up 24 percent in the week to Dec 1.

Meanwhile, tourists and residents took measures to combat the smoke, buying face masks and staying indoors as much as possible. On Thursday, Sydney’s air quality index registered fine particulate pollution — small enough to penetrate deep inside the lungs — at over 160 parts per million, far above levels considered to be safe. Local newspapers and television have posted advice about how to limit the impact of the smoke — offering tips on what masks to buy and what activities are safest. The smoke caused golfers at the Australian Open — one of the world’s oldest national Opens — to abandon their round as they could not see the ball.

Golfers also played below their usual standards. The world’s top 200 players took part in the event. AFP

Indonesian faints during whipping

IDN, Indonesia: An Indonesian man who fainted as he was being whipped for pre-marital sex yesterday was revived to receive the rest of his punishment. The man was sentenced to 100 strokes by a masked sharia officer who asked him to stop lashing himself while in pre-marital sex.

"It’s tough to see your golf ball when you’re out there playing, where it finishes. Your eyes do hurt," said 2015 champion Matt Jones. "I’ve got that cough like you’ve got something in your lungs, phlegm in your lungs or whatever, but it’s not fun," he said. —AFP

But three people were flogged 100 times each for having pre-marital sex, while two men caught having sex with underage girls were also whipped 100 times last year. Other offences tend to carry dozens or even fewer lashes.

Rights groups have slammed public caning as cruel, and Indonesia’s President Joko Widodo has called for it to end, but the practice has widespread support among Aceh’s mostly Muslim population. —AFP
Indian rape victim set ablaze on way to court

Outrage mounts over crimes against women

LUCKNOW: A 23-year-old rape victim was set ablaze by a gang of men, including the alleged rapist, as she made her way to court in the northern India yesterday, police said, stirring public outrage and shame over the scourge of crimes against women. During the past week, thousands of Indians have protested in several cities following the alleged rape and murder of a 27-year-old vet near the southern city of Hyderabad.

Protesters and parliamentarians are pressing for courts to fast-track rape cases and demanding tougher penalties. The woman attacked and burned yesterday morning was in a critical condition, according to D S Negi, a doctor at the Civil Hospital in Lucknow, the capital of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. She had been on her way to catch a train in Unnao district to attend a hearing when she was doused with kerosene and set on fire, police said.

“As per victim’s statement five people were involved in setting her on fire, including the one who was accused in the rape case,” Vikrant Vir, a police superintendent in Unnao, told Reuters. All five men have been detained, Uttar Pradesh police said in a tweet. Police documents seen by Reuters showed the woman had filed a complaint before the police in March alleging that she had been raped at a gunpoint on Dec 12, 2018. Having been subsequently jailed, the alleged rapist was released last week after securing bail, police officer S K Bhagat said in Lucknow.

Uttar Pradesh is India’s most populous state and has become notorious for its poor record regarding crimes against women, with more than 4,200 cases of rape reported there in 2017 - the highest in the country. The Uttar Pradesh state government, currently controlled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), came under fire in July from opposition groups accusing it of protecting a lawmaker accused of rape. — Reuters

Japanese doctor made Afghan deserts green, until deadly attack

TOKYO: Tetsu Nakamura, the Japanese doctor and aid worker killed in Afghanistan on Wednesday, was inspired to make the country’s deserts green by the deaths of children in a clinic he ran in a drought-stricken rural area. “You’d hear a child screaming in the waiting room, but by the time you got there they’d be dead,” he told NHK television in an October program. “That happened almost every day. They were so malnourished that things like diarrhea could kill them... My thinking was that if those patients had had clean water and enough to eat, they would have survived.”

His death in a Wednesday attack by unknown gunmen who killed the doctor and five others working with him left both Afghanistan and Japan in mourning. Born in western Japan, Nakamura, 73, trained as a doctor and answered a 1984 recruitment call to work in a clinic treating leprosy in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, attracted by the region’s stark beauty. He began treating Afghan refugees who were pouring over the border in the wake of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which led to him opening a clinic in that country in 1991. “I couldn’t ignore the Afghans,” he said.

Following a devastating 2000 drought which brought scores of starving and ill people to his clinic, he first helped bore wells and then came up with the idea of an irrigation canal, inspired by similarities between Japanese and Afghan rivers. In 2003 - the same year Nakamura was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award, often called Asia’s Nobel - construction began. After six grueling years of labor, much of it by hand and in temperatures as high as 50 Celsius, the canal was finally completed.

Since then, some 16,000 hectares of desert has been brought back to life, making Nakamura such a widely revered figure in Afghanistan that earlier this year he became the first foreigner awarded Afghan citizenship. “As a doctor, nothing is better than helping patients and sending them home,” and re-greening the desert did the same for rural Afghanistan, Nakamura told NHK. “A hospital treats patients one by one, but this helps an entire village...I love seeing a village that’s been brought back to life.” — Reuters
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Birdcages, pearls galore at Chanel fashion show

See Page 20
Chanel turned little gilded birdcages into handbags on the catwalk in Paris on Wednesday, at an annual ‘Metier D’Art’ fashion showcase of its most intricate craftwork that also included lacy creations and shiny tweed suits. The French couture house recreated the Parisian apartment where founder Coco Chanel lived in the early 1900s and where collections were once presented, as models strutted down a reconstruction of its famed winding staircase. Kaia Gerber, the daughter of supermodel Cindy Crawford, showed off a logo-strewn, black and white ensemble that included a wispy, short skirt, while other models also paraded down the runway in monochrome outfits.

Some wore long strings of pearls, while one dress was entirely embroidered in the semi-precious stones, in a spectacular, twirling pattern. Rhinestones and golden buttons added pizzazz to jumpsuits and jackets, while many looks carried intricate flower embroideries and ruffles. Actresses Marion Cotillard and Penelope Cruz were among stars on the front row at the show, which was designed by Virginie Viard, successor to Chanel's long-time creative chief Karl Lagerfeld, who died in February.—Reuters
When “Silly Piggy” appeared in China’s popular WeChat social media app, the sticker became an instant hit, with people sending it more than 30 million times in its first month to express their feelings in text messages. Stickers like the mischievous cartoon pig and other quirky creatures are all the rage in China, giving the artists behind them a way to make money and win fans—as long as they stay within the bounds of censorship.

The creator of Silly Piggy, River Rui, was able to leave her office job with a design firm and set up as an independent artist thanks to the success of the character. “‘Silly Piggy’ is more like how I am in my little world, how I interact with my friends, it’s that ‘Silly Piggy’ kind of style,” Rui told AFP. The pig has many moods: he types furiously at his desk as tears stream down his face. He lays flat on the office floor as his spirit leaves his body. “Basically anyone who has done overtime will have the same feelings as him,” said Rui as she doodled on a scrap of paper in a Shanghai cafe.

Unlike memes and animated GIFs popular outside China, instant messaging stickers are often original creations of local artists who can see their little characters enjoy spectacular popularity among the country’s 847 million mobile internet users and spread offline through commercial licensing deals. “Friends feel proud of me when people they know share my stickers and they tell them ‘I know the person who made those’ and they feel proud. It’s really flattering and makes me very happy,” Rui said. “It’s like a dream.”

Now more than two-thirds of her income comes from her cartoon pig, through licensing and selling merchandise online, including soft toys and keychains of Silly Piggy. WeChat also allows people to send money to the artists directly via the application. Some, like Rui, have a loyal following. Scores of excited fans queued up for Rui’s autograph at a recent fan meeting in a fashionable Shanghai mall with a pop-up Silly Piggy merchandise stall. “It’s so cute and it reflects how young office workers feel inside,” said 23-year-old fan Yang Hao. “Even though it’s grumbling it can still express that in a really lively and vivid way.”

**Popular in Asia**

Stickers are also popular in other parts of Asia. In Japan, the LINE messaging service has launched 4.9 million sets of stickers, including officially-approved cartoon versions of famous characters from Harry Potter to Mickey Mouse. South Korea’s largest messaging app KakaoTalk introduced its first set of emotions in November 2011 and now boasts 7,500 sets that generally cost 2,000 won ($1.70) each.

WeChat stickers are subject to strict censorship—like all online content in the Communist-ruled country. To be approved by the platform, stickers must not violate rules such as harming the nation’s honor, disturbing social order or inciting unlawful assembly and protest, according to WeChat’s regulations. After people drew unflattering comparisons between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Winnie the Pooh, stickers of the popular portly bear became unavailable for download on WeChat.—AFP
Billy Dee Williams didn’t know what ‘gender fluid’ meant

The 82-year-old actor caused a stir last week when he said he sees himself as “feminine as well as masculine” but he has insisted his comments were misunderstood and he doesn’t view himself as not having a fixed gender. He told The Undisputed: “Well, first of all, I asked last night, I said, ‘What the hell is gender fluid?’ That’s a whole new term.’ “But what I was talking about was about men getting in touch with their softer side of themselves.”

Charlize Theron hits out at Harvey Weinstein

The ‘Bombshell’ star has hit out at the disgraced producer - who has been the subject of dozens of accusations of sexual misconduct - and claimed he had “no limit” to the way he would try and makes actresses feel they were in competition. Discussing how he would pit women against each other so he could stay on top, Charlize told the New York Times newspaper: “Yeah, and he did that to everybody. Pitting women against each other? He was really, really good at that.”

R Kelly’s girlfriend says the account in her name is fake

Posts on the page promised last month that Joycelyn Savage would make daily posts on the paid platform about the disgraced singer - who is facing numerous charges for sexual offences - and it was subsequently alleged he had kept her locked up “like an animal” and forced her to have two terminations at his house, but she has issued a statement in which she vowed to “never betray” the “I Believe I Can Fly” hitmaker or destroy their “special” bond. She said in a video shared to TMZ: “Please do not believe what you see and hear on social media. That is not my Instagram. Someone is impersonating me. I just want everyone to know we still support him and we would never betray him. Me and Azriel [Clary] will forever love him. I am not even that kind of girl that would do something like that and betray him. I’ve been through so much with him and we have a bond that is so special that no one ever can break. I would never in a million years hurt him like this. I would never do this. It’s just really really sad that somebody would pretend to be me and put it out in the world and say that I’m a victim, that I am brainwashed, I’m a sexual slave — it doesn’t get worse than that.”

Ashley Graham has been having acupuncture

The 32-year-old model - who is expecting a baby boy with her husband Justin Ervin - credits the procedure with helping her body "feel good" throughout her pregnancy. She shared a slideshow of videos showing the needles in her face and captioned the Instagram post: "I have been doing acupuncture throughout my whole pregnancy and I have to say it’s been keeping my body feeling so good! Yesterday Sandra @treatmentbylanshin did a little face sculpting with the needles and I love the results(sic)." In the first video, Ashley explained: “We are sculpting into my cheek, into my jawline.” Acupuncturist and founder of Treatment by Lanshin, Sandra Lanshin, added: “Getting the muscle tension out. And then we’re going to sculpt, sculpt, sculpt.” In the next clip, Ashley shook her face so the needles - which resembled a green beard - wobbled and shouted: “Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas!” The third video documented Sandra removing the needles as her client joked about the bleeding. She said: “It’s worth the sculpt.” The model recently admitted she has had “terrible days” worrying about her appearance after gaining 40lbs during her pregnancy.
Ray J admits Princess
Love is 'still mad' at him

The 'One Wish' hitmaker has opened up after his model wife accused him of leaving her and their 17-month-old daughter Melody "Stranded" in Las Vegas - which he denied - last month and despite her claim he would file for divorce, the singer confirmed they are still together. Speaking to PEOPLE magazine, he said: “Well, first off, let me say, Princess, I love you, baby, and I'm sorry for all the things that happened. “We cool now and we'll work it out. I know that you still made me at, but as a couple, you go through things and it just got a little bit out of hand. “Sometimes it gets out to the public and then everybody has their opinion on it, but we’re good though, as parents and as friends and as husband and wife. We just went through something.” The public row was sparked after the ‘Sexy Can I’ singer shared a photo of himself and his family posing on the red carpet at the BET Soul Train Awards in Las Vegas. In the now-deleted post, Ray wrote: “Thank you @bet #SoulTrainAwards @princesslove @melodylovenorwood (sic)” Princess - who is due to give birth to their second child in a few weeks - then commented: “Left me and Melody stranded in Vegas and blocked me from calling.. now you wanna post family photos,” she wrote with a laugh-crying emoji and the hashtag #ByeUgly. (sic)

Felicity Jones is pregnant

The ‘Rogue One: A Star Wars Story’ actress and her husband Charles Guard are expecting their first child together, a representative for the actress has confirmed to PEOPLE. The news comes just over a year after the 36-year-old actress and the 43-year-old director tied the knot. Felicity and Charles married in June last year, 13 months after getting engaged following two years of dating. They pair married in a secret ceremony at Sudeley Castle in the Cotswolds, south west England, in front of guests including A-list pals Eddie Redmayne - who Felicity starred alongside in ‘The Theory of Everything’, and is acting opposite in new motion picture ‘The Aeronauts’ - and Tom Hanks. The castle closed its grounds to the public early on the Saturday to accommodate the ceremony, where Felicity is said to have made a speech. The couple have largely kept their romance private in the time they have been together, but Felicity admitted last month she loves the “stability” that marriage brings to her life. She said: “It’s a joy. It’s wonderful to have such stability in a very changeable profession.” And she previously admitted to being a “romantic” at heart. She said: “I am definitely romantic and I love romantic stories - that’s why I keep making romantic movies. “It’s funny how seeing a love story gives people a similar confidence boost when they use it.

Lady Gaga wants to have children in the next decade

The 33-year-old singer has “crazy” plans for the future and hopes to be very busy in both her personal and professional life. Asked what she thinks will happen for her in the next 10 years, she told YouTube outlet NikkieTutorials “More music, not retiring any time soon... all kinds of different music. “I wanna do more movies, I wanna have babies and I want to continue to build the behemoth that is Haus Laboratories into the makeup company of my dreams. “I’m living my inspirations right now, in this moment. When I get inspired, I do things right away.” There will be tons of crazy things that I do over the next decade. I just don’t know exactly what they are, which is why they’ll be extra crazy.” During the video segment, the ‘Star is Born’ actress showed off products from her Haus Laboratories cosmetics range and explained how her passion for makeup-up and its ability to transform led to creating her pop star alter ego, Gaga - whose real name is Stefani Germanotta - said: “I love make-up. I’ve discovered myself through make-up, that’s what made me feel beautiful, that’s what made me invent Lady Gaga, because I looked in the mirror and I was like, ‘I don’t like what I see and I don’t feel good on the inside, so I’m just gonna start painting now, and I’m gonna make something that I like.’ And the ‘Shallow’ hitmaker hopes her own product range gives people a similar confidence boost when they use it.

Ian Somerhalder lost virginity at 13

The 40-year-old actor – who now has two-year-old daughter Bodhi with wife Nikki Reed - has spilled the details of the first sexual encounter he had with a woman who was 16. Speaking to Andy Cohen on his SiriusXM show ‘Radio Andy’, Ian admitted: “It was fun.” Andy then asked: “Was that when your sexual life started?” To which he replied: “When you’re 13 and you’re a boy ... boys are pretty naive on it.” The ‘Vampire Diaries’ alum also confessed that he used to spy on his older brother, who is seven years old than him when he had women in his bedroom and that he learnt a lot about pursuing girls from his “Casanova” sibling. He said: “He taught me a lot, and he was quite a Casanova. “He used to have girls in his bedroom all the time and what I did was, I went into the bottom corner of his window and I pinched the Venetian blinds. I pinched the blinds down so I’d have a clear view. “I’d go outside and I’d watch, and I learned a lot.” The father-of-one also admitted that he thinks it’s "vastly unfair" that boys and girls are treated differently by their parents when it comes to them explaining sex and relationships. He said: “It’s so vastly unfair. All my friends who are guys who have sons are like, ‘Yeah, you’re going to get a date, yeah,’ while all the dads with daughters are like, ‘I will kill these little ba***ds.’ It’s so vastly unfair.”
In the Palestinian enclave of Gaza, without a cinema for 30 years, a few hundred people walk the red carpet to a rare film screening—held on the street. The opening of the Red Carpet Human Rights Film Festival on Wednesday evening had been expected to take place inside the Amer Cinema, which has been abandoned for three decades. But it was moved at the last minute in unclear circumstances, with a screen erected in the street outside the cinema, a grey building with the letters peeling off. The festival’s executive director, Muntaser Al-Sabaa, said organizers had been told by the cinema’s owners that they could no longer use it as a venue. “Suddenly they told us: ‘We are sorry but the situation is dangerous’. They said: ‘We are afraid’. What happened is incomprehensible. We don’t know who told this partner to block the permit to open the cinema.” The organizers said that they had obtained the necessary permits to host the festival in the cinema. The Gaza Strip is run by Islamist movement Hamas, which enforces rules based on a strict conservative interpretation of Islam. Since seizing control in 2007 they have prevented events they consider immoral. The interior ministry in Gaza did not respond to a request for comment.

The week-long festival was scheduled to show 45 documentaries and is part-funded by the Palestinian Authority, based in the West Bank and dominated by the rival Fatah movement of president Mahmud Abbas. “We chose Amer cinema for its strong symbolism and to send a message that cinema buildings still exist in Gaza and people have the right to enjoy shows,” Sabaa said. The enclave of two million people has not had a working cinema since the last ones closed during the first Palestinian intifada, or uprising, in the late 1980s. Gaza is still recovering from the last of three wars between Hamas and Israel in 2014.

“Unique feel”

In the end around 200 people sat outside to watch the opening film, the documentary “Gaza” by Irish directors Andrew McConnell and Garry Keane. The film, which documents the lives of a number of Palestinians over several years, has won critical acclaim. With a chill in the air, at times the audience clapped, while others looked saddened by the tale of daily woes in the Israeli-blockaded territory. “I came with my wife and daughter to watch,” said Fathi Omar. “I was hoping to see the opening film on the screen (inside).” “When we travel to Egypt, we go to the cinema to see the new films. The cinema has a unique feel.”

Actress and theatre director Dania Ziara said that she was happy that the screening had gone ahead. “But I would have been even happier if the show was in the cinema. In the street it is very noisy,” Jonathan Conlon, representative of Ireland in Palestine, told AFP. It was “very special to attend the screening of a film made by two Irishmen who were able to overcome so many obstacles to complete this extraordinary documentary of life in Gaza. “More than anything, I think, the film shows the great humanity - and the hopes - of ordinary Gazans.” —AFP
Egypt archaeologist Hawass sees role as ‘custodian’ of antiquities

Standing at the foot of the towering Great Sphinx of Giza, Zahi Hawass revealed his reputation as an indefatigable yet controversial figure in the enigmatic world of Egyptology. With the early morning sun-kissed pyramids behind him, the 72-year-old dubbed ‘the Egyptian Indiana Jones’ posed casually for photos sporting his trademark cowboy hat. “This is a real archaeologist’s hat. Harrison Ford’s was a fake,” he joked with AFP, referring to the American actor and star of the Indiana Jones movies. Hawass, who has appeared in dozens of documentaries about ancient Egypt, is himself a star attraction for a luxury archaeological tour organized by an operator based in Poland.

A larger-than-life character, who sees himself as "the custodian of Egyptian antiquities", he evokes in the same breath ancient deities and hierarchals as well as his own name. Regaling tour participants with stories of his archaeological adventures, he boasts of his international achievements and cheerfully poses for selfies. The high-energy show is all part of his combative performance for the eager crowd who forked over almost 10,000 US dollars each for two weeks of travel basking in his knowledge on all things Pharaonic.

'I found my passion'

Despite his swagger, Hawass says he never once imagined he would have such a meteoric rise in the often dry and dusty world of archaeology. “When I was young, I wanted to be a lawyer...I was a very bad student,” he told AFP. On a whim, a few friends advised him to study archaeology, and he fell instantly in love.

One day while out on a dig everything clicked when he uncovered a statue, “I thought to myself, I found my passion,” he said. Today several decades later, he divides his time between digs in southern Egypt, his Cairo office, a daily sports workout and a multitude of prestigious conferences both at home and abroad. But his flamboyant showmanship when enthusiastically unearthing Egypt’s ancient treasures to a global audience has ruffled many in his esteemed academic community.

Some peers accuse him of being a business man cashing in on his celebrity. And he admits that $150 per entrance ticket to one of his conferences is a little steep. But to those who accuse him of lacking empirical rigor in his fieldwork, he hits back and points to his many awards. “I have made some major discoveries,” he said citing the tombs of the pyramid builders in Giza in the 1990s or the golden mummies of Bahariya Oasis, eastern Egypt, in 1996.

Fayza Hakal, professor of Archeology at the American University of Cairo (AUC), said his research methods are “serious”; “Like all stars, he has his fans and detractors,” she said. Heguard Sourouzian, a renowned Armenian archaeologist working in Upper Egypt, is more generous in his assessment. He maintains Hawass has been a dynamic “engine” for Egyptology, translating to lucrative research grants from governments and funding bodies.

“Ambassador for archaeology”

Hawass was head of Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities from 2002 to 2011 and then briefly minister of antiquities in early 2011. It was a portfolio especially created for him. But he had to give it up right after the 2011 revolution that unseated long-time autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

Employees hurled abuse at him amid charges of nepotism and accusations of smuggling antiquities overseas. As he was escorted out of the Egyptian Museum, he left in a haze of corruption allegations along with other Mubarak allies. A case brought against him was overturned and the charges dropped on legal technicalities.

Hawass maintains his innocence and boasts that the case never made it to court.

Under President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, he remains an influential figure in the said. He is effusive in his praise of the general-turned-politician saying he “saved Egypt”. There have been rumors of a bitter rivalry between him and the current minister of antiquities, Khaled El-Enany, but Hawass dismisses such talk saying his successor is “doing a very good job”. “Enany, when he came he depended on the people that I trained,” he said. “And he calls me for advice all the time.” — AFP

Immersive movie technology gets US debut with the new ‘Jumanji’ adventure

Moviegoers have been offered rolling seats, 3D glasses and even rain and smells in recent years as theater chains seek to fill seats. Now comes an immersive experience that gets moviegoers to movie theaters, and ICE is unique experiences is a way to draw increasing competition for audiences from theater chains seek to fill seats. Now comes an immersive experience, with action films working best.

“The films on ICE must be the films that have action, color and movement,” said Josephine Roux, managing director of CGR Cinemas. “It really needs movement of the camera - Mission Impossible, ‘Jumanji’, films like that.” The technology is coming to the United States as movie theaters face competition for audiences from streaming platforms like Netflix and Disney+. “We do believe that providing unique experiences is a way to draw moviegoers to movie theaters, and ICE is a great example of that, and this is an experience you can’t get at home,” said Shively. — Reuters

Bye-bye, birdie: Study finds North American birds getting smaller

Since 1978, researchers have scooped up and measured tens of thousands of birds that died after crashing into buildings in Chicago during spring and fall migrations. Their work has documented what might be called the incredible shrinking bird. A study published on Wednesday involving 70,716 birds killed from Wednesday involving 70,716 birds killed from 1978 through 2016 in such collisions in the third-largest US city found that their average body sizes steadily declined over that time, though their wingspans increased.

The results suggest that a warming climate is driving down the size of certain bird species in North America and perhaps around the world, the researchers said. They cited a phenomenon called Bergmann’s rule, in which individuals within a species tend to be smaller in warmer regions and larger in colder regions, as reason to believe that species may become smaller over time as temperatures rise.

The study focused on 52 species - mostly songbirds dominated by various sparrows, warblers and thrushes - that breed in cold regions of North America and spend their winters in locations south of Chicago. The researchers measured and weighed a parade of birds that crashed into building windows and went splat onto the ground. Over the four decades, body size decreased in all 52 species. The average body mass fell by 2.6%. Leg bone length dropped by 2.4%. The wingspans increased by 1.3%, possibly to enable the species to continue to make long migrations even with smaller bodies.

"In other words, climate change seems to be changing both the size and shape of these species," said biologist Brian Weeks of the University of Michigan’s School for Environment and Sustainability, lead author of the study published in the journal Ecology Letters. “Surely everyone agrees that the climate is warming, but examples of just how that is affecting the natural world are only now coming to light,” added Dave Willard, collections manager emeritus at the Field Museum in Chicago who measured all the birds.

The study provides fresh evidence of worrisome trends for North American birds. A study published in September documented a 29% decline in the population drop in the United States and Canada since 1970 and a net loss of about 2.9 billion birds. “I think the message to take away is this,” Weeks said. “As humans change the world at an unprecedented rate and scale, there are likely widespread and consistent biotic responses to environmental change.” — Reuters
Santa Claus dives into a hot climate issue in aquarium

In a change of scene, Santa Claus is donning flippers and a diving mask along with his traditional red-and-white outfit to scuba dive in a Paris aquarium as he teaches kids about global warming and climate issues during the festive season. The aquatic Santa, a professional diver and biologist, may be found swimming among the fish and even a zebra shark every day during the holiday weeks. The show is part of the aquarium's activities aimed at educating children about environmental issues including global warming, loss of biodiversity and extreme weather as a result of climate change.

“Children are the future,” said Alexandre Dalloni, one of the aquarium’s scientists. “The planet is also here for children to inherit, so it’s those of a very young age which we can teach ... to tell them that everyone is responsible for preserving the planet for the future.”

Dalloni added that swimming with the shark was safe for Santa. “The shark is an animal which isn’t going to attack a human for no reason. There are attacks, but they’re accidental,” he told Reuters. Assuming all remains peaceful in the tank, scuba-diving Santa will be in residence until Jan 5. — Reuters

Award-winning UK film upends bloody shame

The award-winning short film, “My Time”, was inspired by seeing a friend being bullied at school for having a period stain on her clothes, its director Giulia Gandini said. The young girl had just started her first period but the teacher refused to allow her to use the toilet during class - a rule that applies to seven out of 10 girls in Britain today, according to the children’s charity Plan International. “I wish that I had seen this film when I was 12,” the London-based director, who grew up in Italy, said at a screening on Tuesday. “I developed this relationship to menstrual blood that was very negative.”

Gandini’s film is the latest to tackle the stigma around menstruation, following last year’s Bollywood movie “Padman” and the Netflix documentary “Period. End of Sentence” - which won an Oscar this year. Shame can be deadly. In Nepal, the centuries-old Hindu practice of “chhaupadi”, where women are banished from their homes during their periods, has led to numerous deaths from suffocation and snake bites.

Despite government schemes to provide free sanitary products in British schools, “period shaming” persists, with one in three women saying they have been bullied, isolated or joked about over “the curse”, research by the charity ActionAid found. “It was a deliberate choice to set it in the UK - you still have this kind of shame and taboos,” said Gandini, adding that she only “started questioning why I was feeling so awful about something so natural” years after her friend’s humiliation. Gandini said her goal as a filmmaker is to dispel stigmas and show the reality of young women’s lives in a positive light.

“Films don’t only reflect culture but they have the power to shape it,” she said, highlighting negative comments she received from men while making the film, with some asking, “Why should I care about menstrual blood?” “My Time” has won multiple awards, including at the Chicago International Children’s Film Festival, London’s TweetFest and Sweden’s BUFF International Film Festival. Gandini said her film has a happier ending than the event she witnessed at school, with a clear feminist message of “being proud of who you are”. — Reuters

Peloton exercise bike’s latest TV advert draws scathing reaction

With the latest ad portraying a woman thanking her husband for giving her an exercise bike for Christmas, social media users have heaped ridicule on Peloton Interactive. “Nothing says ‘maybe you should lose a few pounds’ like gifting your already rail thin life partner a Peloton,” one Twitter user said, as others piled on to scorn the commercial, which is set in a large, richly furnished home. Many note that Peloton bicycles are worth at least $2,245 and require a paid subscription to the video exercise classes.

“Before you buy a Peloton, you must have a luxurious home with a spotless picture window so everyone can see you work out,” another commentator noted. The ad, which ends with the couple watching the woman’s video montage about her year of exercise, has been broadcast nearly 7,000 times since its appearance on November 4, costing about $13.8 million, according to the specialized site tSpot.tv. It has been viewed more than 600,000 times on YouTube, and also is featured at some US movie theaters in the pre-show packages.

Others commentators wonder about the family dynamic portrayed. “But she’s the only one exercising. He just sits on the couch and watches video of her exercising,” said another Twitter user, Peloton, which aims to revive stationary bicycles and treadmills from their role as clothes hangers, by combining them with online sessions led by dynamic and smiling young instructors, has been routinely criticized for its marketing featuring luxurious apartments and models with perfect physiques.

While some on Twitter could not contain their visceral hatred of the commercial - “Every time it plays my blood boils,” one said - others noted that the campaign was a success since people are talking about it. “Someone in the marketing department did a good job.” After a difficult Wall Street launch in late September, Peloton shares have gained ground, hitting a high point Monday night of $36.84, or 27 percent above its IPO price. — AFP

A Peloton stationary bike sits on display at one of the fitness company’s studios in New York City. — AFP

A diver clad in Santa Claus outfit performs amongst fish during a Christmas-themed underwater show at an aquarium in Seoul. — AFP Photos
Iraqi actors perform a play representing the ongoing anti-government demonstrations, in Tahrir Square in the capital Baghdad.—AFP Photos

Iraq revolution will be written, read, painted and dramatized

The pops of gunfire rang out across the protest camp in Iraq's capital. Blood-stained bodies writhed on the pavement, and smoke from burning tyres startled the captive audience's eyes. But for once in recent weeks, the scenes playing out in Baghdad's Tahrir Square were a dramatization, put on by actors who travelled 600 kilometers from the port city of Basra.

To an audience in tears, they acted out protesters railing against corruption and the lack of jobs, and filming with smartphones to broadcast the rallies live on social media. Suddenly, the actors crumpled to the ground, motionless, under a volley of tear gas canisters and live rounds.

Each actor took turns recounting the story of his “martyr,” weaving through the stunned spectators and occasionally folding into one of their hands an Iraqi tricolor labeled with the names of towns where dozens have died. The south has been particularly bloody over the last week, pushing the two-month toll to nearly 430 dead and 20,000 wounded—the vast majority of them protesters.

In a time of such hope and heartbreak, art is the answer, says 30-year-old Ali Issam, one of the actors. “Art is finally playing its true role: carrying the voice of Iraq,” he told AFP.

'Mini-ministry of culture'

As anti-government demonstrations in the capital and Shiite-majority south enter their third month, they are being turned into plays, paintings, poems and literature. Tahrir has become an art hub, a rare space for free expression in a country where conservative tribes, paramilitary forces and powerful politicians have at various points tried to snuff out criticism.

“It’s a mini-ministry of culture,” said Muslim Habib, a young director from Baghdad. Every day at dusk, he sets up a small projector in a tent on Tahrir, marked with a huge banner identifying it proudly as “Revolution Theatre.”

Inside, he screens documentaries, shorts and other works by Iraqis both at home and abroad and hopes to soon show “films from the revolutions in Ukraine, Egypt or Syria.” Rows of chairs spill out from the tent onto the pavement, packed nightly with young and old, men and women, protesters and curious onlookers.

Reading to revolt

The library is full of dozens of worn second-hand books, ranging from translated American novels and political essays to romance novels and theological works. “This is culture,” said Mustafa, the 20-year-old volunteer manager, confessing: “I especially love Dan Brown novels.” Cuddled up with a book in his hand, Mustafa said he stopped going to school at a young age so he could work to provide for his parents. Already married, he worked in a printing shop but now peddles bottles of icy water in Baghdad’s traffic-clogged streets during sweltering summers. “Reading is my way of continuing my education,” Mustafa said, insisting Tahrir should be flooded with novels for protesters.

This is the proof that we are awake, we understand what is happening and we’re trying to succeed,” he said. Youth make up a vast majority of the protesters in Tahrir, as well as 60 percent of Iraq’s 40 million people. Many have said their active roles in demonstrations disprove those dismissing them as the “PUBG generation,” a combat video game that is so popular among Iraqi youth that parents often scold them for playing it too much. “Yes, we are the PUBG generation—but we are also a cultured generation,” chuckled Mustafa, before turning back to his book.—AFP
Climate change threatens end of trail for Niger’s nomadic herders

Ali’s sharp eyes scanned the heat-shimmered horizon, searching in vain for clouds. It was noon and 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit) on the ninth day of their quest to reach new pastures. There was no tree anywhere, no shelter at all for his family, 27 sheep and six camels. “We heard that the first rain has fallen in the north. That’s where we’re going,” the turbaned herder said, as he filled up a water bottle at the side of the road. An arduous trail lay ahead: more than 100 kilometres (60 miles) across the arid wastes of southern Niger before the family reached their goal.

There at Bermo, they counted on joining thousands of other herders, spending a few months in verdant hollows on the edge of the Sahara, famous for their moist air, juicy grass and water. The annual migration of the nomadic Fulani community—also called Peuls—is a vast caravan of herder folk that tails back to neighboring Nigeria. Women and children perched on donkeys already burdened with bags of jute, plastic containers, mattresses and gourdes. Scrawny cows, sheep and goats trailed alongside in the baking heat, looking exhausted.

Vulnerable

Nomadic herders are among the world’s most exposed communities when it comes to the impact of climate change. Higher temperatures, shifting winds and moisture levels that alter rainfall patterns, sandstorms, torrential rain—all can change the quality or even the location of pasture on which migrating herders depend. This year, for the Fulani, has been relatively good. The herdsmen were able to draw on stocks of animal feed to help them survive stress points, while timely rainfall on some areas of the migration trail helped tender young grass to grow. Whether this respite endures is the big question. Niger, one of the world’s poorest countries, depends on farming, particularly herding, to provide a livelihood for 80 percent of its population. In addition to its vulnerability to climate change, the country is on the frontline of desertification—the equivalent of around 150,000 football pitches is lost each year.

Capricious

“The weather has become completely unpredictable,” said Djafarou Amadou, an engineer working for a group called the Association to Revitalize Herding in Niger (AREN). “What we fear most are pockets of drought which take people by surprise when they least expect it.” In 2018, more than 60,000 people, gathered in Bermo, celebrated when rain began to fall as early as May. But after a few weeks, the precious rain suddenly stopped. None fell for the next 30 days. The green plains turned yellow and the price of cereal fodder on local markets rocketed. Rouada Sabgari, an elderly herder, said that he had to sell off his skinniest cows at rock-bottom prices.
LIFESTYLE | FEATURE

Wodaabe women prepare their donkeys before fetching water at a well near the Sabgari Clan camp in Bermo.

Nomadic Fulani men tend to the rebuilding of a hut at a camp in Dosso.

Wodaabe woman prepares the morning meal at the Sabgari Clan camp in Bermo.

Koumbou, an elderly nomadic Fulani woman, gestures at sunset in front the hut she lives in at a Fulani camp in Dosso.

prices just to survive—a mere 5,000 CFA francs (US$8.4, 7.6 euros) per animal, compared with more than 200,000 francs at better times. Every winter, Sahgari said, he camps nearby a well dug by his grandfather more than half a century ago, six kilometers from the village of Bermo. He is part of a Fulani clan called the Wodaabe, famous for travelling extremely long distances with their herds, from Niger to the Central African Republic via Cameroon and Chad. They are also nicknamed the Mbororo, like the hardly strain of reddish, large-horned steers they drive.

There is little that Sahgari doesn’t know about survival and resilience. But he said he wondered whether his children will be able to carry on the ancient herding traditions. Successive droughts over the past 10 years have caused him to lose half of his herd. Today, he only has 32 cows—a catastrophic loss of capital for him and his 25-member family. In the Fulani culture, cattle are the measure of wealth and freedom. According to their beliefs, at the making of the world, the cow was created by God (Gueno) himself, using a drop of milk.

Lethal droughts

Seated on a mat in front of his tent, on a plain swept by winds and plastic bags snared on thorny bushes, Sahgari looked back on a life of hardship and brutal change. “In the old days, we didn’t eat cereal or meat. The milk was rich and plentiful, it made us strong. Wealth and freedom. According to their beliefs, at the making of the world, the cow was created by God (Gueno) himself, using a drop of milk.

As Sahgari spoke, he gestured at the stream of red dust that had turned his tent a muddy brown. “Today, we have fewer animals and smaller harvests and more mouths to feed,” said the engineer Amadou. Niger is the sixth poorest country in the world but has the planet’s highest fertility rate at more than seven children per woman on average.

The crunch

Dwindling harvests, relentless population pressure, climate uncertainty, pollution of underground aquifers, rivalry between herders and farmers over access to land: all this is a deadly mixture. In recent times, even in good years such as 2019, the phantom of hunger has never gone away. Harvests and livestock production are in surplus and the price of millet, sorghum and corn has fallen.

Yet despite this, between June and August, 1.2 million Nigeriens were in a position of serious food insecurity, according to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Barka Azzey, 38, is a testimony to how herder families in Niger can be ground down by repeated crises. His once-proud herd of 40 cows dwindled from hunger and diseases, leaving only scrawny beasts that gave no more milk and were unable to have calves. It was time to quit. “We didn’t have enough to eat, to buy clothes, so I took my family and we went to live in the town,” Azzey said, his voice betraying sadness.

He became a watchman, living with his wife Rabi and their five children in the grounds of a wealthy trader in Maradi, Niger’s second largest town. On the floor of his hut, three thin chickens rested in the shadow of a satellite dish where clothes were stretched out to dry. Azzey earns a meagre 20,000 CFA francs (US$34, 30 euros) a month, and to feed the children has to buy food on credit at the local grocery store. “There’s nothing good in towns. Just despair,” Azzey said. He is fixated by one idea—“to earn enough money to rebuild my herd and get my old life back.”

Exodus

Azzey is just one of innumerable young Nigeriens who have turned their backs on the harsh life of herding to try their luck in the cities. In cities across West Africa, you can see these young men huddling for a few bank notes, offering to shine your shoes, sell you a SIM card for your phone or some medicinal remedy. Many become caught in the poverty spiral, and have no way out. AREN, the British charity Oxfam and other NGOs have set up programs in rural areas that seek to stem this human haemorrhage.

One such scheme is a dairy, set up in the village of Bermo, which employs 300 people, mainly women, to produce yoghurt and cheese that are then sold at the local market. Help such as this has been a boon to Hadiza Attahirou, 39, who for 15 years went to Mali or Senegal to work for a few months to earn a little money. She received two cows under a help scheme—a small income, but a lifeline. “I can ease the burden for my husband when he goes off with the herds and pay my daughter’s school fees,” she said. Others have benefited from micro-credit to buy farming tools or sewing machines.

Store the good times

The wheel of time turns, in the Fulani year, to Gerewol—a grand festival to mark the end of the rainy season. In Fulani folklore, this is a time to breathe and take into account life’s blessings. Food is plentiful and the flanks of the animals are fat. Nomadic clans arrive in Bermo from across the Sahel. Bonds of friendship and love are renewed. Weddings and births are celebrated.

The ageless rituals of courting are renewed once more, as men—faces painted, their hair in locks and bodies decorated with magical charms—dance for the women.

Like their animals who have grown fat on the grass of Bermo, the Fulani will also stock up on this moment. Tomorrow, they will set out once more on the trail. They will draw on memories of these days of comradeship, love and fun—a precious fund to sustain them in the perils that lie ahead. Before them lies farmace-like heat. Grass that will unexpectedly wither and die. Water holes that become parched. And they will be doomed to walk further and further, in search of those elusive clouds.—AFP
Rap mogul Jay-Z marks his 50th birthday with return to Spotify

Rap mogul Jay-Z celebrated his fiftieth birthday on Wednesday by putting his catalog back on streaming giant Spotify, after a two-year hiatus. The billionaire artist, who owns rival streaming service Tidal, had pulled the majority of his discography from Spotify in 2017, months before dropping his “4:44” album exclusively on his own upstart platform.

The introspective album prompted a surge of interest in the paid subscription service Tidal—which also exclusively carries his megastar wife Beyoncé’s much-touted visual album “Lemonade”—briefly becoming a top downloaded app.

Fans can now stream “4:44” on Spotify for the first time, along with classics like “The Blueprint,” “American Gangster” and “Watch the Throne.” The rapper has the second-most top albums in the history of Billboard’s rankings chart with 14, bested only by The Beatles, who have 19. “Happy Birthday, Hov,” Spotify tweeted Wednesday, using a nickname of the rapper born Shawn Carter, who grew up in one of Brooklyn’s most notorious housing projects.

There was no indication how long Jay-Z’s flow would remain available on Spotify, which has often come under fire from prominent artists including Prince, Taylor Swift and Thom Yorke for its royalty system, which many musicians say leaves them underpaid. In June, Forbes declared Hov rap’s first billionaire, estimating $1 billion of his vast fortune came from Tidal. As of 2016, Tidal said it had 3 million users. Today, Spotify says it has 248 million users, including 113 million who pay for premium service.—AFP

First glimpse of latest Bond film goes online

Car chases, machine gun fire and love interest: fans of James Bond on Wednesday got their first taste of the upcoming film featuring the fictional British superspy, “No Time To Die.” A trailer on the official 007 Twitter account shows sharp-suited Bond, played by British actor Daniel Craig, evading capture in his Aston Martin sports car and jumping off a viaduct. Making a return alongside the swag secret agent is actress Lea Seydoux, whose character Madeleine Swann provided the obligatory love interest in the last film, “Spectre” (2015).

“Why would I betray you?” she asks Bond as they hurtle through narrow streets at breakneck speed while being shot at. “We all have our secrets,” Bond replies. “We just didn’t get to yours yet.”

The 25th instalment of the British spy saga, due out in April, sees Bond drawn out of retirement in Jamaica by his old friend and CIA agent Felix Leiter. He is asked to embark on a treacherous mission to rescue a kidnapped scientist, according to Universal Pictures. Rami Malek, who won a best actor Oscar for his depiction of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury in “Bohemian Rhapsody”, plays the villain in the long-awaited movie.

Craig, 51, who had to undergo minor ankle surgery after an injury on set, is expected bow out after eight years as agent 007. The trailer introduces a new rivalry between the ageing Bond and a new spy, played by British actress Lashana Lynch.

“And now the world’s moving on, Commander Bond,” she says to 007, warning him to “stay in your lane.” British actress and writer Phoebe Waller-Bridge (“Fleabag”) was involved in the script to help improve the portrayal of women, after repeated claims of misogyny and sexism. —AFP

Instagram to require birth dates in move to block underage use

Instagram said Wednesday it would require new users to verify they are at least 13 when they join the visually focused, Facebook-owned social network. The move aims to help Instagram comply with a US law and its own policies that require any user to be at least 13. “Asking for this information will help prevent underage people from joining Instagram, help us keep young people safer and enable more age-appropriate experiences overall,” an Instagram blog said. The company said the age information would not be visible to others but would help in creating “age-appropriate and safer experiences” on the social network with more than a billion users.

It was not immediately clear how Instagram would protect against young people providing false information, which has been a persistent issue for social media. The announcement came a day after a TechCrunch article which noted that Instagram did not follow the example of most of its social media peers in checking the ages of users, which could put the network in violation of the Child Online Privacy Protection Act. The article noted that Facebook and Instagram both employed moderators who may lock the accounts of any users they suspect are under 13.—AFP

‘The rapist is you’: Chile hymn against sexual violence goes viral

Thousands of women have mobbed the National Stadium in Chile’s capital for a flash demonstration of sexual violence—the latest performance of a battle-cry that has seized public attention during weeks of national unrest. Women of all ages from around Santiago, dressed in black and wearing red scarves and blindfolds, converged on the sporting venue in the early evening after a call-out on social media networks. “The fault is not with me, nor where I was, nor how I was dressed... The rapist is you!” the group sang, stomping their feet and waving their arms in a choreographed routine that has in recent weeks been staged around the country and around the world.

Similar performances have been staged by women as far away as Paris, Barcelona and Mexico City. “It was a great experience to share this with thousands and thousands of women,” 66-year-old Jacqueline Santisteban told AFP after Wednesday’s demonstration. First created by the feminist collective La Tesis, based in the Chilean seaside town of Valparaiso, the performance began to be emulated after reports of police violence against women and as countrywide demonstrations against the government gained steam.—AFP
Aries (March 21-April 19)

Plan a special outing with someone near and dear to your heart. Special time with someone you love will be very emotionally satisfying to you today. You are a loving mood. You are focused on building a stronger relationship and you will find this very satisfying. This is the ideal time to tap into your creative energy. Look around for a need that is not being met. The answer could be a simple invention with a huge impact. Your mindset is perfect for this. You will be able to not only use your talent to benefit your needs, but also help others. This could be a win-win situation for you.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Prepare for a major event. This may put an end to your old way of life. You may find independence is a necessity now rather than a choice. You are on your own and this may mark a time of increased responsibility and accountability. Some soul searching may be in order to face this new life. Take your time and spend sometime meditating or re-examining to access your new situation. Do not ask yourself, Why me? Why you? You know why. Because you can handle any obstacle that is put in your path.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Your words have more power than you could ever imagine. Use them wisely. This is a time others will find you very persuasive. You are a natural born leader and may find yourself asked to lead the pack today. You are the key to developing future career opportunities. This may begin to present themselves to you. Choose your friends wisely and be sure to keep only those who have your best interest at heart in your circle. You may find not everyone is supportive. Jealousy and envy may rear their heads in your life. To avoid this, take some time today to spoil yourself. This will be rewarding for you.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Your peers are appreciative of your ability to be able to make constructive suggestions or to help them with practical decisions, which relate to group issues. Knowing exactly what the public wants at this time is yet another feather in your hat. Your name and reputation are spreading quickly. Expect an upgrade soon in your job identity and sense it seems that all of your dreams are coming true. Goals seem attainable now. Everything seems to be falling in your lap. You are being smiled upon and you have a new license to light and understanding on a situation.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

You have a special place in your heart for those close to you. You seem to be the one the younger generation in your life look up to and admire. Your advice and guidance may prove sought from someone who looks to you as a mentor. You may feel as if your greatest growth comes when you are helping others. Today may be one of those days you are spinning your wheels getting physical tasks accomplished. Before frustration takes hold, stop and realize your shoulder to lean on and your listening ear and wonderful advice may be a much greater accomplishment that a completion of the tasks at hand. Libra, he proud of who you and what you are to others.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Things may seem too good to be true. In an almost magical sense it seems that all of your dreams are coming true. Goals seem attainable now. Everything seems to be falling in your lap. You are being smiled upon and you have a new license to light and understanding on a situation. Today could find you doing a bit of soul-searching trying to find answers to all that fascinate you about who you are, who you have become, and where life finds you today. This is a day solutions to old problems seem to fall into your lap. You may find much support from someone close to you that truly admires your more eccentric qualities.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A need for power and control is a driving force in your life now. You long to be in control of everyone and every aspect of your world. You may find that others see you as being more assertive than usual and are caught off guard by the change in you. You find you are curious and seeking answers to subjects and mysteries you find intriguing. Today could find you doing a bit of soul-searching trying to find answers to all that fascinate you about who you are, who you have become, and where life finds you today. This is a day solutions to old problems seem to fall into your lap. You may find much support from someone close to you that truly admires your more eccentric qualities.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Your relationships seem to take on a new importance for you now. You have come to realize you gather strength from the support of those close to you. You may experience a bit of a wakeup call today. A refreshing reminder that helps you remember it is ok to put yourself first. You are not responsible for anyone’s happiness but your own. Always putting others ahead of yourself after time can cause you to be unhappy. Take some time today to spoil yourself. This will be rewarding and satisfying to you.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Lady Luck is smiling down on you. Today is one of those days that it seems you can do no wrong. Everything is going your way and you are full of happiness and energy. This is a great time to get all of your affairs in order and continue to dream big.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

There is a reason they make chocolate AND vanilla. What appeals to one may not always be appealing to the other. People are different. They have different options and different敝ick perferences on life. You may find yourself running across someone who could not be any more opposite of you. You may find someone who is perfect for you. You can always turn a negative situation into something positive. Sit and talk and have a really good time to talk this person has to bring. Make plans today for future events as you will find everything seems to fall into place. What a great day.

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Classifieds
Friday, December 6, 2019

MATRIMONIAL

Reputed high-educated Goan Catholic family girl 38 yrs. 5’3” slim, fair, good looking, convent educated graduate B.Pharma. Having her own medical pharmacy in Goa. Seeks alliance from well-established Catholic bachelor below 42 yrs. Good looking, clean habit, preferably doctor, engineer, CA or professional businessman from Kuwait/Gulf/abroad. Send details with family background and photo email: cariren@yahoo.com

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Joymon Paulose son of Paulose holder of Indian Passport No. J5343908 issued at Kuwait on 04.03.2011 permanent resident of Vithayathil house, Ayroor, Ernakulam Dist. Kerala, India and presently residing building No. 12, Block-2, Abuhalifa, Kuwait. Do hereby split my name from Joymon Vithayathil Paulose to Joymon as given name and Vithayathil Paulose as surname with immediate effect. (C 5692)

I, Heba Joymon daughter of Joymon holder of Indian Passport No. T0711766 issued at Kuwait on 23.12.2018 permanent resident of Vithayathil house, Ayroor, Ernakulam Dist. Kerala, India and presently residing building No. 12, Block-2, Abuhalifa, Kuwait. Do hereby split my name from Heba Joymon Vithayathil to Heba as given name and Joymon Vithayathil as surname with immediate effect. (C 5692)

3-12-2019

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 20 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold with light to moderate variable wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear later on.

WEATHER WARNING

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<tr>
<th>STATION</th>
<th>MAX. EXP.</th>
<th>MIN. REC.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KUWAIT CITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>KUWAIT AIRPORT</td>
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<td>09 °C</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABDALY</td>
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<td>09 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BABYAN</td>
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<td>- °C</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAHRA</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAILAKA ISLAND</td>
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<td>12 °C</td>
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<tr>
<td>SALMIYAH</td>
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<td>08 °C</td>
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<td>AHMADI</td>
<td>20 °C</td>
<td>07 °C</td>
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<td>NUWAISIB</td>
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<td>SALMY</td>
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4 DAYS FORECAST

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<th>DAY</th>
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<td>12/06</td>
<td>Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain that might be thunderous.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>12/07</td>
<td>Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thunderous.</td>
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<td>Sunday</td>
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<td>Fair and some scattered clouds will appear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>12/09</td>
<td>Partly cloudy to cloudy.</td>
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PRAYER TIMES

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<tr>
<td>Sunrise</td>
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<td>Zuhur</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunset</td>
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RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

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<th>MIN. Temp.</th>
<th>MAX. RH</th>
<th>MIN. RH</th>
<th>MAX. Wind</th>
<th>MIN. Wind</th>
<th>TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.</th>
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<tr>
<td>23 °C</td>
<td>12 °C</td>
<td>94 %</td>
<td>35 %</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>NW</td>
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PARIS: Railway workers, teachers and emergency room medics launched one of the biggest public sector strikes in France for decades yesterday, determined to force President Emmanuel Macron to abandon plans to overhaul France’s generous pension system. Transport networks in Paris and cities across France ground to a near halt as unions dug in for a protest that threatens to paralyze France for days and poses the severest challenge to Macron’s reform agenda since “yellow vest” protests erupted.

Railway and metro stations in Paris were largely deserted during the early rush hour as commuters dusted off old bicycles, turned to carpooling rides or worked from home. “What we’ve got to do is shut the economy down,” Christian Grolier, a senior official from the hard-left Force Ouvriere union, told Reuters. “People are spoiling for a fight.”

Airport workers, truck drivers, police and garbage collectors and others are all expected to join the strike at a time of widespread discontent towards Macron’s drive to make France’s economy more competitive and cut public spending. Macron wants to simplify France’s unwieldy pension system, which comprises more than 40 different plans, many with different retirement ages and benefits. Macron says the system is unfair and too costly.

He wants a single, points-based system under which for each euro contributed, every pensioner has equal rights. The battle between Macron and the unions for public support will be pivotal to the strike’s success. An Opinion poll last month showed almost half of all French opposed the reform. “For 30 years successive governments have tried to bring reform and fail because the unions cripple the country,” said 56-year-old cafe owner Isabelle Guibal. “People can work around it today and tomorrow, but next week people may get annoyed.”

Street protests

Before sunrise, riot police erected barriers in streets surrounding the president and prime minister’s offices and searched the bags of pedestrians along the Champs Elysees boulevard, ahead of a day of street protests which the government has warned may be infiltrated by violent groups. Protesters will march from the capital’s Gare du Nord to Place de la Nation in the afternoon.

Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said thousands of anarchist “black bloc” and hardcore “yellow vest” protesters were expected to wreak havoc. He ordered shops along the route to close. Some 6,000 police will be deployed, including dozens of rapid-response officers on motorbikes. The SNCF state railway said only one in 10 commuter and high-speed TGV trains would run. Train operators Eurostar and Thalys have cancelled services linking Paris with London and Brussels. The civil aviation authority asked airlines to cancel 20% of flights because of knock-on effects from the strike. In southern France, protesters blocked at least one oil facility. Power output was down at two coal-burning power plants and one gas plant as some energy workers walked out, though there were no impact on nuclear output, grid operator RTE said. Past attempts at pension reform have ended badly. Former president Jacques Chirac’s conservative government in 1995 caved into union demands after weeks of crippling protests. For Macron, this week’s showdown with strikers will set the tone for the second half of his mandate, with more difficult reforms to come, including to unemployment benefits. — Reuters
Saudi Aramco pursues war cover after attacks

Aramco looking to buy insurance against war, terror attacks

LONDON: Saudi Aramco is looking to buy insurance against war and terrorism attacks after a damaging drone and missile attack on some of its oil facilities in September, two sources said. Aramco, the world's largest oil company, has been looking for cover from insurers including those based at Lloyd's of London and elsewhere in the London market, they added. The firm is seeking cover for facilities in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, its oil heartland, where it suffered the September attacks, one of the sources said. Aramco said in the prospectus of this month's planned listing that it did not expect all risks and its cover may not protect it from terrorism or acts of war.

At the launch of the IPO, which could be the world's biggest and raise up to $25.6 billion, Aramco said that it did not expect the Sept 14 attack to have a material impact on its finances and operations. Aramco declined to comment. Available insurance options range from cover against a terror attack or sabotage through to full coverage, which includes war or civil war, along with compensation for the cost of business interruption. An initial loss estimate from the strikes on Aramco's plants was 2 billion riyals ($533 million), a third source said.

Aramco insures much of its property itself through a so-called captive insurer, Bermuda-based Stellar Insurance. Although one of the sources said Aramco also has an "excess of loss" cover with international insurers for any property damage above $200 million, this does not cover war or terror attacks, or revenue losses due to business interruption. Aramco, which said in October it had fully restored oil output after the September attacks on its facilities, did have war cover around five years ago, the source added.

"Waking up"

Companies have become nervous about attacks on their property in Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude exporter, after the strikes which temporarily shut down 5.7 million barrels per day (bpd) of Aramco's output, more than 5% of global oil supply. As well as Aramco, a Saudi petrochemical company is also looking for terror and war insurance in Eastern Province where the attacks took place, a fourth source said.

"We have received more enquiries," said Scott Bolton, director, crisis management at insurance broker Aon, adding that both domestic and international companies were checking whether they were covered for such attacks. Saudi Basic Industries Corp (SABIC), which Aramco agreed to buy in a $69.1 billion deal this year, already has war insurance, one of the sources said.

SABIC did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but said in its 2018 annual report that it "kept a close eye on emerging geopolitical interruption risks" and had added cyber insurance to its global insurance program. Riyadh and Washington have blamed the September strikes on Iran, which denies involvement. The United States has sent troops to Saudi Arabia, which it says is aimed at deterring further attacks amid heightened regional tensions.

The cost of war and terror policies in Saudi Arabia has risen by "multiples" since the attacks, one of the sources said without giving more detail on pricing. Another added that companies in the region were "waking up" to the idea. Aramco's captive insurer, Stellar, offers energy onshore and offshore property, general liability and associated business interruption cover, insurance ratings agency AM Best said.

AM Best confirmed Stellar's financial strength rating of A (excellent) with a stable outlook in October, adding that the insurer had indicated its property program had no "exposure" to the strikes. The captives have a "diversified panel of financially strong reinsurers", AM Best said.

Global reinsurers Hannover Re, Munich Re and Swiss Re, which help insurers cover large risks, declined to comment, while Aon said it did not have "visibility" into whether Aramco was seeking insurance. — Reuters

World's food prices surge, lifted by meat and vegetable oils

ROME: World food prices rose strongly in November, lifted by big jumps in prices of meat and vegetable oils, despite slightly lower cereals prices, the United Nations food agency said yesterday. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) food price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilsseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar hit a 26-month high in November, averaging 177.2 points, up 2.7% on the previous month and up 5.5% year-on-year.

FAO also predicted that cereal production would reach an all-time high of 2.714 billion tons in 2019, up 0.4% from its last forecast. The cereal price index fell 1.2% to 162.4 points, with large export supplies and strong competition among world producers weighing on wheat prices. Rice prices fell to six-month lows as new crop arrivals added pressure.

The vegetable oil price index rose 10.4% to 150.6 points, reaching its highest point since May 2018, led by firm palm oil prices, which strengthened on robust import demand, increased biodiesel use and concerns over possible supply shortages. The meat price index registered its largest month-on-month increase since May 2009, rising 4.6% percent from October to 190.5 points, with beef and sheep meat rising most strongly, lifted by demand from China and year-end holiday demand. The sugar price index averaged 181.6 points, up 1.8% percent from October, led by expectations of higher demand.

The FAO Dairy Price Index averaged 192.6 points, only 4.8% up from the previous month, accounting for a downturn in sales, pressure to meet ambitious emissions targets and challenges in deploying fully self-driving cars. — Reuters

Oil rises as OPEC weighs deeper output cuts

LONDON: Oil prices edged higher yesterday ahead of an OPEC meeting where members are expected to agree on deeper output cuts in an effort to prop up prices and prevent a glut next year. Sources told Reuters that OPEC was seeking to increase production cuts by the group and its allies by Russia by more than 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) from their current level of 1.2 million bpd. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries meets in Vienna followed by a meeting on Friday with Russia and other producers. The group is known as OPEC+.

Brent crude futures were up 21 cents, or 0.33%, to $63.21 a barrel at 1005 GMT, Brent surged 3.6% on Wednesday. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were up 1 cents to $58.44 a barrel. They settled up 4.2% on Wednesday. The OPEC+ group has been curbing output since 2017 to counter surging production from the United States, now the world's biggest oil producer thanks to a rapid growth in shale oil output. Next year, rising production in other non-OPEC countries such as Brazil and Norway threatens to add to the glut.

"We expect a constructive outcome to today's meeting in terms of a prolongation of the deal, but are not yet convinced that a strong bullish surprise with a sizeable adjustment to the target level will really transpire," Vienna-based consultancy JBC Energy said in a note. OPEC's effort to deepen cuts and increase member compliance was also driven by the group's de facto leader Saudi Arabia's hopes to see higher oil prices to support its budget and initial public offering (IPO) of state-owned Saudi Aramco.

Oil prices surged on Wednesday on expectations of deeper OPEC cuts and data showing a large drop in US crude inventories last week. But prices are still roughly where they were a week ago, as concerns about a US-China trade war persist. US President Donald Trump on Wednesday described trade talks with China as going "very well", a day after saying it could take until after next year's presidential election to complete an agreement. — Reuters

Western, Chinese consumers divided on self-driving cars

BEIJING: Automakers, ride-hailing and technology companies plowing money into the development of electric, self-driving and shared car services will find more enthusiastic consumers in China than in Europe and the United States, a survey yesterday showed. Consumers in some Western countries appear unconvinced as automakers overhaul their factories and supply chains to produce more electric cars and invest billions to develop self-driving technology, the survey by OC&C Strategy Consulting showed.

While more than 90% of Chinese residents said they would consider, were likely to or definitely would buy an electric car, only about half of the surveyed consumers in the United States were eyeing an electric car as their next purchase. In Europe, between 64% and 77% of respondents said the same. The research comes as the global auto industry is undergoing drastic changes with a downturn in sales, pressure to meet ambitious emissions targets and challenges in deploying fully self-driving cars as robustness. — Reuters
Farmers counting their losses as animals die from thirst, lack of food

NESIGWE: Livestock farmer Siphwe Moyo walks briskly under the scorching sun until she arrives at a shady tree in the middle of a parched, unplanted maize field. She is making a second check on three emaciated cows, two of which are pregnant. Moyo, 59, is relieved to see them still standing. She and her husband, Daniel, sometimes have to lift the weakened animals back to their feet three times a day in a frantic bid to keep them alive. As another drought ravages Zimbabwe, farmers in livestock-rich Matabeleland, in the country’s west, are again counting their losses as animals die from thirst and lack of food.

North reported losses of nearly 2,600 cattle over the past two months, said the headman of nearby Mhlabuyathisha village said his community had lost 18 cattle in the last three weeks. The deaths come as most rivers in the district have dried up and livestock need to travel ever-longer distances in search of water, Moyo said. Farmers started reducing their herds as the drought hit, he said, but many took action too late.

**Drying cattle**

In September and October, Matabeleland North reported losses of nearly 2,600 cattle as drought dried up water supplies and pastures, said Polex Moyo, an officer for the province’s department of veterinary services. He believes the losses will be even higher, with many livestock “in very poor condition”, he said. A year ago, by comparison, 766 cattle were lost over the same period, he said.

Cattle are dying in part because cash-strapped farmers can’t afford to buy the supplementary feed their animals need, particularly with the price surging as demand soars, said Kenneth Nyoni, a trader in agricultural inputs. A 50-kg (110 lb) bag of commercial cattle feed is now selling for a third more than a year ago, he said. Daniel Moyo said his family has already sold three goats to buy cattle feed in an effort to keep the three other 20 cattle the family owns “at risk” unless we get rains soon and they have water and grass”. Moyo’s neighbours in other villages in Nkayi District are already seeing their animals die. In Tshutsu, village head Mbulawa Sibanda says he has seen 15 cattle lost to drought in the last few weeks.

The bush is filling with rotting animals, and more will die even if rains come, he said, as pastures take time to recover. Ngwiza Khu-malo, the headman of nearby Mhlabuyathisha village said his community had lost 18 cattle in the last three weeks. The deaths come as most rivers in the district have dried up and livestock need to travel ever-longer distances in search of water, Moyo said. Farmers started reducing their herds as the drought hit, he said, but many took action too late.

**Struggling feedlots**

A project in Nesugwe village, to put cattle into feeding pens during droughts - a move that cut losses in a previous drought - also has struggled in recent years, said Moyo, who chairs the effort. When the project was first established in 2015, farmers fed animals in the pens with commercial feed, with the cost offset by the much higher price the fat cattle brought at market in a year when supplies of them were low.

The cash earned from sales then helped feed other animals, keeping more of them alive. But a devaluation of Zimbabwe’s currency in late 2016 led to the collapse of the project, as in many livestock “in very poor condition”, he said. Other 20 cattle the family owns “are at risk too unless we get rains soon and they have water and grass”. Moyo said. Moyo’s neighbours in other villages in Nkayi District are already seeing their animals die. In Tshutsu, village head Mbulawa Sibanda says he has seen 15 cattle lost to drought in the last few weeks.

Farmers - many of whom grow crops as well as raise cattle - also are struggling to afford quality seeds and fertiliser this year, local officials said. “While farmers are losing cattle in Nkayi, many families are also going for days without food and cannot afford to buy inputs to prepare for farming this year,” said Kufakwerezve Ncube, a councilor in Nkayi Urban Ward 29 and former chairman of the Nkayi Rural District Council. He called for urgent government help to supply food aid. —Reuters

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**Japan’s PM unveils $120 billion stimulus package**

**Tokyo:** Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe unveiled $120 billion in stimulus measures yesterday, to help the world’s third largest economy overcome the aftermath of recent natural disasters. The package is also aimed at helping alleviate the impact of a recent tax hike and survive a potential economic slowdown after a spending boom for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. “We will introduce a daring fiscal policy worth 13 trillion yen ($120 billion),” Abe told ministers and party leaders at the prime minister’s office.

“We have crafted a powerful policy package,” Abe added. Under the plan, the government will spend some six trillion yen on public investment after a series of natural disasters – including killer Typhoon Hagibis - caused huge damage to infrastructure, local media said. Japan’s economy has so far expanded this year, partially because of strong demand related to preparations for the Olympics, which will start in July. Some analysts warned the country may suffer a post-Olympic slump. The package is also aimed at easing the impact of the increase in consumption tax from eight percent to 10 percent, which came into effect on October 1, and helping Japanese firms prepare for a global economic slowdown due to the US-China trade dispute. The Tokyo stock market welcomed the package, with the Nikkei index up 0.71 percent and the broader Topix climbing 0.48 percent. “In particular, stimulus-related shares such as construction companies benefited from the announcement,” Toshikazu Horiuchi, a broker at Iwatsu Cosmo Securities said. But Yusuke Shimoda, economist at Japan Research Institute, warned the impact of the package would be “limited.”

“The package is likely to boost infrastructure-related businesses, but is unlikely to help reform the nation’s slow-growth economy fundamentally,” Shimoda said. The package will also include government measures to help expand exports of farm products as a trade accord between Tokyo and Washington is set to take effect next year. Kyodo News said. Among other steps, the government will help people in their 30s and 40s, who have been struggling to find work due to past economic slowdowns, to land new jobs, it said. —AFP

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**Japan cosmetic giant Shiseido gambles on ‘Made in Japan’**

**Otawara:** On wasteland once used for earthquake drills in the small town of Otawara north of Tokyo, Japanese giant Shiseido has built its first domestic factory in 36 years, hoping to capitalize on a boom for “Made in Japan” cosmetics.

The Japanese cosmetics industry faces huge competition not only from established players such as L’Oreal and Estee Lauder but increasingly also from the “K-beauty” craze coming from South Korea.

Nevertheless, Japan is more than holding its own, with exports nearly quadrupling since 2013 to $46 billion yen ($51 billion), according to finance ministry figures, nearly two-thirds of that going to China and Hong Kong. The domestic industry is also benefitting from an explosion of inbound tourism in recent years ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics - in particular a relaxing of visa requirements for Chinese tourists who helped launch the project. —Reuters

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**Business**

**Friday Times**

**Friday, December 6, 2019**
Investors remain on edge amid mixed messages from Trump

**Asian stocks climb as US and China trade deal hopes flicker**

TOKYO: Stock markets in Asia inched up yesterday on the possibility that China and the United States may soon seal a “phase one” deal to end their 17-month trade war, but conflicting messages from US President Donald Trump kept a lid on the advance. European shares are set to follow with a slightly firmer open, with the pan-regional Euro Stoxx 50 futures and London’s FTSE futures rising 0.1% each at about 0600 GMT. Hopes that an agreement would soon emerge stemmed from a Bloomberg report on Wednesday that the two sides were close to a “phase one” deal, and Trump’s remarks that the talks were “going very well” after he had earlier said it might take until late 2020 to reach an accord. “My base case scenario is the two sides reach some deal. The pressure for a deal is immense because of the economic slowdown in both countries,” said Shane Oliver, head of investment strategy and chief economist at AMP Capital Investors in Sydney. “However, we see increased volatility because policy uncertainty has become a constant.” As investors tilted towards optimism, riskier assets rose and safe havens such as the Japanese yen weakened. The broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan gained 0.5%. Japan’s Nikkei stock index rose 0.7%, Australian shares were up 1.2%, and in China, blue chips climbed 0.7%, and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng index eked out gains of 0.4%. HSBC Global Research said in a note on Wednesday analysts’ consensus estimates of Asian companies’ earnings forecasts were revised up for the first time in 18 months, and that similar turning points in recent years had paved the way for stock market recoveries. But more market turbulence is possible in the short term given Sino-US negotiations are very fluid. If China and the United States cannot reach an agreement soon, the next important date to watch is Dec 15, when Washington is scheduled to impose even more tariffs on Chinese goods. Traders are also bracing for the closely-watched US non-farm payrolls report due Friday to determine how well the US economy is holding up amid a global slowdown. Trading will likely be thin and there will be little money chasing these unpredictable trade headlines as the year-end approaches, said Robert Carnell, chief economist and head of research for Asia-Pacific at ING in Singapore. “The motivation now (for investors) is not to lose any money if you’re under water, and if you’ve made money, keep it that way,” he said. “If you haven’t positioned yet you are not going to in the next couple of weeks.” The yen traded down 0.07% at 108.77 per dollar, ceding some of the previous day’s gains as positive signs about the trade dispute hurt demand for safe-haven currencies. The yield on benchmark 10-year Treasury notes fell slightly to 1.7605% in Asia, retracing some of the gains made in the previous session. US crude edged 0.25% lower to $58.18 a barrel yesterday as a 3% rally overnight showed signs of fading. However, prices could be supported if the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, and fellow producers including Russia, approve deeper crude output cuts when they meet in Vienna today. — Reuters

**Huawei cancels new Taiwan phone launch**

TAIPEI: Tech giant Huawei has cancelled the launch of a flagship phone and watch in Taiwan after Taipei imposed a temporary ban on some of its products for listing the island as part of China. On its official Taiwan Facebook page Wednesday Chinese company Huawei said the launch of its Mate 30 Pro smartphone and its GT 2 digital watch had been cancelled due to “supply issues” after elaborating further. All those who participated in the pre-order event of the products — and express deep regret for causing you inconvenience,” the statement said, adding that users would be refunded. The cancellations came after Taiwan last month suspended sales of three Huawei models that list the self-ruled, democratic island as “Taiwan, China” for timezones and contacts. On Thursday Taiwan’s National Communications Commission (NCC) said the temporary ban of Huawei’s P30, P30 pro and Nova 5T models was based on a self-declaration by the company that it had yet to change the wording. How Taiwan is described is a hugely sensitive political issue. Beijing considers Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to seize it by force if necessary, even though the two sides have been governed separately for the last seven decades. In recent years international brands have routinely found themselves bowing to Beijing’s stance on Taiwan - a much smaller market compared to the huge mainland. A growing list of international firms, including luxury brands, airlines and hotels, have been pushed to apologize to Beijing or change Taiwan’s classification on their websites to “Taiwan, China” or “Chinese Taipei”. The authoritarian mainland has ramped up diplomatic and economic pressure on Taiwan since President Tsai Ing-wen was elected in 2016 because her party refuses to recognise that the island is part of “one China.” Pressure is building as Taiwan heads towards elections in January, with Tsai seeking to defeat an opponent who favors much warmer ties with China. Huawei, the world’s number two smartphone producer, has previously come under fire in mainland China for the opposite offence - not labeling the cities of Taipei, Hong Kong and Macau as part of China in some Chinese-language settings. The company is also fighting legal battles in the United States, saying Thursday it has petitioned a US court to overturn a ban imposed on national security grounds that prevents carriers in rural America from buying its equipment by tapping an $8.5-billion federal fund. — AFP

**India’s poor fight desperate battle to find work as slowdown bites**

NEW DELHI: The hunt for work becomes more desperate every day on Delhi's street corner labor markets as India’s economic slowdown bites deeper, piling pressure on Prime Minister Narendra Modi just half a year into his second term. With the central bank cutting interest rates five times this year - but on Thursday unable to lower them any further because of high inflation - patience was running thin at the “labour Chowk”, or market, in the packed, narrow streets of Old Delhi. Among the hundreds of painters, electricians, carpenters and plumbers who anxiously gather at dawn each day, 55-year-old painter Tehseen has been a regular for three decades. But he is increasingly dependent, and has seen sales dip - his income has slumped from about $350 dollars to $140 in the past three years. He is at least still earning. The unemployment rate, currently about 8.5 percent, has hit a four-decade high in the past two years. Tehseen blames government efforts to eradicate the tax-avoiding “unofficial economy”. A government survey this year estimated that more than 80 percent of the workforce are “unofficial”. Modi stunned the country in November 2016 by cancelling more than 80 percent of the bank notes in circulation, and the introduction a year later of a nationwide goods and services tax dealt a new blow to business confidence. Last week, official figures showed the economy grew just 4.5 percent in the second quarter, the slowest rate in six years. Modi’s rightwing government is struggling to convince the public that it has the answers to the slowdown. “Companies have suffered since the note ban,” said Tehseen. “They do not want to think about getting their offices renovated when they have no business. We have to bear the brunt now.” In Raju, a labor market carper for 20 years, said he now goes for days on end without a job offer. “The work and the money are 50 percent down on what I used to get,” he said. And lower wages means a harder time to get a meal on the table. In trouble and worried

At the Old Delhi food market, Zarina Begum said she sometimes goes home with her bags empty. “The vegetables are just too expensive,” said the 50-year-old housewife. On bad days her children get a meal of pulses, or chickpea flour with oil. Raj Kumar used to sell a meal of lentils and vegetables in his nearby restaurant for the equivalent of 56 US cents. But increased costs means he now asks 70 cents and sales have taken a hit. “I had to increase prices to keep up with expenses. But people just don’t have the money,” he said. Sandip Jain, a 45-year-old stone mason, said people might have a good opinion of Modi but they are disappointed with his handling of the economy. “Every businessman is in trouble and is worried. Those who ended their day with an income of 700 rupees (10 dollars) are now down to 270,” he said.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced reforms, including easing restrictions on foreign investment and cutting corporate taxes. But that does little to boost public confidence in a country where hundreds of millions live barely on poverty wages. The multi-nation Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development stepped up pressure on Modi yesterday by calling for India to bring down trade barriers and reform its “complex” labor laws that discourage hiring. Consumption has fallen because of the breakdown of the labor market,” Ram Kumar of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences said. He said Modi has given incentives to the private sector but companies have not responded and the economy was now worsening because the government “avoids” questions on the slowdown. Economist Sameer Narang said the government had to see through its privatization and other reforms but warned “it will be a slow recovery for India from here on”. — AFP
WASHINGTON: US services sector activity slowed in November as lingering concerns about trade tensions and worker shortages pushed production to its lowest level in a decade, which could heighten fears about the economy's health, data on Wednesday showed private employment continued manufacturing slump and second straight monthly drop in construction outlays tempered growth expectations for the fourth quarter, which had been boosted by a rush of upbeat reports on the trade deficit, housing and business investment. Still, the economy appears to be growing at a moderate pace rather than stalling. Growth is being constrained by the Trump administration's “America First” policy, which has seen the United States embroiled in a trade war with China, and tight labor markets, including retail trade and construction, which have eroded business confidence, come as the stimulus from last year's $1.5 trillion tax cut package is fading.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) said its non-manufacturing activity index fell to a reading of 53.9 last month from 54.7 in October. A reading above 50 indicates expansion in the services sector, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index dipping to a reading of 54.5 in November. The survey's production index tumbled 5.4 points to 51.6, the lowest level since November 2009, as new orders fell for the 13th straight month. The index for new orders fell to its lowest level in a decade, which could come as the stimulus from last year's $1.5 trillion tax cut package is fading. Still, the economy appears to be growing at a moderate pace rather than stalling. Growth is being constrained by the Trump administration's “America First” policy, which has seen the United States embroiled in a trade war with China, and tight labor markets, including retail trade and construction, which have eroded business confidence, come as the stimulus from last year's $1.5 trillion tax cut package is fading.

The ISM said services industry businesses “hope for a resolution on tariffs and continue to be hampered by constraints in labor resources.” It found 12 industries, including retail trade and construction, reported growth last month. Five industries, including agriculture, mining and construction, reported a contraction. But key details of the ISM report were upbeat. New orders picked up last month, though order backlogs contracted. A measure of services industry employment rose to 55.5 from 53.7 in October. This supports economists' expectations that the government's closely watched employment report on Friday would show a sharp rebound in job growth in November, despite the palpable job gains reported by private employers last month. Private employers added only 62,000 jobs in November, the ADP National Employment report showed on Wednesday. It was the smallest monthly gain since May when just 46,000 jobs were created, the fewest since 2010, and continued a trend of decelerating job growth that has taken hold this year. Data for October was revised down to show private payrolls increasing 121,000 from an originally reported 125,000 gain. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast private employment rising by 140,000 jobs in November. The ADP figures come ahead of the Labor Department's more comprehensive nonfarm payrolls report due out on Friday, which includes both public- and private-sector employment.

According to a Reuters survey of economists, nonfarm payrolls probably increased by 180,000 jobs last month, boosted in part by the return of about 46,000 General Motors workers who had been excluded while on a 40-day strike. The strike held down job growth to 128,000 in October. The unemployment rate is forecast unchanged at 3.6% in November.

The ADP report, which is jointly developed with Moody's Analytics, has a poor record predicting the private payrolls component of the government's employment report. Economists said the ADP job count was not affected by the resumption of work by the GM workers. Still, last month's private payroll gains pointed to a cooling labor market. — Reuters
OAKLAND: The Tennessee Titans and host Oakland Raiders will treat each other like playoff opponents when the postseason hopefuls go head-to-head Sunday in a game that figures to have significant ramifications in the AFC race.

With four games remaining, the Titans (7-5) enter the battle of second-place teams in better shape than the Raiders (6-6) in the AFC wild-card chase.

Sunday’s outcome, barring a tie, will either give Oakland the overall edge on Tennessee (based on a head-to-head tiebreaker of teams with the same record) or basically eliminate the Raiders from wild-card contention (two games behind the Titans with three to play, with Tennessee holding the tiebreaker).

“We would love to make the playoffs. We would love to win a championship. That’s out of our control right now,” Raiders coach Jon Gruden noted in the wake of a 40-19 blowout loss at Kansas City on Sunday that dropped his club to 5-7-1.

The duel between former Alabama star running back Derrick Henry and Josh Jacobs will be a highlight. Henry, who rushed for 1,061 yards and is tied for 14th in rushing with 1,061 yards and is tied for 14th in rushing with 1,061 yards, ranks third in the NFL in both rushing with 1,149 yards and touchdowns with 13, Jacobs, a rookie first-round pick who arrived on the Alabama campus one year after Henry left with a Heisman Trophy and accumulated 1,491 rushing yards in three seasons, ranks fourth in the NFC in rushing with 1,061 yards and is tied for 14th in touchdowns with seven.

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**Besieged Castle: Folau not only problem for Rugby boss**

**SYDNEY:** Australian rugby was already in crisis when Raeline Castle took over but the problems refused to go away for the chief executive — even after ending the Israel Folau anti-gay controversy. Two years after Castle was tasked with steadying Rugby Australia’s listing ship, Folau, a poor World Cup and the demise of a lucrative TV deal have dented her in choppy waters.

The New Zealander faced calls to step down over her handling of the Folau case, which Rugby Australia settled out of court for an undisclosed sum. But she insisted she was the best person for the job as Rugby Australia heads towards 2020 seeking a new broadcast partner and an uptick in fortunes on the pitch.

“There’s not a business leader that leads an organisation that I’ve spoken to that hasn’t looked at this situation and gone, ‘This is a very difficult thing,’” Castle said, referring to the Folau case. “Ultimately we’ve had extensive support from the rugby community and also from the wider business community.”

Folau, the former Australia fullback, had launched a Aus$14 million compensation claim after his sacking in May for posting “Hell awaits” gays, as well as drunks, atheists and others. While his comments drew outrage, it was a case that exposed divisions in Australian society after Folau won backing from conservatives who defended his right to express his religious views.

There were also commercial implications for Rugby Australia, whose main sponsor, flag carrier Qantas, warned the governing body to take appropriate action. Castle will be delighted to finally see the back of Folau, after admitting she had caused her the toughest challenge of her career when he posted similar comments last year. But although settling the case avoided a lengthy and expensive court battle, the outcome still hit Rugby Australia in the pocket — and Folau’s beaming reaction spoke volumes about which side was the happier.

“A team of the 20th century’s greatest spin doctors can’t help Rugby Australia. They lost on Wednesday, Big Time,” wrote columnist Janet Albrechtsen in The Australian. Castle will now be looking forward eagerly to the arrival of fellow New Zealander Dave Rennie, the highly rated new Wallabies coach whose signing was one of the brightest moments of Rugby Australia’s year.

Rennie, who takes the reins in July, succeeds Michael Cheika whose stormy tenure ended with a record defeat to England in October’s World Cup quarter-finals — and a stinging parting shot. “It is no secret I have no relationship with the CEO (Raeline Castle) and not much with the chairman (Cameron Clyne),” Cheika was quoted as saying by Australia’s Fox Sports. — AFP

**‘We didn’t back down’, Rugby Australia insists after Folau payout**

**SYDNEY:** Rugby Australia insisted yesterday it did not back down by settling its feud with Israel Folau over homophobic comments, while all-but ruling out the staunch Christian from playing Super Rugby again. The parties avoided a costly court battle by reaching a mediated agreement on Wednesday to end Folau’s lawsuit over his sacking in May for warning “hell awaits” gay people and others he considers sinners.

Under the settlement, both sides apologised for “any hurt or harm” caused, with Folau taking to YouTube to claim he had been “vindicated”. Financial terms of the deal were confidential, but Rugby Australia chief Castle shot down a report that the settlement was worth Aus$8 million as “wildly inaccurate”.

She said the governing body “didn’t back down” and that it stood by its decision to terminate his contract. “We had to make a decision that was right for rugby in this country,” she said at a press conference in Sydney. “We made the right decision in calling out Israel on his posts and his inappropriate messaging,” she added.

“That remains the same, we stick to our values that inclusiveness is absolutely core to rugby,” she said, referring to the Folau case. “Ultimately we’ve had extensive support from the rugby community and also from the wider business community.”

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Kosgei targets Olympic gold after smashing world record

MANILA: Kenya's Brigid Kosgei, the fastest-ever woman marathon runner, has set her sights on next year's Olympic games, where a win will solidify her place among the greatest to have ever competed in the sport.

The 25-year old mother of twins smashed Briton's Paula Radcliffe's 16-year-old world record by 81 seconds at the Chicago Marathon in October, recording a time of two hours, 14 minutes and four seconds to cap a stunning rise to the sport's summit for Kosgei who started competing internationally only four years ago.

"When I went to compete (in Chicago) I did not think that I would break the record," Kosgei told Reuters at an Athletics Kenya conference in the northwestern city of Eldoret. "My aim was to break the course record (which was 2:17:18).

She does not feel any pressure now after her record-breaking win or that she needs to re-store some Kenyan pride for the distance, where, despite producing great runners for decades, they have struggled to crack the Olympics and then be shamed.

The Kenyans' distress over their spor-ting mainstream yesterday as it made its debut at the Southeast Asian Games, becoming a medal event for the first time at an Olympic-recognised multi-sport competition.

The 11-country Games, spread across dozens of venues in the northern Philippines, neared the halfway stage, eSports made its grand entrance at a dark-ened arena in Manila.

It represents progress for video gam-ing, which was a demonstration sport at last year's Asian Games but has been left off the programme for the next edition in 2022.

Competitors from nine countries are competing over six days for medals in Mobile Legends, Arena of Valor, Dota 2, Starcraft II, Tekken 7 and Hearthstone.

"This is a very, very historic day be-cause for the first time eSports will be played in the Southeast Asian Games," local mayor Francis Zamora said at an opening ceremony at the 5,500-capacity San Juan Arena.

The Philippines are the host for the first time under the watchful eye of the World Anti-Doping Agency, which has been accused of failing to properly enforce anti-doping rules.

Kosgei's win was a milestone for Kenya, which has struggled to crack the world's top 10 in recent years.

"I had to change my mindset and to focus on the distance," Kosgei said after breaking the record.

"I thought that I could win the race, but I didn't know how long I could keep going.

Her goal since then has been to lower her personal best. "I would just keep lowering it until a new personal best is reached," she said. Kosgei said she was disappointed by the scepticism in some quarters that the record went to Kenya, a country that has had its reputation as a world leader in athletics tarnished by the use of performance-enhancing drugs by some of its athletes.

"Before that sometimes I would be discour-aged by others that marathons are really tough. But I came to realize, it's not tough, it's just discipline and hard work and patience." Kosgei also dismissed critics who have said her record was unfairly aided by the use of the latest running shoes from Nike. The shoes have carbon-fibre plates and a thicker midsole that the manufacturers claim improve running econ-omy by 4% or 5%. A version of the shoes are also worn by men's marathon world-record holder Kenyan Eliud Kipchoge, who said the day before Kosgei's Chicago win, recorded an astonishing, pacey-aided 1:59.40 in Vienna.

"Shoes don't run, it's the feet that run" Kosgei said. "If you are not in shape and I use those shoes it won't help." —Reuters
Tristan Jarry, Penguins stop visiting Blues with shutout

PITTSBURG: Tristan Jarry stopped all 28 shots he faced Wednesday as the Pittsburgh Penguins halted the visiting St. Louis Blues' four-game winning streak. It was the first shutout of the season for Jarry, who is third of his career. No. 1 goalie Matt Murray has won two Stanley Cups with Pittsburgh, but lately the Penguins have been leaning on Jarry, who has four starts and five appearances over the team's past six games. Teddy Blueger, Stefan Noesen and Alex Galchenyuk scored for Pittsburgh over the team's past six games. Teddy Blueger, Stefan Noesen and Alex Galchenyuk scored for Pittsburgh over the team's past six games. Teddy Blueger, Stefan Noesen and Alex Galchenyuk scored for Pittsburgh over the team's past six games. Teddy Blueger, Stefan Noesen and Alex Galchenyuk scored for Pittsburgh over the team's past six games.

SENATORS 5, OILERS 2
Tyler Ennis scored once in a three-point game while Connor Brown and Vladislav Namestnikov both collected one goal and one assist as visiting Ottawa defeated Edmonton. Ottawa snapped a five-game losing streak while winning for the sixth straight visit to Edmonton. The Oilers took their third defeat in four games. Senator's goaltender Craig Anderson made 25 saves in his return after missing four games due to injury.

CAPITALS 3, KINGS 1
John Carlson scored two goals and Ilya Samsonov made 22 saves to lead visiting Washington past Los Angeles for the Capitals' fifth straight victory. Tom Wilson also scored an empty-net goal for Washington, which improved to an NHL-best 13-2-1 on the road. The Metropolitan Division-leading Capitals now have 47 points after 30 games, a franchise record. Carlson has 42 points (11 goals, 31 assists) on the season. He joins Calgary's Al MacInnis (1990-91, 11 goals, 31 assists) as the only defensemen since 1979-80 to record 42 points in their first 30 games of a season. —Reuters

S African cricket crisis deepens

JOHANNESBURG: The crisis in South African cricket deepened yesterday as former chief executive Ali Bacher called on incumbent Thabang Moroe to quit, while a second independent director resigned from the board of Cricket South Africa. Bacher, a former Test captain, said Moroe was out of his depth, while independent board member Ishqah Khan, the chairman of CSA's finance committee, said he could no longer be party to an organisation that was "ruining the game".

Khan blamed Moroe for the majority of issues besetting CSA, including failing to adhere to the terms of an agreement with the SA Cricketers' Association, the banning of five journalists last weekend and "widespread credit card abuse".

Reaction to death of former England captain Bob Willis

LONDON: For English cricket fans who witnessed Bob Willis's ferocious spell of fast bowling to win the third Ashes test at Headingley in 1981 it was an unforgettable and iconic sporting afternoon. Willis's former team mate Geoffrey Boycott had a close-up view that day as the six foot six inch paceman with the luxuriant curls ripped the Australian batting order to shreds.

Boycott joined the chorus of tributes to Willis after news of the 70-year-old's death on Wednesday, recalling the match-winning spell of eight for 43 which secured Willis's place in the nation's sporting folklore.

Here are a selection of tributes to England's fourth-highest Test wicket taker and the man nicknamed The Goose: "He was not seeing anything else other than the batsman and the stump. He had blinkered vision, a bit like a racehorse galloping towards the finish line. "None of us needed to speak to him. There was no point anyway as his focus, emotion and passion all came together in that moment and he blew the Aussies away," —Geoffrey Boycott

"As a player he had a big heart, he'd run in, nearly fell tins, and hit the pitch hard. At his peak was one of the best three bowlers in the world." "He was hugely admired all around the world. Everybody knew who he was." —former England bowler Darren Gough.

"Just saw the news on Bob Willis and very sad indeed. Off air I just loved listening to his great stories on how they played the game back in the day." —former South Africa fast bowler Allan Donald

"He was a man that cared passionately about everything to do with England cricket. He was one of England's greatest ever fast bowlers. Who would forget him charging down the hill in the '81 Botham's Ashes bowling the Aussies out in that fantastic series," —former England assistant coach and current Warwickshire head coach Paul Farbrace. —Reuters
LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo’s 35 points propelled the Milwaukee Bucks to an 10th straight NBA victory on Wednesday, a hard-fought 127-103 win over the Pistons in Detroit.

Antetokounmpo, the reigning NBA Most Valuable Player, powered through a contentious encounter, pulling down six rebounds and handing out nine assists as the Bucks continued their domination of the Pistons.

The Bucks improved to 19-3 — tied for best record in the league with the Western Conference-leading Los Angeles Lakers, who beat the Utah Jazz 121-96 in Salt Lake City, Monday, whose eight wins over Detroit last season included a first-round playoff sweep, have now notched two wins this season over the Pistons.

The Bucks led by 11 at halftime, and by 20 after three quarters as the Pistons proved unable to mount a challenge. Khris Middleton added 17 points for Milwaukee and Eric Bledsoe chipped in 15. Andre Drummond led Detroit with 23 points, 14 rebounds and five assists.

Antetokounmpo and Detroit’s Blake Griffin clashed early and often. Midway through the second quarter, Griffin elbowed Antetokounmpo in the face and teammates hurried to intervene as the two exchanged words.

Antetokounmpo answered in the third with a monster block of Griffin’s layup attempt, and less than a minute later when he hit the court after a foul by Bruce Brown, Griffin angered the Bucks by stepping over Antetokounmpo’s legs.

Middleton raced over and admonished Griffin and after a lengthy review Brown, Griffin and Middleton all received technical fouls. “At that point, I was, like, tired,” Antetokounmpo said. ‘I was, like, ‘They’re going to do this all night.’”

“After I was trying to talk back, trying to let them know this is more than basketball. I can stop playing basketball, we can fight. ‘At the end of the day my teammates want me in the game, my teammates want me to keep my head in the game.’ The tough-guy posturing didn’t help the Pistons and the Bucks emerged with their longest winning streak since 1973.

The Lakers put on a defensive clinic in Utah, coming up with 13 steals and blocking 12 shots as they held the Jazz to 41 percent shooting.

Anthony Davis, battling illness that saw him receive intravenous fluids at halftime of the Lakers’ win at Denver on Tuesday, scored 26 points. Davis added five rebounds, six assists and three blocked shots.

LeBron James added 20 points and handed out 12 assists for the Lakers, who didn’t trail at all after the first quarter and led by as many as 25 in the second half. “Thirty-two fastbreak points on the second night of a back-to-back, that’s just great effort by our team,” Lakers coach Frank Vogel said after his team’s 10th straight NBA victory on Wednesday.

“Just want to continue to battle on the defensive end,” Davis said. “We played with great pace tonight and were able to get points in transition. We just played together.”

The Jazz lost for the fifth time in sixth games — but suffered just their second home defeat of the season.

In Boston, the Celtics defeated the Miami Heat 112-93, handing the Heat their first defeat of the season in a three-game road trip that had included wins over the Brooklyn Nets and Toronto Raptors.

Miami were without coach Erik Spoelstra, who returned to Florida on Wednesday for the birth of his second son. The heat led by as many as 11 points early in the second quarter, but Boston closed the half on a 28-9 scoring run to take a 52-44 lead at halftime and never trailed in the second half.


The Dallas Mavericks won a see-saw battle against the Minnesota Timberwolves 121-114.

The Timberwolves led 93-91 with 7:39 remaining when the Mavericks made three-pointers on five of their next six possessions to seize the momentum. Dwight Powell led the Mavs with 24 points, connecting on nine of nine from the field. Luka Doncic added 22 points — a relatively quiet night for the Mavs’ young star after his 33-point, 18-rebound performance against New Orleans on Tuesday.

Leaders Gladbach seek to beat Bayern

MUNICH: Borussia Moenchengladbach trying to bring down the mighty Bayern Munich after years of Bavarian dominance might sound like a line from a 1970’s German football almanac but that will be the case tomorrow when the two sides meet in the league.

For decades-long roles have been reversed this season, with the ‘Foals’ of Gladbach galloping away at the top of the standings while Bayern struggle to keep pace. For younger fans, this season, with the ‘Foals’ of Gladbach galloping away at the top of the standings while Bayern struggle to keep pace, is a sight for sore eyes.

Frenchman Marcus Thuram and Swiss international Bardy Schall, who are enjoying a scintillating campaign.

They have top young players and are arguably the strongest team in the league. That is why we really want to win that game,” Plea has formed a formidable partnership with fellow Frenchman Marcus Thuram and Swiss international Bodolam, scoring four goals and recording four assists.

Thuram has contributed six goals while Embolo, who struggled for a starting spot at Schalke 04, has five. “The fact that we are still league leaders shows how good we have been working and how good a season we have been playing,” Plea added. “We have a great team... and we are currently in just very good form.

The Bavarians will be feeling the heat, having suffered a shock 2-1 home loss to Bayer Leverkusen last week, their first defeat under interim coach Hansi Flick. Another loss would see them drop further behind in the title race and put Flick’s future at the club in doubt. Second-placed RB Leipzig, on 27 points, host Hoffenheim, where Schalke 04, a further two points behind in third, travel to Leverkusen.

Atletico seek quick fix at Villarreal in transitional season

MADRID: Atletico Madrid’s seemingly unshakeable position as Spain’s third force has come under threat following a slide in form and they desperately need to get their season back on track when they visit Villarreal in La Liga today.

The match would be taking place in Madrid, after Barca but the fifth worst defence.

Simeone’s side are far from entertaining, with only six teams in the league having scored fewer than their 16 goals, although they can boast the second best defence.

Today’s game represents an ideological clash of sorts — Villarreal, who are 13th in the table, have the best attack outside of Real and Barca but the fifth worst defence.

Simeone has blamed his side’s recent struggles on the huge overhaul his squad underwent in the past season, asking for patience in a “season of transition”.

He can point to key departures such as Antoine Griezmann, their top scorer for the last five seasons, stalwart defenders Juanfran, Filipe Luis, Diego Godin and Lucas Hernandez, plus Spanish midfielder Rodrigo.

But the club spent a staggering 300 million euros ($331 million) on replenishing their squad and many of their new arrivals are not stepping up, especially 126-million euro man Joao Felix, who has failed to score for over two months.

“We’re worried but now is the time to dig in and stay united,” added midfielder Saul Niguez. “It’s a delicate situation but we’ll only get out of it by working hard.” — Reuters
## Neymar, Mbappe fire PSG five points clear in Ligue 1

**PARIS:** Neymar and Kylian Mbappe both scored as Paris Saint-Germain restored their five-point cushion at the top of Ligue 1 with a 2-0 win over Nantes on Wednesday. Mbappe’s smart finish shortly after half-time and Neymar’s late penalty saw the hosts clinch victory at the Parc des Princes.

PSG, whose scheduled game against Monaco last weekend was postponed due to bad weather, also have a game in hand on second-placed Marseille as they bid for their fifth straight victory. The league leaders are in better form at the moment than at any point during their fairy-tale 2015/16 Premier League title-winning campaign and this victory equalled their top-flight record for consecutive wins, set in March 1963.

“We had to be patient this evening and worked very hard for that but I thought we deserved it,” Rodgers told reporters. “It was a real team effort and to get seven wins on the spin in the Premier League is a great achievement. The team is developing and proving they have a winning mentality and mindset.”

Watford were playing their first game under caretaker coach Hayden Mullins after Quique Javi’s departure, and had several opportunities, including a chance to double the lead when he raced towards an incisive pass from Vardy but was thwarted from close range by a brave block from Masina.

Watford stayed rooted to the bottom on eight points although Mullins was pleased to see his side push one of the top teams in the league all the way. “I think up until the penalty we were in the game and even after it we were still in the game. We have come away from home to a team that has done really well and put up a great performance and took it right to the wire,” he said.

“The boys have responded fantastically well, I’m so proud of what they did tonight. There were loads of positives.” — Reuters

## Mount, Abraham sink Villa as Chelsea return to form

**LONDON:** Frank Lampard challenged Tammy Abraham to prove he has the hunger for long-term success after the Chelsea striker’s influential display inspired a 2-1 victory against Aston Villa on Wednesday. Villa’s late side lined a run of two successive Premier League defeats thanks to the latest heroics from emerging England duo Abraham and Mason Mount at Stamford Bridge.

Abraham put Chelsea ahead in the first half against the team the 22-year-old striker helped win promotion from the Championship last season. Trezeguet drew Villa level, but 20-year-old midfielder Mount responded with a blistering volley from Abraham’s assist to seal the points after half-time.

“Chelsea remain fourth, six points ahead of fifth-placed Wolves, as they chase a Champions League berth in Lampard’s impressive first season in charge. Abraham scored 26 goals in 40 appearances on loan at Villa and, his confidence sky-high after that success, he has enjoyed a breakthrough season with Chelsea.”

His 12th goal in all competitions for Chelsea this term includes 11 in 14 league appearances and Blues boss Lampard expects him to maintain the speed of his development. “Tammy is near the top of the goal-scoring charts, stretches defences, starts our press and he’s growing as a personality in the dressing room,” Lampard said.

“When he comes out of the team he’s a player you miss. He’s a hungry boy. ‘I wouldn’t set him a (goal) target. All you would say is every game can you score and can you be hungry for the team? At the moment he is doing it.” Like Abraham, Mount is thriving under Lampard, who coached him on loan at Derby last season and has given the dynamic midfielder his chance on the big stage.

“I don’t think Mason should be mentioned solely on goals. I thought his all-round game in the second half is what we would expect of him. He won the ball back in good areas,” Lampard said.

Lampard had been frustrated with Chelsea’s lack of creativity and cutting edge in their shock 1-0 defeat against West Ham tomorrow, so he was encouraged by the way they dominated against Villa. “It was the team I wanted to see, West Ham was the only game this season when we haven’t been up to par,” he said.

“We have got a lot of credit for our energy and tackling play. That was missing at the weekend but today we were back to where we were. I’m happy but I want more.”

Abraham’s return from the hip injury that ruled him out of the West Ham game made Chelsea a far more incisive unit and the youngster broke the deadlock in the 24th minute. Showcasing his nuanced penalty area movement, Abraham edged subtly away from Ezri Konsa to meet Reece James’ cross with a clinical close-range header.

Abraham’s strike should have been the signal for Chelsea to go for the kill, but instead the creaky defensive that has been their Achilles heel at times under Lampard was breached in the 41st minute.

Cesar Azpilicueta, caught out of position, gave Ahmed Elmohamady’s swing over a cross to Trezeguet, who had no problem getting in front with a fantastic left-footed strike after Nantes could only half clear a corner, while Muslim’s free-kick was only parried away to the West Ham goal by Cesar Azpilicueta.

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Rashford strikes twice as Man Utd end Mourinho's perfect start at Spurs

MANCHESTER: Marcus Rashford spoiled Jose Mourinho's return to Old Trafford on Wednesday, scoring twice as Manchester United beat Tottenham 2-1 to end their former manager's perfect start to his tenure at his new club. The England forward put United in front in the first half and converted a second-half penalty to restore their lead after Dele Alli's exquisite equaliser as Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side leapfrogged Spurs, climbing to sixth in the Premier League table. Spurs went into the match ahead of United after their mini-revival under their new boss, who replaced the sacked Mauricio Pochettino at the London club last month. Struggling United had made their worst start to a season in 31 years but played with energy and adventure and deserved their win.

Smiling manager Solskjaer hailed his youthful side. "The three points are massive for us," he told the BBC. "We've had too many draws this season and given too many points away from winning positions. It's a great lesson the last two games (Sheffield United and Aston Villa) and we came back in a great manner."

"We've started the rebuilding. We've made decisions that we had to and we're looking to build this club to be better again and I can't think short-term when I'm trying to do that."

The home side deservedly took the lead when Rashford beat Paulo Gazzaniga at his near post in the sixth minute — the forward's 11th goal in his past 13 games for United and England. United could easily have stretched their lead but Gazzaniga made amends by touching a thundershadow Rashford shot onto the crossbar.

It was a far cry from recent disjointed performances against Sheffield United and Aston Villa. Both of those matches ended in draws after United had taken the lead. But despite being a clear second best, Tottenham edged their way back into the game and were on level terms six minutes before half-time thanks to an audacious piece of skill from the in-form Alli.

Serge Aurier's shot was saved and the rebound landed to Alli, whose sweet first touch took the ball away from Ashley Young and Fred. He let it bounce before shooting past David de Gea into the far corner.

The England man missed the majority of the early part of the season through injury but has bounced back in style, scoring four times in his past three matches. United would have been disappointed to have been trailing at the break after their impressive first-half showing but they were back in front in the 49th minute when Rashford sent Gazzaniga the wrong way from the spot after being brought down by Moussa Sissoko.

United surged forward in search of another goal, with Rashford a constant threat down the left and Daniel James also looking dangerous. Mourinho threw on unsettled midfielder Christian Eriksen in search of an equaliser as the game remained in the balance but despite some late pressure against a nervy United, Spurs left Old Trafford empty-handed. The new Spurs boss, sacked by United last December, described his reception at Old Trafford as "nice and polite". "It's a step back against a team that is playing with same objective as us, trying to get up the table and reach the top six," he said.

"We need to keep going. We made mistakes but it's not good to be crying about them now," Mourinho won his first three matches in charge of Spurs, with his team scoring 10 goals in the process but he has problems to sort out at the back as he targets a Champions League spot. United are also eyeing the top four despite a huge gap to close. They remain eight points behind fourth-placed Chelsea and just seven points above the relegation zone. — AFP

Bahrain in Gulf Cup finals

DOHA: Bahrain yesterday qualified for the final of the 24th Arabian Gulf Cup football tournament in Qatar after beating Iraq 5-3 on penalties. The extra time ended with a positive draw (2-2) at the meeting between the two teams at Abdullah Bin Stadium.

However, the game started until the Iraqi player Muhannad Ali scored an early goal in the sixth minute, but Bahraini player Abdullah Al-Hazza equalized in the 19th minute. Then Iraq's Ibrahim Raish responded with a second goal in the 18th minute while Bahrain's Mohamed Marhoun equalised in the 47th minute, ending the first half with two goals for both teams.

The Iraqi team entered with a clear preference in an attempt to seize a third goal, but the Bahraini team was defensively organized to end the half with this result. With a score of (5-3) Bahrain reached the finals of the Gulf Cup while waiting for the results of Saudi and Qatar. The final match for the 24th Gulf Arab Cup will be held on Sunday at Khalifa International Stadium.

Meanwhile, Bert van Marwijk has been sacked as head coach of the United Arab Emirates, the country's football federation said on Wednesday after the team was knocked out of the Gulf Cup.

The UAE were eliminated from the keenly-contested regional tournament on Tuesday following a 4-2 loss at the hands of Qatar in a group game both sides needed to win to advance to the semi-finals. Van Marwijk, who led his native Netherlands to the final of the World Cup in South Africa in 2010, took over as head coach of the UAE earlier this year having previously qualified neighbouring Saudi Arabia for the finals of the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Similar expectations were placed on the 67-year-old when he replaced Alberto Zaccheroni but the UAE have struggled so far in qualifying for Qatar 2022. The team are currently in fourth place in their group in the second phase of Asia's preliminary rounds, five points behind leaders Vietnam but with a game in hand. The UAE's next World Cup qualifier will be on March 26, when they host Malaysia. — Agencies

Liverpool thrash Everton

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool surged eight points clear at the top of the Premier League as Divock Origi was the scourge of Everton once more in a thrilling 5-2 Merseyside derby win for the European champions at Anfield.

All but one of the goals came before half-time as Origi and Sadio Mane finished off a blistering counter-attack to make it 4-1. The scoring did not stop there as Richarlison cut the deficit once more, but Georginio Wijnaldum hammered the final nail in the Everton coffin a minute from time as an eighth defeat in 11 league games sees the Toffees slip into the bottom three.

"All the goals were incredible," said a delighted Jurgen Klopp, who made five changes in total. "Wonderful goals, sensational passes, super pieces of football. I loved it a lot." "It's a step back against a team that is playing with same objective as us, trying to get up the table and reach the top six," he said.

"We need to keep going. We made mistakes but it's not good to be crying about them now," Mourinho won his first three matches in charge of Spurs, with his team scoring 10 goals in the process but he has problems to sort out at the back as he targets a Champions League spot. United are also eyeing the top four despite a huge gap to close. They remain eight points behind fourth-placed Chelsea and just seven points above the relegation zone. — AFP

DOHA: Iraq's forward Mohanad Ali (R) vies for the ball with Bahrain's defender Abdullah Hazaa during the 24th Arabian Gulf Cup semi-final football match between Iraq and Bahrain at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in the Qatari capital Doha yesterday. — AFP

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Antetokounmpo leads Bucks past Pistons as Lakers trump Jazz

DETROIT: Derrick Rose #25 of the Detroit Pistons handles the ball against the Milwaukee Bucks at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit, Michigan. — AFP