Iran tried to ‘impede’ UK tanker in Gulf: Britain

See Pages 10 & 11
Wealth in Kuwait

The Wall Street Journal recently published a list of the world’s richest countries. Kuwait ranked fifth in the world and the second in the Arab and Gulf region in terms of per capita gross national income of $72,872 annually, while Qatar ranked first in the world. Kuwait’s gross domestic product for 2017 was $271.1 billion and was ranked 57th among 196 countries in the world.

Kuwait is one of only five countries with a per capita gross national income of more than $70,000. Unlike most of the world’s richest countries, Kuwait has no diversified economy, with oil making up more than 84 percent of exports. The report said the accurate indicator of the country’s economic output is the use of gross product or income. This measure covers all economic activities within state borders as well as wealth created by national entities operating in other countries.

I agree that there is no source of income other than oil in Kuwait, so it is natural to demand to find additional alternatives. But this news was not great for some people, who compared the list with the general situation experienced by many people here, especially those demanding consumer loans be written off, and the hardship of life in Kuwait for both citizens and expats.

The paper, which reviewed gross national income per capita in about 200 countries, said the richest 25 countries tend to have complex and diversified economies to create more wealth in the world, most of it concentrated among the wealthiest people in the richest countries.

I read a comment from a reader, who wondered about the benefit of these billions, as when a Kuwaiti or expat goes to the ministries complex for example, they waste a large amount of the time in paperwork and may not complete their business the first time or if the system is down, which is very common. How sad is it to see Kuwait not using Internet technology and modern methods to facilitate the work of people to process their transactions easily without hassle or fatigue. I believe the wealth of a state must be felt and seen by all and not only a few people.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia – two major economies in the Middle East – have shown remarkable growth on the back of improved GDP growth and strong financial market performance, the report said. This year, the French company Capgemini for financial services recorded a growth of 8 percent in the number of people whose wealth exceeded $1 million (KD 304,500) from 2018 to 880,000 people in 2019.

I wonder what these new rich people have offered Kuwait with regards to charity and societal development. I remember the words of American financier Warren Buffett, who was the richest person in the world in 2008 and the third richest in the world in 2011. In 2012, he became one of the most influential people in the world. He gave one tip – that one must reduce debt and spending on trivial things, adding not to rely on others.

It is good advice I guess, but if you are one of those who borrowed money from the bank, you will be dependent on paying the loan for many years. I do not know what trivial things are? Is buying a house, for example, through loans a trivial matter?

I think such news is not always great because it is a fact that many people suffer from loans and high prices that have become apparent to many people, and living expenses that are no longer cheap. The wealth which the newspaper is talking about might be the richness of the state and not necessarily the wealth of all.

Suicide prevention needed in Kuwait

Suicide is a global phenomenon. There is no modern society where it does not exist. In Kuwait, it is illegal and those who try to commit suicide can face prosecution – on top of all the problems that led them down that path in the first place.

Often suicide is viewed as an expat issue and in fact, recent statistics do show that the majority of those who commit suicide in Kuwait are foreigners. But suicide is an issue that affects us all and it can strike in any family, in any community and have devastating consequences.

That is why Kuwait needs to bring suicide prevention efforts into the 21st century with a dedicated suicide prevention hotline and more efforts to provide awareness training for doctors and nurses as well as police regarding this phenomenon.

Expatriates, especially low income earners, are often targets for predatory business practices including loan sharks, illicit recruitment agencies and pyramid scams. Despite the fact that loan sharks are illegal in Kuwait, they are rampant and taking loans in this manner is easily available here. Another way low income workers can get into financial straits is with pyramid schemes or lotteries or group investing which often results in loss of life savings or other financial troubles.

Though there are no statistics available, its thought that many, if not the majority of suicides among expatriates are triggered by financial difficulties. While there are charities here that aim to help the indigent, its not always possible or open to the most vulnerable populations.

Suicide prevent efforts can be designed specifically to target those most in need, utilizing different languages to reach the different communities in Kuwait.

Although there is no dedicated 24-hour suicide prevent hotline, there are some government resources that people in need can call for help. Therapists Outreach (Police community service department)
+965/ 9400-0435
+965/ 9400-0463
Therapists (social development office)
+965/ 9406-9304
+965/ 9408-2761
+965/ 2244-0904
+965/ 2240-2401
+965/ 2206-3645
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Kuwaiti economist Abdullah Al-Salloum has founded a political platform called Dhammin to serve electoral campaigns and make things easier for candidates. Municipal Council member Hamad Al-Medlij said: “I have witnessed dozens of exhausting election days. With Dhammin, the campaign management had live updates on everything. It could visualize a very detailed live view of the vote tallying process without a single phone call or text message.”

Mohammed Mansour, Board Member of Mishref Cooperative Society, said: “I had a very close look at Dhammin’s analytics. It gave me clear information before anyone else. Live tallying gave us the chance to know how electoral committees are currently performing.”

Abdullah Al-Mudhaf, a political activist, noted: “Dhammin makes it easier to understand how a candidate is performing as it gives accurate analytics and reports. It saves a lot of time and effort, and the interface is easy to use by all age segments.”

Kuwait Times spoke with Salloum to learn more about the Dhammin platform.

Kuwait Times: What is Dhammin?
Salloum: Dhammin in Arabic means “to guarantee” - is a smart political platform that manages a candidate’s electoral campaign for the National Assembly, Municipal Council or cooperative society. The platform, which consists of smart device apps and backend application programming interface (API), aims to help a candidate achieve the best political outcome – winning an election – with the best and least use of resources, such as time, effort and financing.

Dhammin is the first platform of its kind to consider distributed systems methodologies in terms of political campaign management and system programming. In a smart manner, the platform takes care of five main operative components of a candidate’s campaign: (1) Online presence, (2) Guarantees, (3) Social events, (4) Election Day and (5) Analytics.

As for resources, the candidate provides a CD containing spreadsheets (they get it officially from the ministry of interior), containing names, dates of birth, voter IDs, voting districts and residence addresses of all voters in the area. These spreadsheets are converted by the Dhammin team into an SQL database, and fetched by the candidate’s Dhammin API. Once that happens, Dhammin apps do their job in analytics based on the campaign’s user inputs. The platform’s pricing ranges from KD 490 to 8,990 annually.

KT: In Dhammin, what is online presence?
Salloum: Today, it is essential for a candidate to have an online presence. Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and
Members also have the privilege to create a list of electoral keys. An electoral key is a person who has an influence on one or more vote(s) within the campaign's district - however, he/she is not a campaign member but is in a good relationship with a current member. Once a member creates electoral key accounts, the electoral keys receive a direct unique website link for their personal use to add their guarantees, just like a member. Imagine a campaign with a hundred members, each with a list of tens of guarantees and a list of tens of electoral keys, each with another list of tens of other guarantees! This will definitely create a very rich scheme that can be converted into statistical observations that are ready to be analyzed.

**KT: How does the social events component work in the platform?**

**Salloum:** One of the candidate's mandatory methods to expand their reach is to mostly attend all social events within the district. This includes weekly diwaniyas, weddings, funerals and other related events. The candidate's challenge is to be aware of those events, their date, time and location, Dhammin takes care of that. The platform allows campaign members to suggest events by filling up a form with all the information required, such as location, date and time, organizer's contact name and phone, etc. Other members - with higher privileges - verify the importance of the suggested events, and either disregard or accept them.

Accepted events are scheduled and profiled with all the required information in a way that makes it easier for the candidate's social team to arrange event visits. Events are then given a feedback rate. The rate shows if a visit has delivered the required impression. This, again, creates a very rich scheme that can be converted into statistical observations that are ready to be analyzed.

**KT: How will candidates utilize the app?**

**Salloum:** Every candidate knows that operative tasks on Election Day are hard and time consuming. WhatsApp messages and phone calls are nonstop. The control team, which ensures delivery of guaranteed votes, is always frustrated with manual validations, sorting and the continuous manual communication with campaign members inside the electoral committees.

Here comes Dhammin to make this process way easier. Every campaign member assigned to be present at an electoral committee uses the platform's smart device app to change the status of a voter. For example, when voter X comes to a committee to vote, the campaign member assigned to that committee sets the status of X as voted. That’s it!

The platform now spreads information to everything related to voter X. For example, the campaign member who has X as a guarantee will immediately be notified that X has voted, and will send him/her a thank you message. It is no longer the control team's job to ensure every guaranteed voter has voted. Their task now is to ensure that every campaign member is delivering what they have guaranteed. This way, stress is distributed and Dhammin integrates all efforts to achieve a single goal - winning the election.

Tallying of votes is not less important. When voting stations close, tallying begins manually on a whiteboard at every electoral committee. The control team usually receives final results of a committee's tally at the end of the sorting process. However, Dhammin makes tallying available live to the control team. A campaign member in a committee uses the platform's app to insert a candidate's vote immediately without waiting for the final tally result. Corrections are made if the final tally is different than the platform's.
Instead of spreadsheets, phone calls and WhatsApp messages, the task of the control team now is to only watch the tallying process and enjoy it, without interfering.

KT: What about analytics?
Salloum: Aside from automation, analytics is very essential in Dhammin. The input of campaign members through the platform components has definitely made tasks easier and faster. Simultaneously, their input to the platform is automatically converted to statistical observations to be used for analytics.

Much time was spent in modeling Dhammin's database for the purpose of maximum utilization. The sophistication of the database allows the processing of very large amount of observations using only very little resources to extract meaningful information for a candidate.

In a matter of milliseconds, the candidate has up-to-date important information. They understand the district and guaranteed voter base much better. They can answer difficult questions like: (1) What is the female-male ratio in the campaign's voting base in area Y, block Z for ages between 21 and 30? (2) Who are the most influential families - based on number of family members - in area Y, block Z that haven't voted yet? (3) What are the blocks in area Y with the highest number of voters aged between 31 and 40? (4) Which are the most influential blocks in area Y? (5) What is the candidate’s ranking among female voters in area Y? (6) Who are the best/worst campaign members in delivering votes of guarantee? Etc.

The platform's analytics component gives the candidate a very clear view of the electoral district. Hence it is made easier for them to act and react to political and social incidents, or in setting up a marketing plan and/or a political strategy.

KT: What sets Dhammin apart from other competitors or platforms providing a similar service?
Salloum: In fact, this market is very niche with a very few - three to six - platforms having the same concept. However, the political outcome is what a candidate is looking for. Dhammin considers campaign managerial details and implements every single candidate's sufficient requests with modern object-oriented programming, sophisticated database modeling, rich RESTful API and trendy smart device apps. I believe the combination of all this sets Dhammin apart.

KT: Can you tell us about the process, challenges and time spent to launch the platform?
Salloum: Due to being a new concept that relied on trial and error, Dhammin followed a solo-programming progress. In other words, it was being programmed solely by me during my free time for approximately six hours daily for seven months.

Based on my expertise, there were no technical challenges but modeling ones. I had to reach more people within the field who had expertise in campaigning and electoral processes. The challenge was to programmatically satisfy every aspect of their concerns. Besides the six-hour per day programming work, there was a three-hour per day mind-mapping work too.

KT: What is the next step for Dhammin?
Salloum: Aside from technical improvements of the API and apps, I am considering involving some components of Dhammin in the state electoral system in an official way. Since candidates can benefit from such a service, why can’t the government? Media institutions, TV channels and newspapers are no exception, as they can also benefit from those components. Dhammin's components will definitely cut their costs while delivering even more satisfactory live news to their audiences.
Many people complain about their housemaids escaping to their countries or to work on an hourly basis elsewhere. The affected citizens and expatriates may not know the legal procedures to submit necessary complaints against domestic workers. Kuwait Times interviewed lawyer Meshari Al-Rawi, who spoke about the rights of the sponsor and how to file a complaint if your housemaid escapes.

**Kuwait Times**: What are the legal procedures in case the maid escapes from the sponsor?

**Rawi**: There are some steps that must be taken in case a domestic worker escapes, such as the driver, guard, housemaid, etc. The correct legal procedures should be followed.

First: Ensure that the contracts made by the agency that brought the maid are clear. Keep copies and attach them when the maid escapes to the escape complaint filed at the department of domestic labor at the ministry of interior.

Second: File a case of absenteeism at the immigration department.

Third: After the investigation by the investigator of the department of domestic labor, take the complaint number and go to court to file a complaint if your housemaid escapes.

**Kuwait Times**: What guarantees a sponsor must take from the agency to preserve their rights?

**Rawi**: Unfortunately, some sponsors lose their rights if they give the agency permission to take control of the procedures. In order to preserve their rights, the sponsor must follow these main steps:

First: When submitting an application with the agency, the contract terms and safety conditions must be reviewed, and the financial value should be agreed upon in the contract in words and numbers. Also, read the agency’s obligations in case of escape. The sponsor must have a copy to keep.

Second: Upon the arrival of the maid and before receiving the domestic helper, the agency must inform the maid of these terms of the contract and what the consequences are in case of escape.

Third: The maid must sign the contract after the registration of the maid’s full information, and the sponsor must keep a copy of the contract concluded between the parties.

Fourth: Receive the receipt of the payment to guarantee the financial value agreed between the sponsor and the agency.

**Kuwait Times**: How should the sponsor act in case the maid travels to her country with his permission, but does not return on time? How can the sponsor protect themselves if she returns and works somewhere else?

**Rawi**: There are ways to protect the sponsor in case of a maid not returning. I will present two cases and will address them legally to preserve the rights of the sponsor.

The first case: When the maid requests to travel, but the contract between the sponsor and the maid has not ended. In this case, the maid must submit a travel request in writing to the sponsor to explain the reasons for travel, the date of travel and return to the country, the contact numbers in her country along with the address and sign the paper.

If the maid does not return by the specified date, the sponsor must submit a complaint at the department of domestic labor. After filing a case in court, the value of the contract and the value of the remaining wages on the contract must be calculated. If the maid returns after six months have elapsed under another sponsor, she will be arrested to pay the value of the sentence handed down.

The second case: When the maid travels after the end of the contract between the maid and the sponsor, and the maid promises to return to work with the sponsor.

In this case, the sponsor must get a written contract by the maid that she will come back. It will be like a new contract, so they should mention all details, such as increasing the salary of the maid or receiving an agreed financial value upon return or before the maid’s journey, the period of leave and return and means of communication as discussed in the first case.

**Kuwait Times**: What advice can you give the sponsor to ensure their legal rights?

**Rawi**: My advice to all sponsors is to keep all documents safely, meet the terms of the contract and pay the salary on time to avoid any allegations by the maid.
Kuwait Speaker, Prime Minister receive Audit Bureau ‘final report’

Bureau’s project to enhance capabilities of internal audit units

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzuq Ali Al-Ghanem received yesterday Acting President of the State Audit Bureau Adel Abdul Aziz Al-Sarawi, where he presented the final report of the project to support the internal control systems to enhance the capabilities of internal audit units. During the meeting, Sarawi and State Audit Bureau senior officials discussed the main elements of the report and a plan that contains effective control mechanisms and internal auditing in the entities controlled by audit bureau.

Sarawi also presented the final report to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah during a meeting held yesterday at Sof Palace. His Highness the Prime Minister expressed his full support for the steps taken by the audit bureau to protect and safeguard public funds, as well as stressing the government’s commitment to combat corruption and to achieve the highest levels of transparency to enhance development in different government sectors. The head of Prime Minister’s Diwan Sheikha Imanah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attended the meeting. — KUNA

**US reserve withdrawals, other factors behind oil price rise: Expert**

**KUWAIT:** Record rise of oil prices on Wednesday was result of weekly withdrawal from the US crude reserves estimated at nine million barrels and other factors including geopolitical jitters, said the Kuwaiti expert Mohammad Al-Shatti. These withdrawals tripled predictions that had been put in the range of three million barrels, Shatti said in an interview. Brent Blend crude climbed $2.85, settled at $67.01 per barrel and the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) rose $2.60 to $60.43 pb.

Locally, the Kuwaiti crude oil price increased $1.37 to $65.69 pb, he said, expressing his belief that the Kuwaiti oil rate would range between $60 and 70 pb in the short term period. Closure of some production terminals and key refineries in the Gulf of Mexico, ahead of a forecast tropical storm and jitters in the Arabian Gulf have also played a role in pushing the oil prices high, Shatti explains. Oil prices’ bullish trend is also attributed to drop of Venezuelan crude exports from 860,000 barrels per day in June to 670,000 bpd in July, the Kuwaiti expert said, shedding further light on the upward movement of the crude rates.

Shatti believes there are other factors that have had some effects on the market and the prices, such as conclusion of the G20 convention, a US-Chinese concord on margins of the conference on resuming trade negotiations between Washington and Beijing and their consensus on necessity to abstain from any move that may impact negatively on the global economy. Shaggy universal trade, almost automatically, leads to lower demand for crude oil. There are other contributing factors such as demand rise in the second half of 2019, simultaneously with start of operating refineries on seasonal basis, global political jitters, namely in oil producing Libya and Venezuela.

As to factors that may stem price hikes, he mentions concerns of a possible global economic slump, noticed in hefty assets’ selloffs across the global financial and business markets. Some indices that suppress prices include stagnant new demand, industrial output by key economic powers namely Germany, Japan and the US, in addition to the fact that the oil reserves of member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) remained above the average of the past five years. Any indices that show industrial sluggishness in the major economic powers; Germany, Japan and the US, fuel such fears, he says, noting that strategists are eagerly awaiting the US-China negotiations expected next week, the outcome of which will certainly impact on the oil markets. — KUNA

**Two workers injured during refinery maintenance**

**KUWAIT:** Two workers were slightly injured yesterday while conducting regular maintenance work for a unit at the Mina Abdullah refinery, Kuwait’s National Petroleum Company (KNPC) spokesman Abdullah Al-Ajmi said. The accident occurred at exactly 10:50 am yesterday, as the workers were subjected to heavy smoke from the remaining oil treatment unit No 12 during regular maintenance work and were immediately transferred to the medical clinic for treatment, Ajmi said in a statement issued by the company. The workers’ condition is ‘reassuring’, he said, stressing that the company has taken the necessary measures to address the causes of this incident. He noted that the maintenance process for the unit is continuing according to its planned program. — KUNA

**Kuwait swelters under lingering heat wave**

**KUWAIT:** A scorching heat wave blanketing Kuwait will continue through the weekend, with northwesterly winds expected during the day leading to blowing dust and low visibility in some areas, national forecasters have warned. A seasonal low continues to hold across Kuwait, bringing dry and hot weather that could trigger strong winds, meteorologist Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said yesterday. He predicted a ‘sizzling weekend’ with temperatures hitting 47 to 49 degrees on midday today, with northwesterly and dusty winds ranging between 20 to 50 kilometers per hour. As for tomorrow, the weather will be extremely hot at a minimum of 46 degrees, with much more active northwesterly winds at a speed of 25 to 55 kilometers per hour, Qarawi warned. — KUNA

**Local**

**Friday Times**

**Friday, July 12, 2019**
Workers’ cry for help highlights visa trafficking problem in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Large numbers of domestic helpers in Kuwait experience various problems with their sponsors that may sometimes go as far as having them immediately deported without them even getting paid. The problem also transcends those who work in their employers’ households, as it also affects a sizeable number of laborers who came to Kuwait on ‘Article 20’ visas given to domestic helpers which they had paid visa traffickers to obtain.

In this regard, a number of Asian laborers told local Arabic daily Al-Qabas that they came to Kuwait on domestic helper visas while in reality they do other jobs and live far from their sponsors’ houses, noting that they struggle daily just to make enough money to pay up to KD 1,000 which each of them had borrowed to obtain a visa to work in Kuwait.

“The problem does not only lie in the fact that sponsors do not do jobs for, but also do not pay our monthly salaries,” said some helpers, noting that they have no protection except from the domestic helpers department, which usually investigates the matter then takes proper action to get them paid and deported. “However, we usually remain on the street until the complaint is attended to,” they added.

Prime suspects

Further, the workers said that they usually come to Kuwait and are left to find jobs on their own as porters or constructions workers, getting paid KD 5-7 daily while taking the risk of being arrested by inspection teams and deported for violating residency laws. “Deportation is a real problem as we always remain the prime suspect, while sponsors refuse to answer when we call them,” the workers added, pointing out the problems they face when they want to transfer their residency visas.

Visa traffickers often target laborers seeking to work in the oil-rich Gulf region, and offer to ‘sell’ them visas for prices that range between KD 300 and KD 1,000 for a one-year visa, which workers have to pay again annually for renewal. Workers in that case are mostly uninformied about Kuwait’s regulations that bars transferring a domestic helper’s visa into an Article 18 visa for private sector employees. “Before referring the arrested ones among us for fingerprinting pending deportation, Kuwaiti authorities are ought to question those who brought us to Kuwait in the first place. They should allow us to transfer to other sponsors instead of deporting us,” one worker lamented.

Notably, statistics showed that 21 of those who advised visa traffickers to obtain degrees, in addition to one with a Master’s degree which they had to disregard only to come to Kuwait using the first available visas. In addition, governmental statistics also revealed that contrary to popular belief, 53 percent of domestic helpers, whose visas holders in Kuwait are actually males, hired as drivers, chefs and other works.

Labor protection

In the meantime, Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel hailed the Public Authority for Manpower’s role to provide all forms of protection and support to laborers experiencing problems with their sponsors. Aqeel explained that special teams comprising 34 employees were formed to deal with domestic helpers’ affairs and follow up all related issues at the administrative support, domestic helpers disputes, inspection and license registration department, as sponsors are responsible to protect sponsors rights.

Further, Aqeel stressed that ever since establishing the domestic helpers department three months earlier, it managed, through amicable agreements with accounts and application owners, to put an end to social media ads offering domestic helpers ‘for sale’ or transfer, and refer violators to the criminal investigation’s human trafficking division.

In addition, Aqeel responded to a BBC report, Kuwait had recently returned a housemaid who turned out to be a minor to her country and subjected the involved domestic labor office to legal actions and suspension. “A total of 44 domestic helper offices were suspended as of June,” she underlined, noting that the financial guarantees deposited by violating offices are sometimes liquefied to pay for either laborers or employers, protect their rights and refer helpers who refuse work to labor shelters pending deportation.

Statistically, among the total of 20,000 domestic helper offices in Kuwait, adding that the department had received 1,224 complaints of which 940 were so far solved, while 100 were referred to court. She also added that the total of domestic helpers in Kuwait is 77,828, according to Interior Ministry registers.

“Kuwait has always been keen on solving domestic helper problems with sponsors and providing special accommodation for female helpers,” Aqeel emphasized, noting that a 5,000-square-meter piece of land has been allocated in South Subahiya to build a female labor shelter, while the existing shelter in Jleeb Al-Shayoukh would be allocated for male laborers.

Later, Ministry official confirmed that 335 female laborers have been admitted to the Jleeb female laborers’ shelter from April 1, 2019 to July 9, 2019, adding that 894 of them have already left the country. “The majority of those were Filipinas with 97 cases, of whom 94 have already left, followed by 80 Indians, 57 Sri Lankans and a minority of Bangladeshis,” Aqeel explained.

Pilgrims urged to take health precautions before traveling

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: Ministry of Health’s (MOH) Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Affairs Dr Majeda Al-Qattan announced putting into effect the recommendations made by Saudi authorities for this year’s pilgrimage, and distributing various directives to all health zones and prevention centers with the main guidelines.

Qattan explained that 20,000 health cards have been printed for pilgrims and distributed to 40 preventive medicine centers, in addition to distributing 20,000 shots of meningitis vaccines, 15,000 seasonal flu vaccines and 12,000 pneumococcus vaccines. Further, Qattan said that all health centers at various exit points have been attended to, while sponsors do not have jobs for us, but some of them formerly investigate the matter then take proper actions that bans transferring a domestic helper’s visa to private sector employees, “before referring the arrested ones among us for fingerprinting pending deportation, Kuwaiti authorities are ought to question those who brought us to Kuwait in the first place. They should allow us to transfer to other sponsors instead of deporting us,” one worker lamented.

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The minister further noted that 335 female laborers have been admitted to the Jleeb female laborers’ shelter from April 1, 2019 to July 9, 2019, adding that 894 of them have already left the country. “The majority of those were Filipinas with 97 cases, of whom 94 have already left, followed by 80 Indians, 57 Sri Lankans and a minority of Bangladeshis,” Aqeel explained.

Labor residence

In a related issue, Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmad Al-Manoufi met with Interior Ministry and manpower authority officials to discuss putting into effect a cabinet decision made in 2016 concerning mandating contractors to provide temporary prefabricated accommodations for workers in given government projects’ sites. “The manpower authority will monitor contractors to make sure this resolution is put in practice, while the Interior Ministry will provide security,” Manoufi explained.

Meanwhile, Municipal Council member Maha Al-Baghihi said that many private residential areas are currently suffering from the spread of bachelor residents’ renting apartments illegally there, noting that it has become a vital necessity to build more labor cities to absorb all workers. Municipal Council member Abdul Salam Al-Handi stressed that labor cities must be comfortable and match UN specifications. “Laborers and bachelors’ reluctance to reside in labor cities proves that the current ones do not provide such services and facilities,” he underlined.

European Union opens HQ in Kuwait Sunday

KUWAIT: The 28-state European Union (EU) will inaugurate on Sunday headquarters of a mission in Kuwait — in a ceremony to be attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, a Foreign Ministry official announced yesterday. Ambassador Walid Al-Khubaizi, the assistant foreign minister for European affairs, said in a statement that the inauguration ceremony would be attended by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, Federica Mogherini, expected in the country tomorrow. The event will signal a crucial stage in the history of bilateral relations between the State of Kuwait and the EU, Ambassador Al-Khubaizi has stated that the Kuwait-EU relations have greatly advanced, alongside greater coordination regarding diverse bilateral and international affairs, Mogherini, during her stay in the country, will meet senior officials for discussions on a host of global issues. Last year, the EU announced the plan to “open a Delegation in Kuwait”, bringing total number of the union missions throughout the world to 42.

An EU press release in this respect had quoted Mogherini as praising Kuwait as an important partner the EU, for peace, security and prosperity in the country and the wider region. “Kuwait is the first country in the Gulf region with which the EEAS (European External Action Service) concluded a Cooperation Agreement in 2016, and opening a new Delegation in Kuwait City will allow us to further step up our political, economic and sectoral engagement. Establishing a permanent presence in the country illustrates that we consider our partnership with the Kuwaiti people a priority. This decision reflects the positive development of EU-Kuwait relations as well as the potential that exists for enhanced cooperation, in particular in support of Kuwait’s Vision 2035 as well as implementation of the EU-Kuwait Cooperation Arrangement. As the third EU Delegation to be established in the Gulf, following those in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2004) and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (2013), the new Delegation in Kuwait also signifies an important step to further strengthen the EU’s engagement in the (Gulf) region,” reads the press release. — KUNA

Friday Times Local

Friday, July 12, 2019

Friday Times

Friday, July 12, 2019
Iran dismisses British report; Trump vows harsher sanctions

LONDON: Three Iranian vessels tried to block a BP-operated tanker passing through the Strait of Hormuz but backed off when confronted by a Royal Navy warship, the UK government said yesterday. Britain warned Iran to “de-escalate the situation in the region” after the British Heritage, a Suezmax oil tanker operated by BP under an Isle of Man flag, was approached. “HMS Montrose was forced to position herself between the Iranian vessels and British Heritage and issue verbal warnings to the Iranian vessels, which then turned away,” a British government spokesman said in a statement.

The incident followed President Donald Trump’s warning he would soon “substantially” increase US sanctions on Iran as part of a drive to curb Iran’s nuclear program and force Tehran to change its regional behavior. The United States blames Iran for a series of attacks on shipping in the world’s most important oil artery since mid-May, accusations Tehran rejects but which have raised fears of increasing conflict in countries where Iran and its US-backed Gulf Arab rivals have been locked in proxy battles for predominance in the Middle East. Last month, Iran shot down a US drone near the Strait of Hormuz and Trump aborted a retaliatory military strike, saying it could have killed 150 people. He has signaled he is open to talks with Tehran without preconditions an offer rejected by Iran’s clerical leadership. The United States is hoping to enlist allies in a military coalition to safeguard strategic waters off Iran and Yemen, Marine General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Tuesday.

‘Crash of wills’

Heightened tension between Iran and the United States have fanned fears of increasing conflict in countries where Iran and its US-backed Gulf Arab rivals have been locked in proxy battles for predominance in the Middle East. Last month, Iran shot down a US drone near the Strait of Hormuz and Trump aborted a retaliatory military strike, saying it could have killed 150 people. He has signaled he is open to talks with Tehran without preconditions an offer rejected by Iran’s clerical leadership. The United States is hoping to enlist allies in a military coalition to safeguard strategic waters off Iran and Yemen, Marine General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Tuesday. Britain, France and Germany have so far avoided triggering a dispute resolution process under the nuclear deal they were instrumental in brokering.

They have so far avoided triggering a dispute resolution process contained in the deal but it could take new steps in the next two months, including restarting dismantled centrifuges and purifying uranium to a sharply higher threshold, unless it is allow to resume normal oil sales. Francois Lecointre, the French armed forces chief, described the friction between the United States and France as a “crash of wills”. “I think it is under control now... I don’t think it can spiral out of control but there can be escalation,” he told CNews television. —Reuters
Russia blames US over Gulf tensions, tanker incidents

Iran Guards say 5 ‘terrorists’ killed near western border

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday blamed Washington for the escalation in tensions with Tehran after Britain said Iranian ships had attempted to impede a British oil tanker in Gulf waters. “The situation is very concerning,” said Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, quoted by news agency RIA Novosti. “The reasons for this are clear. This is Washington’s deliberate, premeditated course to exacerbate tensions.” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists he was aware that “such an incident allegedly took place” but also of Tehran’s denial. “As before, we call on everyone to behave with restraint in the Persian Gulf in order not to exacerbate the situation,” he said, calling for dialogue.

Timeline of escalation in the Gulf

DUBAI: Tensions in the Gulf region have escalated in recent weeks amid a deepening standoff between Iran and United States over Tehran’s nuclear program. Here is a recap:

- **Credible threat**
  
  On May 5, the United States says it is sending an aircraft carrier strike group and a bomber task force to waters near Iran in response to “indications of a credible threat by Iranian regime forces.” The Pentagon also sends B-52 bombers to the region and, later, an amphibious assault ship and Patriot missile defense battery. US officials do not give more details of the threats but the move comes amid heightened tensions over Iran’s nuclear program. Washington reimposed sanctions on Iran last year after quitting a 2015 deal meant to control its nuclear drive. On May 8, it announces a halt to certain commitments under the agreement, including increasing enriched uranium and heavy water production. US President Donald Trump responds with new sanctions on Iran’s steel and mining sectors.

- **Tanker ‘sabotage’**
  
  On May 12, the United Arab Emirates says four commercial oil tankers had been targeted by “acts of sabotage” in Gulf waters off Saudi Arabia. The United States later identifies two of its oil tankers suffering “significant damage” but no casualties or oil spill. The other vessels were Norwegian and Emirati. Washington and Riyadh blame Tehran, which denies involvement. A UAE investigation finds later that a “state actor” was likely responsible for the attacks, probably carried out by limpet mines, but does not specifically blame Iran.

- **Tankers in flames**
  
  In the early hours of June 13, two fuel-loaded tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz towards the Indian Ocean are hit by mysterious blasts that cause major fires. One is a Norwegian vessel and the other is Japanese-owned. Their crews are rescued. The strait is a vital corridor connecting the petroleum-rich states of the Middle East with markets around the world. Washington, London and Riyadh accuse Tehran of being behind the attacks, which it denies.

- **Rocket attacks on Iraq**
  
  On June 18, rockets strike an oil field in Iraq’s Basra region, near a camp used by a company of US industrial conglomerate General Electric. It is the latest in a nearly week-long barrage of anonymous shelling attacks on American interests across Iraq. The incidents are not claimed but largely originate from areas where Shiite-dominated armed groups loyal to Tehran have free rein.

As standoff deepens, US tries coalition-building

WASHINGTON: In seeking a coalition at sea to monitor Iran, the United States is hoping to present a united front at a time when its hawkish policy has aggravated tensions and key allies are at loggerheads. General Joseph Dunford, the top US military officer, said the United States would take the commanding role and provide surveillance as other countries escort vessels under their own flags.

“I think probably over the next couple weeks we’ll identify which nations have the political will to support that initiative and then we’ll work directly with the militaries to identify the specific capabilities that’ll support that.” Dunford said Tuesday. He said the coalition would operate both in the Strait of Hormuz — the chokepoint to the Gulf through which 20 percent of the world’s oil flows — and the Bab el-Mandeb, the crucial shipping line into the Red Sea off war-battered Yemen.

The building coalition comes as tensions soar with Iran, which shot down a US spy drone and has been blamed by Washington for a series of sabotage attacks on oil tankers. Many observers see Iran as trying to extract a price on President Donald Trump’s administration, which imposed crippling sanctions and has tried to stop all of Tehran’s oil sales in hopes of weakening the clerical regime.

Trump, who exited a nuclear accord with Iran negotiated by his predecessor Barack Obama, on Wednesday vowed to keep ramping up sanctions — but he also has indicated he does not want war, calling off a planned strike last month at the 11th hour. In a familiar priority for Trump, he has accused other nations of not paying enough for their own ships’ security — a point stressed by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo as he visited allies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates last month.

Dunford’s remarks came on the day that the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, met Trump at the White House. Qatar, which is home to some 10,000 US troops but has comparatively cordial relations with Iran, has been under a Saudi-led embargo for two years, a massive rift in the Gulf Cooperation Council of oil-rich, US-friendly Arab monarchies. Alex Vatanka, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, said that the coalition initiative could serve to “end the intra-GCC conflict through the backdoor,” although he said that would be a longer-term calculation.

“There are good reasons why the US wants others to do a lot more to protect the flow of energy and trade from the Persian Gulf,” he said. “Is it going to change the big-picture dynamics in the sense of the US-Iran standoff? That’s where I’m more skeptical,” he said. He said Iran was trying to impose counter-pressure against the United States and create “a bit of panic in the head of President Trump” by destabilizing the oil market. “I’m not sure that this is going to in itself deter the Iranians from being in the path they are in,” he said. —AFP

US drone downed

On June 20, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards say they shot down a US drone which violated Iranian airspace. The Pentagon says the drone was in international airspace and denies an “unprovoked attack.” Trump says he approved a retaliatory strike the next day but cancelled it at the last minute. On June 24, he announces a host of new sanctions on Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and senior Iranian military leaders.

Iran tanker seized

On July 4, authorities in Gibraltar, a British overseas territory in the Mediterranean, detain an Iranian tanker on suspicion that it is carrying crude to Syria in violation of EU sanctions. Iran denies the release, accusing Britain of acting at the bidding of the United States. On July 11, Britain says three Iranian military vessels had tried the previous day to “impede the passage” of a UK oil tanker in Gulf waters but were warned off by a British warship. The tanker is owned by British energy giant BP. Iran’s Revolutionary Guards deny there was any confrontation but warn that United States and Britain will “strongly regret” the seizure of the tanker off Gibraltar. —AFP

In another development, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said yesterday they had killed five “terrorists” in clashes near the western border with Iraq. “A terrorist team that intended to infiltrate into our country from the western borders yesterday (Wednesday)... was completely destroyed,” the Guards said in a statement published by their official website Sepahnews.

Tensions have surged since May 10, when Iran shot down a US drone which violated Iranian airspace. The Pentagon says the downed drone was operating out of a US military base in the United Arab Emirates.
Beaten, abused; Sudan women bear scars of fight for freedom

Women had their clothes torn off, raped

KHARTOUM: After six years abroad, Khadija Saleh returned to Sudan in March to join protesters in the streets demanding change. She was taking part in a sit-in near the Defense Ministry in Khartoum on June 3 when security forces stormed in. The area had become a centre for anti-government protests. Saleh said she was beaten with sticks, and still wears bandages on her wounds. “I came back from a safer place because I want a better future for this country,” the 41-year-old said.

Women were a driving force during months of protests against President Omar al-Bashir’s 30-year rule, before he was replaced by a military council in April. But the protests didn’t stop as demonstrators demanded the military swiftly hand power to civilians, leading to a stand-off and then a crackdown. Nihad Gabralla, a 53-year-old activist, said she was beaten and threatened with rape during the June 3 raid. “Sudan can be better,” she said. “My daughter deserves to live in a nice country... We will fight.”

Under Bashir’s rule, women’s lives were tightly controlled by men. Morality laws meant a woman could be arrested for wearing trousers. For that reason, 35-year-old Mahdi Abaz-Yezid wore trousers while she campaigned for change at the sit-in. She believes she was beaten more because of her choice of fashion. “There was already a bullet in my arm, I was bleeding but they continued to beat me,” she said.

Duha Mohmed, a 23-year-old student who escaped the sit-in raid before returning to help the injured, said she also wanted a life in which she could make her own choices. “I don’t want to wear a headscarf, but it is not my choice. I want my right to wear what I want.”

Amel Tajeidin, a 41-year-old mother of four, said she and her husband took turns watching their children. “While it was his turn to look after the children, I took part in the demonstrations,” she said. She had been teaching songs to street children in a makeshift tent at the sit-in. During the June 3 raid, members of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) shouted at her and other protesters and told them to flee. “We ran. We were surrounded by soldiers and policemen,” she said. Both her arms are now wrapped in bandages. “While we were running, they beat us. To protect my head, I used my hands. This is why my two arms are broken,” she said. “The ones like us beaten by police were lucky, the ones beaten by RSF members were brutally injured.”

The military council has said excesses were committed as the sit-in was cleared. It said these are being investigated and that those responsible will be held accountable. Despite the violence, Sudan’s military rulers and a coalition of opposition and protest groups agreed last week to share power for three years ahead of elections. —Reuters

Khashoggi fallout: Saudi holidaymakers urged to shun Turkey

RIYADH: Diplomatic fallout over journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s murder appears to be slowing the flow of high-rolling Saudis to Turkey, as calls grow within the oil-rich kingdom to boycott the holiday magnet. The two Sunni Muslim powers have a longstanding geopolitical rivalry, but relations plummed new lows after Khashoggi’s killing in October in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, which tarnished Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s global image. Each year hundreds of thousands of Saudi tourists visit Turkey, thanks to its milder climate, turquoise waters and status as a crossroads between East and West. But tensions over the journalist’s murder are feeding into growing calls by nationalists and pro-government media to boycott Turkey, potentially hitting its already strained economy. “Don’t go to Turkey” and “Turkey is not safe” are just some of the headlines that have popped up, with multiple media outlets running hostile stories in recent months. Many, including Al-Arabiya, have splashed official warnings from the Saudi embassy in Ankara about rising passport wait times as a result.

The apparent scaremongering seems to be working, since the Turkish tourism ministry reported Saudi visitor arrivals dropped more than 30 percent in the first five months of 2019 compared to the same period last year. A travel agency in Riyadh reported a similar fall in bookings to AFP, although Saudi tourism authorities did not respond to a request for comment. “I care about safety,” a young Riyadh resident told AFP, explaining why he was likely to avoid Turkey.

‘Boycott call’

Saudis, who are also among the top property buyers and investors in Turkey, spend an average of $500 (450 euros) a day as tourists in the country, significantly higher than European visitors, according to a 2018 study by Riyadh’s King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies. Appeals for a boycott of Turkey are not limited to tourism. A video predating Khashoggi’s murder that showed Riyadh’s influential governor Faisal bin Bandar declining an offer of Turkish coffee recently resurfaced on social media, triggering a call for a boycott of Turkish products. —AFP

UAE shields reputation with drawdown from Yemen ‘quagmire’

DUBAI: A surprise UAE troop drawdown in war-torn Yemen aims to restore the Gulf country’s reputation, but may strain ties with key ally Saudi Arabia at a time of heightened tensions with Iran, experts say. “The political, reputational and operational risks Abu Dhabi incurred in Yemen stood in no relation to the anticipated benefits,” said Andreas Krieg, a professor at King’s College in London. The United Arab Emirates has been a key player in the Saudi-led coalition which intervened in Yemen in March 2015 to back the internationally-recognized government against the Tehran-aligned Houthi rebels, only months after they captured the capital Sanaa.

Since then, tens of thousands of people-mostly civilians-have been killed in the conflict described by the UN as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, which has left the impoverished country on the brink of famine. The two sides have fought to a stalemate, and several rounds of UN-sponsored talks, the last held in Sweden in December, have failed to implement any deal to end the war.

Yet in a sudden move on Monday, the UAE announced it was redeploying and reducing its troops mainly from northern Yemen. In four years of combat, it has sent in thousands of troops and helped train some 90,000 Yemeni soldiers. One factor driving the drawdown may have been hopes of limiting the damage to the UAE over its role in Yemen, with both the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis staking claims on the country, significantly higher than European visitors, according to a 2018 study by the UAE’s standing in the US,” Krieg told AFP. Last week, a US Democratic senator warned Washington could cut off arms sales to the Emirates over a report the UAE shipped US missiles to Libyan rebels in violation of a UN arms embargo. The UAE denied the claims. Increasing regional differences with Iran may also have helped seal the troop reduction, said Middle East expert James Dorsey. “If there were to erupt into a military conflict, then the Emirates alongside Saudi Arabia is going to be a battlefield,” he told AFP. “I think the Emiratis want to be ready for that, even though they don’t want a military conflict with Iran.”

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**International**

**Assad hits a wall in Syrian war as front lines harden**

Fighting brings no real gain for government

**BEIRUT:** President Bashar Al-Assad's assault in the northwest has been met with a painful rebel counter-punch that underlines Turkish resolve to keep the area out of his hands and shows why he will struggle to take back more of Syria by force. More than two months of Russian-backed operations in and around Idlib province have yielded little or nothing for Assad's side. It marks a rare case of a military campaign that has not gone his way since Russia intervened in 2015.

While resisting government attacks, the insurgents have managed to carve out small advances of their own, drawing on ample stocks of guided anti-tank missiles that opposition and diplomatic sources say have been supplied by Turkey. They're even equipping themselves with these missiles...they mean they are comfortably supplied, a rebel source said speaking on condition of anonymity because he was discussing rebel military capabilities. Turkey's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on reports that Ankaa has stepped supplies of arms to rebels. With Turkey committed to the rebels, government spokesman Stelios Petsas on Thursday said the area had been hit by winds...it means they are being cut off, a Western diplomat speaking anonymously in order to offer a candid assessment.

**‘Bone-breaking battle’**

The Idlib area is dominated by Tahrir al-Sham, the jihadists formerly known as the Nusra Front. Proscribed as a terrorist group by the UN Security Council, the group has set aside past conflict with Turkish-backed rebels to deal with a Russian military threat that might open the way for a Turkish military advance towards the regime-controlled capital, Damascus.

“I expect the battles to continue for a time because it has become a bone-breaking battle,” he said in written answers to questions from Reuters. The government campaign of air strikes and barrel bomb attacks on rebel-held areas has yield little or nothing for months of Russian-backed operations in and around Idlib province. The capture of the southwest a year ago remains Assad's last big gain. The prospects of further advances have been obstructed not only by Turkish interests in the northwest but also the presence of US forces in the east and northeast, American troops are still supporting Kurdish-led fighters following a reversal of President Donald Trump's decision last December to pull them all out.

“After more than eight years of war, this leaves Syria carved up into areas of US, Russian, Turkish and Iranian influence that seem unlikely to be stitched back together any time soon. We could see the front lines harden and remain like that for some time, where either the appetite or capability to fight through them is not there on the part of the regime or its allies,” said a Western diplomat speaking anonymously in order to offer a candid assessment.

**Unprecedented phenomenon**

On a beach in Sozopoli, the storm toppled and ripped open a Czech family's caravan, killing an elderly couple in their seventies and injuring an 8-year-old boy...it was a matchbox,” said Yannis Karabouriotis, owner of a nearby tavern. “You cannot describe it. There used to be 50 pine trees around the beachfront in one of Greece's top tourist areas, terrorizing thousands of holidaymakers caught in the open, authorities said yesterday. Six tourists including two children were killed in a freak storm overnight in Sozopoli near the town of Sveti Vlas...the storm was sending 50 of its fire engines to the station. Russia is economically dependent on its vast oil and gas reserves...from being launched from Idlib, including drone strikes on its nearby air base. President Vladimir Putin said in April a full-scale operation in Idlib was impractical for now, Though the government has not declared the goals of the campaign, rebel sources believe it was to capture two highways that pass through rebel-held territory. Some 300,000 people fleeing bombardment have moved towards the Turkish border since April, prompting the United Nations to warn that Idlib was on the brink of a "humanitarian nightmare." —Reuters

**Huge fire erupts at power station outside Moscow**

MOSCOW: A huge blaze broke out yesterday at a gas-fired power station just outside Moscow sending a plume of smoke and flames 50 meters into the sky, Russian television showed. The fire at Power Station No 27 broke out around 1140 am around 20 kilometers from Moscow. The emergencies ministry said that 11 people received medical treatment including five people with minor burns but no one was hospitalized. There was no risk of fire spreading to nearby residential areas, it said.

The energy ministry said a high-pressure gas pipe supplying fuel was burning outside the power station itself. Russian television reported that the cause of the fire “could have been an explosion.” The smoke and flames were visible from the capital and the emergency ministry said that the fire blazed over an area of 800 square meters (8,600 square feet). The plume of fire subsided after authorities switched off the gas supply but black smoke continued to billow as gas already released continued to burn.

The emergencies ministry said the fire would be localized shortly. One witness, Sofiya Fesenko, watching the fire from her flat in Mytishi, said on Russian television that hot water flowed from cold taps after the fire broke out. “We saw smoke covering half the sky,” she said. The emergency services sent in helicopters to drop water and fire-fighting trains to tackle the blaze, with more than 150 firefighters at the scene. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin wrote on Twitter that the city was sending 50 of its fire engines to the power station.

The authorities warned drivers not to use nearby highways as the smoke hindered traffic and one highway leading to Moscow's ring road was closed entirely. The power station was built at the end of the Soviet era and opened in 1996. Its four reactors supply part of Moscow and the Moscow region with electricity and centralized hot water and heating. The energy ministry said electricity supplies to the public would not be affected and the fire did not damage generation equipment at the station. Russia is economically dependent on its vast oil and gas reserves. —AFP
New Orleans threatened by floods as big storm forms

‘Be prepared for the impact’

WASHINGTON: The US city of New Orleans prepared Wednesday to face the first tropical storm of the season, which could become a hurricane and lead the governor of Louisiana to declare a state of emergency. “It is still too soon to tell what the impact will be, but we believe there will be an impact,” New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell said at a press conference in the city which was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

“Be prepared for the impacts,” she warned, reminding residents that the city had already received up to eight inches of rain in three hours that morning. There was partial flooding. New Orleans was placed under a storm-surge watch Wednesday morning along with a stretch of Louisiana coast as a tropical storm formed in the Gulf of Mexico, threatening the region with potentially life-threatening rains.

The storm-surge watches warn residents of possible flooding from rising waters and coastal inundations in the city, known worldwide for its Mardi Gras and jazz. Part of New Orleans is built below sea level. “Conditions appear favorable for this system to strengthen to a hurricane as it approaches the central Gulf Coast by the weekend,” the Miami-based National Hurricane Center said. If the storm becomes a hurricane as anticipated, it would be the first of the Atlantic season and would be named Barry.

Parts of the southeastern Louisiana coast were already experiencing heavy rains and flooding, the NHC said. Jefferson Parish, which includes parts of New Orleans, was drenched in four to six inches of rain (10-15 centimeters) and two to three more inches were expected. Louisiana governor John Bel Edwards declared the state of emergency, which allows the state to provide additional resources for storm preparation.

Power out

Residents in the risk zone are currently encouraged to stay home and “shelter in place.” On the Wednesday morning nearly 10,000 inhabitants lost electricity in New Orleans. During Hurricane Katrina levees collapsed under the weight of the water, flooding 80 percent of the city. More than 1,800 people died during the catastrophe. At 2100 GMT Wednesday the storm system was 124 miles (200 kilometers) southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River.

The storm packed sustained winds of 40 miles per hour (65 kilometers), still way below hurricane force of 74 miles per hour but on track to become a tropical storm by Thursday and a hurricane by Friday. It was expected to unload as much as a foot of rain over the Gulf Coast through early next week, forecasters said. Local authorities also issued warnings to residents as the Mississippi River neared flood levels, rising to 16 feet (4.9 meters) in New Orleans as of 1300 GMT.

The levees protecting the city are built to hold back the river to a depth of 20 feet, a level that forecasters warned could be reached by Saturday morning. During the press conference, a spokesman from Flood Protection said he was “confident” in the levees’ ability to hold back the water, while one of his colleagues added that the 189 pumps spread throughout the city were operating at “optimum capacity.”

Missing teen mystery deepens as Vatican dig reveals empty graves

VATICAN CITY: The mystery surrounding the disappearance of an Italian teenager 36 years ago deepened yesterday after two graves at the Vatican were opened to rule out any misunderstandings over which grave was meant.

The tombs belonged to two princesses, buried in 1836 and 1840. The small, leafy cemetery, located on the original site of the Emperor Nero circus, is usually the last resting place for German-speaking members of Catholic institutions. Beyond St Peter’s Basilica, in an area off-limits to tourists, neat rows of tombstones lie behind its gates. Clinical tools set aside to measure recovered bones lay unused on a nearby table. The Vatican said it had informed the princesses’ descendants that their remains were missing. It said it would look into work done on the tombs in the 19th century, and again in the 1960s and 1970s, in a bid to find out what happened to them.

Dozens of journalists and crowds of curious tourists had gathered at the entrance to the Vatican nearest the cemetery. Supporters of the Orlandi family waited outside, in T-shirts reading “The Truth Sets Us Free” and “Where Is Her Body?” “This mystery is part of this country’s dark history,” Sgro said, in reference to a series of decades-old cases in Italy dogged by unanswered questions and believed by conspiracy theorists.

Merkel sits through anthems after shaking spells

BERLIN: Angela Merkel remained seated during national anthems at an official ceremony yesterday, as the German chancellor apparently sought to prevent a repeat of uncontrollable shaking with a rare change of protocol. With questions swirling about Merkel’s health after she suffered three episodes of shaking in public in less than a month, the veteran leader opted to play safe.

After greeting Denmark’s new Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen at the portico of the chancellery, a smiling Merkel walked her over to a podium where both leaders took their seats. The unusual move came a day after a similar ceremony when the German chancellor was seen shaking involuntarily for the third time.

On Wednesday, Merkel began trembling as national anthems were being played at the reception of Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne. Just over an hour later, she attended a press conference as planned and told journalists that her health was no cause for concern. She explained that she was simply still in a phase of “processing” a previous shaking spell, but that “there has been progress”. “I will have to live with it for a while,” added Merkel, who turns 65 next week. “Just like how it has come, one day it will go away too,” she said.

More transparency?

The shaking on Wednesday was visible although less severe than during the first episode in June. On that occasion she appeared unsteady and shook as she stood in the midday sun next to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, whom she was welcoming with military honors. That first bout of shaking was blamed on dehydration. But a second episode struck a week later at the end of June, just hours before she was due to board a plane for a G20 summit in Japan.

Officials have sought to play down the repeated shaking, insisting that Merkel is well while refusing to address detailed questions about her medical condition. But several media outlets said Merkel would need to provide more transparency if she wanted the speculation to go away. The daily Süddeutsche Zeitung said Merkel’s explanation belies “her fear that the public could doubt her strength and ability, especially if she admitted that she has allowed herself to be examined.” Meaning: she herself has doubts.” — AFP
When US puts a border between migrant kids and their caretakers

Can you help me get my son back?

EL PASO: On June 12, Gerardo, a 41-year-old indigenous bricklayer from Guatemala, appeared before a US immigration judge in El Paso, Texas. Since crossing the US-Mexico border illegally two months earlier with his 14-year-old son, he had been separated from the boy and forced to wait in Mexico for his hearing. Now, he had only one question for the judge: “Can you help me get my son back?”

After they crossed into the United States, a border patrol agent declared the boy’s photocopied birth certificate to be fake, casting doubt on their father-son relationship. Despite Gerardo’s protestations in broken Spanish, officers took the boy, Walter, away. Gerardo was sent to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, to wait out his immigration court proceedings, with no idea where Walter was taken and no instructions on how to find him, according to Gerardo and his attorneys, who recounted the court appearance and circumstances of his case to Reuters.

They asked that his surname be withheld because Gerardo fears for his family’s safety in Guatemala. In a phone call to a cousin in Arkansas, Gerardo said, he learned that Walter was at a large migrant children’s shelter near Miami. Separated from his dad, Walter later recalled, “I felt like the world was crashing down on me.” As a new Trump administration policy rapidly expands, family separations increasingly are complicated by a formidable barrier: an international border.

Started in January, the policy known as “Migrant Protection Protocols” (MPP) requires some migrants to wait in Mexico for their immigration cases to be processed, while others—based largely on border authorities’ discretion—are allowed to wait in the United States. Under MPP, about 18,500 migrants have been returned to Mexico, Mexican officials say.

When children are sent north of the border and caregivers south, communication and legal coordination suffer, kids’ emotional health can deteriorate and simply finding one another again can take weeks, according to about two dozen interviews with migrant families, their attorneys and advocates, case workers and researchers, as well as courtroom observations. Although a court last year halted the widespread “zero tolerance” separations of migrant parents and children at the border, US officials still separate certain family members there.

They separate children from parents if they believe documents to be fraudulent, the parent has a criminal record, they can’t prove parentage, or the child appears to be at risk. Officials also routinely separate children from non-parent relatives with whom they traveled, including aunts, siblings and grandparents - an approach also followed during the Obama administration that is meant to stem child trafficking.

This year, under MPP, border officials in some locations have given the option to send such adults to Mexico rather than detain or release them in the United States pending their court hearings. The separated children are sent to US-based children’s shelters.

A US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) official said that parents are not being separated from children due to the MPP program, and did not respond when asked whether they track children separated from other family members they had traveled with. The department’s data, held by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), is not open to public view.

In general, the Trump administration has said that it is cracking down on fraud at the border. “We believe (smuggling organizations) have been coaching individuals by saying if you come to the border with a child and you purport to be a family unit, you will not get detained and you will be released into the interior,” said Gregory Nevano, assistant director at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency’s Homeland Security Investigations. “We are trying to save and rescue children,” Nevano said.

ICE officials said they interviewed 2,475 “family units” (purported parents and children) on the southwest border who “presented indicia of fraud” between mid-April and July 5. Of those, 352 were found to be falsely claiming parent-child relationships. Attorneys and children’s case-workers say that when the caretaking adults are sent to Mexico, it’s more difficult to contact them because they often don’t have a fixed address.

It’s also harder for the adults and children to connect: The 1-800 number available online to locate children in US shelters doesn’t work from Mexico. Meanwhile, younger children may not know the details of their asylum case or even the location of family members who might help or sponsor them in the United States. And in cases like Gerardo’s, the geographic boundary can make it harder to identify and rectify a separation apparently made in error. — Reuters

Mass immigration roundups in US to start Sunday

NEW YORK: Roundups of undocumented immigrant families will start Sunday in 10 US cities, fulfilling a hardline immigration stance from US President Donald Trump which will be a key issue in his 2020 re-election bid, the New York Times reported. The raids will be conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents over a number of days starting July 14, the Times reported citing unnamed sources including two current and one former homeland security officials.

Reuters could not independently confirm the pending government action early today. The officials told the Times that ICE agents were targeting at least 2,000 immigrants who have been ordered deported but remain in the country illegally.

Trump said on July 5 that the mass roundups would begin “fairly soon,” even as migrant advocates vowed their communities would be “ready” when immigration officers come. He postponed the operation last month after the date was leaked, but last week said it would take place after July 4. “They’ll be starting fairly soon, but I don’t call them raids, we’re removing people, all of these people who have come in over the years illegally,” Trump told reporters at the White House on Friday.

Last month ICE officials said operations would target recently-arrived undocumented migrants in a bid to discourage a surge of Central American families at the southwest border. ICE said in a previous statement its focus was arresting people with criminal histories but any immigrant family in violation of US laws was subject to arrest. The threatened raids have rattled immigrant communities and come after apprehensions of migrants on the southwest border hit a 12-year high in May before easing in June as Mexico increased immigration enforcement.

Democratic lawmakers visited an El Paso, Texas, Border Patrol station on Monday and said migrants were being held in “horrifying” conditions, with women told to drink out of a toilet, a claim that has been disputed. Immigrant families arrested together will be held together, when possible, in family detention centers in Texas and Pennsylvania, the officials told the Times. But because of space limitations, some might stay in hotel rooms until travel is arranged. — Reuters

Migrant whose daughter died slams ‘cruelty’

WASHINGTON: A Guatemalan woman whose infant daughter died after being held by US immigration authorities denounced the “cruelty” of the country’s migrant detention centers on Wednesday. Yazmin Juarez spoke out at “Kids in Cages: Inhuman Treatment at the Border,” a congressional hearing staged amid a series of scandals over poor conditions suffered by detained migrants that has rocked Washington.

“If today I can make a change, if I can make a difference by telling you what is happening with the ICE detention, the cruelty...it is extremely unfair,” a tearful Juarez told reporters before the hearing, referring to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Juarez said she fled to the United States last year with her 19-month-old Mariee “because I feared for our lives in Guatemala.” She crossed the border and claimed asylum but says she and Mariee were “locked in a freezing cold cage for a few days” then moved to an ICE detention center, where her daughter became ill.

“I begged the doctors and medical staff to give her the care I knew she needed but they didn’t,” Juarez said. “When ICE finally released us, I took Mariee...to a doctor and then to the emergency room. But it was too late. Mariee never left the hospital,” she said. Speaking before the House Civil Rights and Civil Liberties subcommittee, Juarez said that “I watched my baby girl die slowly and painfully—a few months before her second birthday.”

“The world should know what is happening to so many babies and children inside these ICE detention facilities,” she said. “My bright beautiful girl is gone but I hope her story will spur America’s government to act.” Representative Elijah Cummings, the chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, denounced what he termed “government-sponsored child abuse on a grand scale.”

“There must be greater accountability,” said Representative Joaquin Castro, the chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. — AFP
India turns to slavery survivors to uncover hidden victims, offer help

Initiatives aim at building trust between victims and state

CHENNAI: When Anjali wanders the backstreets of a city in southern India where she was once forced into prostitution in the name of religion, she does not go seeking answers, closure or revenge. The 39-year-old survivor searches Raichur for other victims of the illegal devadasi system - which sees girls "dedicated" to temples and trapped in sex slavery - trying to earn their trust and refer them to rehabilitation schemes run by the government.

Anjali is part of an initiative by the Karnataka state government that has turned to survivors and community workers in a push to find and support more trafficking victims. "The devadasi practice is illegal but continues quietly," Anjali who declined to give her real name as her children are in danger, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview over the phone.

"Since it is illegal, people trapped in it are very scared of coming out," said the community leader and member of Taaras, a coalition of women in sex work with a presence in 12 states. "They fear they will face police action and suffer in silence. The only time they speak up is when I go to them." Several state governments in India are increasingly working with survivor networks and community groups - which include thousands of volunteers - to trace, identify and help victims.

Survivors not only know where to look for victims, but can help them overcome any stigma and shame, as well as mistrust in the authorities, according to campaigners and state officials. From community-led search-and-rescue efforts to mobile apps designed to give authorities, according to the Thomson Reuters Foundation interview, a crucial safeguard for a secular justice system.

"We leverage the connection community workers have to gain access to others and bring them under the devadasi rehabilitation program," similarly, in neighboring Telangana, the State AIDS Control Society tracks the health of trafficking survivors with the help of a sex workers group that liaises directly with such victims. "They don't open up to government officials but confide in peers who have been through their journey," said civil servant Anna Prasanna Kumar, adding that each community worker gave the state access to larger groups of women in need of help.

Kumari said a new mobile app, launched on a trial basis in five districts of southern Telangana state this May after being proposed by community leaders, is being used to collect data on access to health for slavery survivors and follow up on cases. In eastern state of West Bengal, another mobile app - Utthan - allows trafficking victims enrolled in rehabilitation schemes to rate government officials on their sensitivity, efficiency and the time taken to respond to survivors and their needs.

"The feedback is sent to senior officials and since its creation in 2018, the app has seen survivors receive care quicker and raised awareness among civil servants about the crime and the trauma facing victims, according to its users. "With this app, the relationship between the policy maker, survivor and officials on ground has become more equal," said psychologist Pompri Ranjeejee of anti-trafficking charity Sanjog.

Pakistan train collision kills 11, injures 78

ISLAMABAD: At least 11 people were killed and nearly 80 injured when two trains collided in central Pakistan early yesterday, officials said. The incident took place in Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province when a passenger train coming from the eastern city of Lahore rammed into a goods train that had stopped at a crossing, a senior government official said. A senior Pakistan Railways official gave AFP the toll, adding: "We fear the death toll will rise as rescue teams are still cutting (through) the wreckage."

Earlier, local police officer Omar Salamat told TV channel Geo News that dozens had been taken to nearby hospitals. "The condition of three to four passengers is critical," he said. Train accidents are common in Pakistan, where the railways have seen decades of decline due to corruption, mismanagement and lack of investment.

Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, the country’s minister for railways told TV channel Aaj that an investigation had been launched to determine the causes of the incident. Prime Minister Imran Khan tweeted his condolences, adding: "Have asked Railways Minister to take emergency steps to counter decades of neglect of railway infrastructure & ensure safety standards." Also yesterday at least nine passengers were killed and 22 injured when a speeding bus overturned near the capital Islamabad, a police official said, while a landslide in the northwestern Swat valley killed six people, all from one family.

Friday Times
Friday, July 12, 2019

Bangladesh charges former chief justice with graft

DHAKA: Bangladesh’s anti-graft office has charged the former chief justice with corruption nearly two years after he fled the country saying he was forced to resign, an official said yesterday. Surenanda Kumar Sinha, who had led the South Asian nation’s Supreme Court to a landmark verdict on judicial independence that went against the government, left Bangladesh in late 2017 amid widespread allegations he had been pressured to step aside.

Opposition groups raised fears that his departure was a blow to the credibility of the judiciary in the Muslim-majority country, ruled by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s Awami League party since 2009. On Wednesday, the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) filed a lawsuit against Sinha and 10 others including a former bank chief executive on charges of graft, money laundering and abuse of power. They were charged with using fake credit papers to launder 40 million taka and transfer it to the account of Sinha, ACC secretary Dilwar Bakht told AFP.

"The case was filed at the district office of the ACC on Wednesday," he said. This is the first time in Bangladesh’s history that a former chief justice has been charged with any of these offenses. Khan’s unceremonious departure came after a rare statement from the Supreme Court in October 2017 said other judges had accused him of graft and refused to sit with him at the top bench. Just months earlier, Sinha had led the Supreme Court in scraping parliament’s power to sack top judges, a move hailed by lawyers as a crucial safeguard for a secular judiciary in the nation of 168 million. — AFP

Pakistan train collision

RAHIM YAR KHAN: Pakistani rescue personnel and local residents search for victims in a wreckage of a train carriage after two trains collided in Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province. — AFP
NEW YORK: More than 7,000 colleges, universities, technical schools and community colleges from around the world declared a climate emergency in a joint letter which was set to be delivered to the United Nations on Wednesday. “Declaring a climate emergency changes the nature of the urgency in higher education,” Sam Barratt, chief of education and youth for UN Environment told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Networks of schools pledged to increase sustainability curriculum and campus outreach, boost climate change research and skill-building opportunities for students and reach carbon neutrality by 2050, some as soon as 2030. “This isn’t nice to do, it’s a must-do,” Barratt said. The letter was coordinated by the UN Environment’s Youth and Education Alliance, The Alliance for Sustainability and Leadership in Education and Second Nature, a nonprofit working with colleges and universities on climate action.

Indonesia to build country’s longest bridge

JAKARTA: Indonesia plans to build a 7 km bridge to connect two islands in the Malacca Strait, close to Singapore, as part of efforts to develop industry and tourism in the area, the government said yesterday. The bridge connecting Batam and Bintan islands will cost an estimated 4 trillion rupiah, the office of the cabinet secretary said in a statement yesterday, and will be the longest in the Southeast Asian country. The bridge aims to capitalize on expanding markets of facilities in the area, the government said.

Thousands of schools, universities declare ‘climate emergency’

Schools pledge to increase sustainability curriculum

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Follow our model for ‘happy’ Xinjiang, China tells West

GENEVA: China said yesterday its treatment of ethnic Muslims in “happy” and “secure” Xinjiang region was a model for other nations to follow despite a bombardment of Western criticism. Nearly two dozen nations at the UN Human Rights Council this week urged China to halt persecution of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang, where UN experts and activists say at least 1 million are held in detention centers.

China’s northwest. Hundreds of people have been killed there in the past few years in violence between Uighurs, a mostly Muslim people who speak a Turkic language, and ethnic majority Han Chinese, especially in the heavily Uighur south of Xinjiang.

China has blamed the violence on Islamist extremists and separatists, while Uighur exiles and activists point to frustration at Chinese controls on their culture and religion. The letter criticizing China was signed by the ambassadors of 22 countries, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland, but not the United States which quit the U.N. body a year ago. They urged China to allow international independent experts, including U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, proper access to Xinjiang.

Bachelet, a former president of Chile, has pushed China to grant the United Nations access to investigate reports of disappearances and arbitrary detentions, particularly of Muslims in Xinjiang. China’s representative said international organizations and media who visited Xinjiang had found the situation was different from its portrayal in the West, and that officials from countries behind the letter declined an invitation to visit.

He accused Western nations of failing to show concern when Xinjiang suffered terrorist attacks, then making irresponsible assessments after the population’s lives had improved. “Those allegations by a small group of Western countries and NGOs cannot do away with the tremendous achievements that were made against terrorism and radicalization and cannot change the fact that Xinjiang people are leading a happy life,” he said.—Reuters
Mainlanders among Hong Kong protesters, though many stay away

Protests portrayed as foreign-funded plot in China

HONG KONG: As Hong Kong is rocked by political chaos, Chinese mainlander Briny Lin has found herself joining the mass protests, an act that would be unthinkable under the authoritarian regime back home. The huge rallies and clashes coursing through the international finance hub are the latest outburst of anger by Hong Kongers who believe Beijing is stamping down on the city's unique freedoms and culture.

But for the hundreds of thousands of Chinese mainlanders who make the city their home, the movement sparks mixed emotions. Some strongly disagree with the protests, which were set off by a now-suspended plan to allow extraditions to the Chinese mainland custody—and discovering more about the Cultural Revolution on its 50th anniversary—changed that. "If the (extradition) bill is passed, the disappearance of bookstores would happen again within the law," she said. Not all share Lin's bravado. In China the protests have been portrayed as a violent, foreign-funded plot, not a mass movement against Beijing's increased influence over the semi-autonomous hub.

AFP approached some 20 mainland tourists in Kowloon to ask them their thoughts and only six had heard there were rallies. "It is rare to see protests on the mainland," said a 21-year-old student named Zhi who said she had read about the protests on the Twitter-like Weibo platform. Another tourist, who gave her surname as Hao, said she had read in Chinese state media that Britain "participated in and provoked this incident". "I don't know whether it is correct or not," she added. Mainlanders who live in Hong Kong seven years ago. He said many of his mainland contemporaries hoped the protests would die down soon. Kay Zeng, 28, from Guangdong province, just across the border with Hong Kong, said she disapproved of the extradition bill being rushed through, but would not take to the streets. "I've never participated in a march and I seldom publicly express my opinions," she told AFP.

Mainland influx

Some one million mainlanders have migrated to Hong Kong since its 1997 handover to China, a diaspora that is itself a source of friction in a city to Hong Kong since its 1997 handover to China, a of the more violent confrontations.

A small number of people, like Lin, have taken to the streets. "This is the first social movement that I've experienced," said the 27-year-old, who moved to Hong Kong four years ago from a city in northern China. "Hong Kong is the only place in China where freedom of speech can be exercised...I want to be there for my own rights and be there to see for myself what the protests are like," she told AFP. Lin said she was happy to give her name and, unlike many, eschewed wearing a mask at the rallies—although she has stayed clear of any political involvement. "I don't know whether it is correct or not," she said. Mainlanders who live in Hong Kong seven years ago. He said many of his mainland contemporaries hoped the protests would die down soon. Kay Zeng, 28, from Guangdong province, just across the border with Hong Kong, said she disapproved of the extradition bill being rushed through, but would not take to the streets. "I've never participated in a march and I seldom publicly express my opinions," she told AFP.

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A model presents a creation from Spanish designer Duarte's Spring/Summer 2020 collection during the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week in Madrid. — AFP

Social media rescue Morocco’s last woman potters

See Page 24
K-pop star who avoided draft may be allowed to return home

A K-pop singer who was deported and barred from South Korea for avoiding military service by changing nationality came a step closer to being allowed to return in a surprise ruling yesterday. South Korea’s highest court ruled that it was unlawful to deny a visa to Steve Yoo, who had huge success in the 1990s.

But in a ruling Thursday, the Supreme Court sent the case back to Seoul High Court for review, saying in a statement that “the law has no restrictions that prevent (him) from visiting South Korea.”

A recent survey showed that almost 70 percent of South Koreans have no restrictions that prevent them from visiting South Korea.

Some have taken extreme measures to avoid conscription, including a dozen music students who were caught last year having deliberately put on weight before their medical exam, hoping to be declared too heavy for service. Others have undergone unnecessary surgery, including extracting their own teeth, and given up their foreign passports and giving up their South Korean citizenship.

Refusing to serve the duty is a crime in the South, which is still technically at war with nuclear-armed North Korea. It can lead to jail terms and stigma that can affect social standing and employment prospects. To justify Yoo’s re-entry ban, the South Korean government said that as a public figure Yoo violated the immigration act, which states that foreigners may be stopped from entering the country if they “pose a threat to public health and interest.”

Lee Yong-su, an activist at Seoul-based NGO World Without War, said the government has been taking the wrong approach to the issue. “Those who have served the duty are angry because there are so many problems with the country’s military,” Lee told AFP. “Rather than really trying to improve the situation and make things better for conscripts, they have unfairly targeted and singled out an individual.” — AFP

Texan widow gives massive donation of art to French gallery

A Texan widow who discovered a love for French art during a trip to Paris in the 1970s is to donate another part of her vast collection of 19th-century masterpieces to France. Marlene Hays and her late husband, businessman Spencer Hays, had already given 187 artworks to the Orsay museum in Paris worth more than 173 million euros ($195 million), the biggest donation to a French museum since World War II. Now, Hays, 82, who was widowed in 2017, is giving a further donation of 106 works from mostly post-Impressionist artists including Matisse, Bonnard, Modigliani and the sculptor Camille Claudel.

The latest gift of 40 paintings, 47 works on paper and 19 sculptures brings the Hays’ donation to the world’s greatest collection of Impressionist art to nearly 300 pieces. The couple—who used to give each other masterworks for their birthdays—have recognized the Hays’ donation to the world’s greatest collection of Impressionist art to nearly 300 pieces. The couple—who used to give each other masterworks for their birthdays—have

Disney star Boyce suffered from epilepsy

D isney star Cameron Boyce, who died last week in his sleep following a seizure, suffered from epilepsy, his family confirmed Wednesday. The 20-year-old actor, best known for his starring role in the “Descendants” TV movies, passed away “due to a seizure as a result of an ongoing medical condition, and that condition was epilepsy,” the family told People magazine. “We are still trying to navigate our way through this extremely heart-wrenching time, and continue to ask for privacy so that the family and all who knew and loved him can grieve his loss and make arrangements for his funeral—which in and of itself, is agonizing,” his family added.

The Los Angeles County Medical Examiner’s office said Monday that an autopsy had been performed on Boyce, but an official cause of death has yet to be announced. The medical examiner said the actor was found unresponsive at his home on Saturday afternoon and was pronounced dead at the scene. Tributes have poured in for the actor since his death, including from former first lady Michelle Obama, who tweeted a photo with Boyce on Tuesday night.

“I was lucky enough to share a few moments with Cameron Boyce—on set, at the White House and on a service project enough time to recognize that not only did he have incredible talent, but also an incredible heart,” Obama wrote.

“Sending love & hugs to his family, friends and his many, many fans.” The actor’s “Descendants” co-star Dove Cameron also posted a tearful six-part video on Instagram, referring to Boyce as an “earth angel.” “Cameron was one of my favorite people alive in the world, though I know that’s not unique to me,” she said. “Cameron was magic—an earth angel.” — AFP
Beyonce led the stars behind the voices of "The Lion King" down the red carpet on Tuesday at the world premiere of the remake of the 1994 Disney movie which uses computer-generated imagery to bring a realistic look to Pride Rock. Depicting stunning African scenery, the new movie follows the same plot as the original Oscar-winning animation about lion cub Simba, who flees his kingdom after his villainous uncle Scar connives to take his father Mufasa’s place as king.

Actor Donald Glover is the voice behind the grown-up Simba, while Beyonce portrays his friend Nala. The cast also includes Chiwetel Ejiofor (Scar), Seth Rogen (Pumbaa) and James Earl Jones, who voiced Mufasa in the 1994 film. "I just listened to what (Beyonce) had to teach me," Glover said of working with the Grammy Award winner. "Only very few times do you get to work with somebody as iconic as Beyonce," Glover said. "I was like, okay, we are like blending this thing together so let me just listen to what she is doing and play off of that."

"The Lion King" was an instant hit with audiences around the world when it was originally released. A hugely successful musical theatre version still runs on New York’s Broadway and in London. "It's like a recipe that will be delicious forever, it just works," Rogen said of the story. "The Lion King" remake, which begins its worldwide cinema rollout in China on Friday before hitting other countries next week, follows new versions of "Aladdin" and "Dumbo". It is directed by Jon Favreau, who was behind the 2016 remake of "The Jungle Book". — Reuters

Pop star Lady Gaga on Tuesday announced a line of beauty products exclusively for sale on Amazon in a boost to the online retailer’s cosmetics business. The brand, Haus Laboratories, will launch in September for shoppers in nearly a dozen countries, including the United States, Germany and Japan, Amazon said. The move underscores how the world’s biggest online retailer is increasing competition with traditional cosmetics sellers like Ulta Beauty and Sephora-parent LVMH, which recently launched a beauty brand by singer Rihanna.

Lady Gaga, who shared an Academy Award this year for the original song "Shallow," said Amazon was the right partner because it embraced her message of self-acceptance. "There are companies that see me and what I stand for and the way that I view the world, and if it’s not perfectly in line with what they do … they’ll be like, ‘Can you just change half of the equation?’" the singer told publication The Business of Fashion, which reported the news earlier Tuesday. "The answer is no. No deal." Amazon’s push into cosmetics includes a private label skin care brand called Belei. — Reuters
The Czech Republic’s national stud farm made it onto the UNESCO world heritage list thanks to a unique landscape of flat, sandy soils, fields, pastures and forest where horses have been bred for at least five centuries, its director said on Wednesday. “It is the only landscape preserved and used for its original purpose,” of horse breeding, stud farm director Jiri Machek told AFP. UNESCO announced on Saturday it was adding the farm to the World Heritage List, describing it as a “Landscape for Breeding and Training of Ceremonial Carriage Horses at Kladruby nad Labem”.

Horse breeding in the town of Kladruby nad Labem around 60 kilometers (40 miles) east of the capital Prague dates back to the Middle Ages, he added. It gave rise to a stud farm founded by the ruling Habsburg dynasty in the 1560s when Czech lands were governed from Vienna. “In 1579 it was promoted to the imperial stud farm to breed horses for Rudolph II’s imperial court,”
‘Oldest remains’ outside Africa reset human migration clock

A 210,000-year-old skull has been identified as the earliest modern human remains found outside Africa, putting the clock back on mankind’s arrival in Europe by more than 150,000 years, researchers said Wednesday. It is the oldest modern human fossils found outside Africa, resetting the human migration chronology.

The findings support the idea that Homo sapiens—our direct human ancestor—emerged in Africa more than six million years ago. They left the continent in several migration waves starting about two million years ago, said researchers, who released their findings in the journal Nature, an international science publication.

Multiple migrations?

Hominins—a subset of great apes that includes Homo sapiens and Neanderthals—are believed to have emerged in Africa more than six million years ago. They left the continent in several migration waves starting about two million years ago. The oldest known African fossil attributed to a member of the Homo family is a 2.8 million-year-old jawbone from Ethiopia.

Homo sapiens replaced Neanderthals across Europe for good around 45,000-35,000 years ago, in what was long considered a gradual takeover of the continent involving millennia of coexistence and even interbreeding. But the skull discovery in Greece suggests that Homo sapiens undertook the migration from Africa to southern Europe on “more than one occasion,” according to Eric Delson, a professor of anthropology at City University of New York.—AFP
Beautiful handcrafted pottery made by Mama Aicha rarely sells in Morocco anymore, but thanks to social media her ancient techniques are drawing students from around the world to the foothills of the Rif mountains. “When I heard about the workshop on Instagram, I signed up immediately because the practice is disappearing,” said Mirna Banieh, a young artist who travelled to Morocco from the West Bank town of Ramallah. “Mama Aicha is old and her knowledge must be passed down,” she added. Banieh’s four fellow students sit cross-legged on mats, their hands covered in clay learning from the 82-year-old potter. They came from London and Nairobi to a remote hamlet at the end of a rocky trail for a week-long initiation.

Their goal is to learn how to shape clay pieces by hand, dry them in the sun, fire them in a large open pit filled with wood and polish them with stone before decorating them with natural pigments.

Like everywhere in the Rif mountains, women potters from the Sless tribe, to which Aicha Tabiz’s family belongs, are vanishing. The tribe counted around 90 potters at the end of 1990s. Now, only a half-dozen remain. “The youth here don’t want to dirty their hands with clay. They dream of being officials with fixed salaries,” said the grandmother, everyone affectionately calls Mama Aicha. The ancestral knowledge that, according to some experts dates back to the Bronze Age, is being lost little by little due to a decline in the market.

Social media rescue Morocco’s last woman potters
**Going plastic**

“When I was young, everyone used clay pots and bowls for daily life and my mother sold them at market, but today everyone prefers plastic,” said Mohamed Tabiz, 53, Aicha’s eldest son. Researchers, collectors, enthusiasts are among the many that have warned for decades of the disappearance of this craft once passed down from generation to generation. “We wanted to establish a museum in the village,” Tabiz said, but “the local authorities weren’t interested”.

The most scholarly of those calling attention to the tradition’s decline, German anthropologist Radiger Vossen, criss-crossed Morocco in the 1980s and 90s to catalogue the techniques and designs used by each tribe. Volunteers from the “Terre des Femmes” (Women’s Earth) association have travelled to the Rif for years, collecting pottery from isolated farms and selling it to tourists from a small boutique in the capital Rabat. But the most famous is undoubtedly the artistic director of Dior, Italian Maria Grazia Chiuri, who recently put the Rif potters in the spotlight at a haute couture fashion show in Marrakesh. But, it is thanks to Instagram that Mama Aicha’s work has gained a global reputation.

“It’s used a lot by potters, everyone posts photographs of their pieces (and) exchanges tips and advice”, said Kim West, a 33-year-old British workshop participant. Through this global word-of-mouth promotion, the workshops advertised on the website of a new association, Sumano, have seen staggering success. “All the spots were filled two days after registration opened, we had a waiting list with applicants from across the globe,” said Martha Valdeon, 42, a co-founder of Sumano from Spain. Set up last year, Sumano promotes Moroccan tribal women’s handicrafts.

**New designs**

With a twinkle in her eye, Mama Aicha patiently guides her students in the studio set up next to the family farm. Papers tacked to the wall list useful words in the local dialect - terms for pottery and tools, common phrases such as “can you help me?” and “what do you think of this?” The master potter teaches mainly using gestures. Like the majority of women from remote parts of Morocco, she dedicated her life to her fields, her livestock and her children. At 27, Houda Oumal, from the neighboring tribe M’tioua, is one of the few to want to “follow in the footsteps of her mother”. She lives with her parents at the top of a mountain amid the cannabis fields that make up, entirely illegally, the principal source of income of the Rif. She began to mold clay at the age of seven, but she does not read or write.

There are five mosques in the community, but not a single school. “This craft allows us to make a good living; we need to make our expertise known so that it becomes profitable”, she said with a timid smile. Recently, the young woman began to sign her creations with her initials, adding more graphic designs and new shapes to “diversify her work and stand out”. “For us, these pieces are works of art, they have real value”, Valdeon said. The Sumano association places orders with the potters, buys the works, transports them to Spain and sells them at 20 times the local price on its website, promising to redistribute the income locally “when the business becomes profitable”. — AFP
We sought a streamlined stovetop recipe for beets that maximized their sweet, earthy flavor with minimal mess. Braising worked perfectly. We partially submerged the beets in just 1 1/4 cups of water so that they partially simmered and partially steamed. Halving the beets cut down our cooking time. In just 45 minutes, the beets were tender and their skins slipped off easily.

We reduced the braising liquid and added brown sugar and vinegar to make a glossy glaze. Shallot, toasted almonds, fresh mint and thyme, and a little lemon zest finished the dish. Look for beets that are 2 to 3 inches in diameter. You can use an 11-inch straight-sided sauté pan in place of the Dutch oven in this recipe. The beets can be served warm or at room temperature. If serving at room temperature, add the nuts and fresh herbs right before serving.

**BRAISED BEETS WITH LEMON AND ALMONDS**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 1/2 pounds beets, trimmed and halved horizontally
- 1 1/4 cups water
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons distilled white vinegar
- 1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar
- 1 shallot, sliced thin
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- 1/2 cup whole almonds, toasted and chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme

**Preparation:**
Place beets, cut side down, in single layer in Dutch oven. Add water and 1/4 teaspoon salt and bring to simmer over high heat. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until beets are tender and can be easily pierced with paring knife, 45 to 50 minutes.

Transfer beets to cutting board to cool slightly. Meanwhile, increase heat to medium-high and reduce cooking liquid, stirring occasionally, until pan is almost dry, 5 to 6 minutes. Add vinegar and sugar, return to boil, and cook, stirring constantly with heat-resistant spatula, until spatula leaves wide trail when dragged through glaze, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove pan from heat.

Once beets are cool enough to handle, rub off skins with paper towels and cut into 1/2 inch wedges. Add beets, shallot, lemon zest, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper to glaze and toss to coat. Transfer to serving platter, sprinkle with almonds, mint, and thyme, and serve.
Fresh, juicy summer tomatoes make a great salad, so we set out to create one with complementary flavors and a creamy dressing. Tomatoes exude lots of liquid when cut, which can quickly turn a salad into soup. To get rid of some of the tomato juice without losing all the valuable flavor, we looked to a method that had proven successful in our other tomato salad recipes: salting the tomatoes before making the salad.

Simply cutting the tomatoes into wedges, tossing them with salt, and letting them sit for 15 minutes provided enough time for the juice to drain. This also seasoned the tomatoes and their juice at the same time. We reserved a measured amount of the flavorful juice to add to the dressing without watering down the salad. Greek yogurt laid the foundation for a creamy, spice-infused dressing, and we boosted its tang with lemon juice and the reserved tomato juice. To that we added fresh oregano, cumin, and garlic, but some tasters found the cumin and garlic too harsh.

A quick zap in the microwave was all it took to effectively bloom the spice and cook the garlic, successfully mellowing their flavors. We tossed the tomatoes with the dressing, finishing with just the right amount of briny feta to add richness and another layer of flavor. Both regular and low-fat Greek yogurt will work well here; do not use nonfat yogurt. The success of this recipe depends on ripe, in-season tomatoes.

**TOMATO SALAD WITH FETA AND CUMIN-YOGURT DRESSING**

**Ingredients:**
- 2 1/2 pounds ripe tomatoes, cored and cut into 1/2-inch-thick wedges
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 scallion, sliced thin
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano
- 3 ounces feta cheese, crumbled

**Preparation:**
Toss tomatoes with 1/2 teaspoon salt and let drain in colander set over bowl for 15 to 20 minutes.

Microwave oil, garlic, and cumin in bowl until fragrant, about 30 seconds; let cool slightly. Transfer 1 tablespoon tomato liquid to large bowl; discard remaining liquid. Whisk in yogurt, lemon juice, scallion, oregano, and oil mixture until combined. Add tomatoes and feta and gently toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.
The Moon now has hundreds of artifacts. Should they be protected?

WASHINGTON: Three rovers, six US flags, dozens of probes that either landed successfully or crashed, tools, cameras and trash—the Moon is dotted with hundreds of objects as a result of space exploration. Some experts are calling to grant them heritage status to protect them from future tourists and human activity. It all started on September 13, 1959 when Soviet probe Luna 2 smashed into Mare Imbrium, its 390 kilograms of mass vaporizing, no doubt, on impact.

It was followed in succession by more Luna probes, then it was the Americans’ turn with the Ranger and Surveyor programs. And then, on July 20, 1969, the first humans, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. The pair spent 22 hours on the Sea of Tranquility. They left behind everything that wasn’t necessary to take back: the lunar module’s descent stage, cameras, lunar boots, tongs, commemorative objects, and four “defecation collection devices.”

Five more successful Apollo missions left behind hundreds of additional objects. All told, the Moon has about a hundred sites where people have left their mark, according to For All Moonkind, a non-profit that seeks to preserve human heritage in space. That’s about 167 tons of material. Legally, “the sites themselves aren’t protected at all,” said Michelle Hanlon, a law professor at the University of Mississippi who co-founded For All Moonkind in 2017 after the European Space Agency Jan Worner joked that he wanted to bring back the American flag.

NASA has adopted recommendations, for example, that future expeditions should not land within two kilometers of Apollo sites. In the US Congress, senators have introduced a “One Small Step to Protect Human Heritage in Space” bill. But the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 is very explicit: “Outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means.”

Once you start making exclusionary zones, and stopping other countries from their free use and exploration of space, you’re running up against the basic premise of the Outer Space Treaty,” Jack Beard, a space law professor from the University of Nebraska, said. To be sure, the treaty says each space object must be registered by its country, a safeguard against irresponsible behavior by private entities. These artifacts also remain the property of the entity which placed them, effectively barring theft. But its loopholes concern lawyers, space agencies and the UN, and not only over the issue of protecting heritage.

Moon traffic is likely to grow in the coming decades and the vague principles of cooperation enshrined in the treaty are not seen as sufficient to regulate it. In 2019 alone, a Chinese robot landed on the Moon, a private Israeli probe crashed, and India will send a probe. US astronauts are scheduled to visit its south pole in 2024, where there is ice. Hundreds of space start-ups will send a probe. US astronauts are scheduled to visit its south pole in 2024, where there is ice. Hundreds of space start-ups will send a probe. According to the United Nations, about 2,500 companies have sprung up, many of which want to exploit the water and mineral resources of the Moon and asteroids. What would happen if they quarreled with one another?

“It’s clear that there is potential for conflict,” Tanja Masson, a professor of space law at Leiden University in The Netherlands told AFP. “There’s a need for rules so that it does not become the Wild West.” She suggests the creation of an international body to distribute priority rights, without granting sovereignty, as is done to manage satellites in geostationary orbit. As for the risk of filling the celestial body up with junk, she said: “We should perhaps build waste centers on the Moon.” —AFP

World’s major cities to face ‘unknown’ climate conditions by 2050

KUALA LUMPUR: A fifth of the world’s major cities will face “unknown” climate conditions by 2050, researchers warned on Wednesday, as rising temperatures heighten the risks of drought and flooding. Climate scientists at the Crowther Lab, a research group based at ETH Zurich, a science and technology university, analyzed 520 cities across the world, including all capitals and most urban centers with a population of more than 1 million.

Looking at current climate conditions in these cities—including precipitation and seasonal data—scientists projected what would happen as temperatures rise another half degree, to near the 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius target set in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change. It showed that 22 percent of the cities will experience unprecedented climate conditions by 2050, such as more intense dry and monsoon seasons, said Jean Francis-Bastin, the lead author of the report.

“It is a change in climate conditions that is likely to increase the risk of flooding and extreme drought,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. “It is unknown conditions.” Almost 70 percent of the world’s population is expected to be living in urban areas by 2050, according to the United Nations, with the cities, especially in poorer nations, face significant challenges, including large and growing slum populations that lack basic services and are increasingly at risk from climate disasters.

Under the Paris Agreement, which has been ratified by 185 countries, governments have pledged to keep global warming “well below” 2C (3.6F) above pre-industrial times and strive for a lower limit of 1.5C. Limiting global temperature rise to 1.5C would avoid economic losses of $12 trillion by 2050, according to the United Nations. Crowther Lab scientists said their study, published in the journal PLOS ONE, was the first global analysis of the likely shifts in climate conditions in major cities as a result of global warming.

It showed that 27 percent of the cities it looked at will experience a striking change in climate conditions by 2050. Across the northern hemisphere, many cities in 30 years time could resemble places that are over 1,000 km further south towards the equator, said the study, which projected conditions if current plans to cut climate-changing emissions go ahead. In Europe, cities will warm by an average of about 2.5 degrees Celsius across the year, but summers and winters could be 3.5C and 4.7C warmer, respectively, Francis-Bastin said. Globally, temperatures are likely to be 2.4C warmer on average — enough to kill nearly every coral reef and soar past the 1.5C limit set in the 2015 Paris Agreement. Under the study scenario, London’s climate in 2050 could be similar to Barcelona’s current climate, with Madrid feeling more like Marrakesh, Seattle more like San Francisco, and Tokyo more like Changsha in central China, it said.

Cities in tropical regions, which are likely to see the strongest impacts from climate change, will experience smaller changes in average temperature, the study said. But they will see shifts in rainfall patterns, leading to more severe flooding and droughts, researchers said. Of the 22 percent of cities that will see “unprecedented” climate shifts, 64% are located in the tropics and include Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Rangoon and Singapore, researchers said.

The study may help cities modify their planning to combat specific climate risks, Francis-Bastin said. He said he also hoped it would help persuade people to change their lifestyles to cut planet-warming emissions and cut the risks.

“We definitely and very quickly need to change the way we are living on the planet.” —Reuters
The dark new world of leaks, rumors and deadly hybrid war

LONDON: As Britain ponders the fallout from leaked diplomatic telegrams from its ambassador to Washington, it ponders an ever more players embrace tearing up the rule book and risking confrontation with Russia, China or both, pointing to an era where a US drone, and came alarmingly close to all-out military action.

In the case of the leaked diplomatic telegrams from British DC ambassador Kim Darroch, there is widespread speculation they may be linked to the battle to become prime minister. Former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, rumor has it, wanted a chance of ambassador to bring in a more pro-Brexit voice.

If someone within government circles leaking the telegrams, they are responsible for both significantly damaging the UK-US “special relationship” and a hugely serious breach of the Official Secrets Act. For now, there seems little clarity on the source. Current Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, Johnson’s sole remaining rival in the Conservative leadership race, said this week there was no particular evidence a foreign state was responsible either.

Kremlin playbook

Such action would, admittedly, fit the Kremlin playbook. Moscow’s hand has been suspected in a host of high-profile hacks and leaks in recent years, from Hillary Clinton’s emails to those of French President Emmanuel Macron. The latter’s team, it later emerged, had been expecting such activity and had faked their email servers with false information and data. Going back almost a decade, those doing business in the former Soviet Union have become used to current or former security operatives using a range of espionage techniques to extract information, undermine rivals and negotiating partners, and achieve leverage.

But it isn’t just the Russians - or at least, it almost certainly isn’t. In Austria, the political fallout is still continuing from the lurid, still largely unexplained saga of the Ibiza Affair. On May 17, two German newspapers published details of a video conversation recorded in an Ibiza villa featuring Austrian vice Chancel lor and head of the far right Freedom Party’s Heinz-Christian Strache. It showed him talking to an unidentified woman falsely claiming to be a leading Russian oligarch’s niece pledging funding and looking to purchase one of Austria’s leading tabloids.

While Strache ultimately became suspicious and ended the meeting, the footage was damning enough to force his resignation, ushering in new elections later this year. Who was behind the sting remains a subject of closely guarded speculation - in Austria, many will not even voice their suspicions, a sign of a wider political environment of paranoia. Last year, Austrian police apparently acting on orders of the Freedom Party government raided the country’s own intelligence agency. Exactly where loyalties truly lie is almost impossible to determine - many in Austria will not even speculate off the record on who was behind the Ibiza recording.

Proxy wars

In Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, and to a lesser extent in Libya and beyond, these calculations and their resulting proxy wars have already killed hundreds of thousands. Elsewhere, particularly in the Western world, the contests have been largely bloodless. Getting to the bottom of what is really going on, however, is more difficult. Indeed, many of those involved are clearly embracing and taking advantage of that dynamic and its resulting confusion.

Recent attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf are a case in point. While the United States unambiguously blamed Iran, specifically its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, others - including America’s European allies - are openly more skeptical. One theory doing the rounds in the Middle East is that the attacks were conducted by rogue hardline elements within Iran, keen to provoke US military action they believed would help them politically against their rivals.

While the American plan to return humans to the moon-including the first woman-in-space has been beset with delays and cost overruns, according to an official audit released last month. The cost of Boeing’s giant Space Launch System (SLS) rocket-at the core of the Artemis project-has risen by nearly 30 percent to $8 billion, and its already-delayed first flight is unlikely to take place by June 2020 as planned. Costs for the Orion capsule being built by Lockheed Martin to transport astronauts are also growing. While Vice President Mike Pence, who announced the accelerated 2024 target in March, has criticized NASA for “bureaucratic inertia” and asked for a new mindset.—AFP

Conspiracy theories

More broadly this alarming rise in Machiavellian ambiguity risks being a disaster for democracy. Without doubt, it feeds into just the kind of conspiracy theories the far right, Kremlin and other spoilers thrive on, and that the international level it dramatically raises the risks of miscalculation.

With their own more ruthless traditions, autocratic states like Russia, China and Iran - and their leaders in particular - are scarcely less paranoid. All three have made it clear to varying degrees they see the hand of the West in domestic dissent at home, and as discontent such as that in Hong Kong escalates, such worries may get worse.

The problem of leaks and leaks - both between nuclear nations and domestic political factions - offer almost the only hope of keeping such strains under control. That process has made all the harder by leaks such as that this week, which risks deterring British diplomats from honestly speaking truth to power. Such distractions also make tackling the enormous problems of the era - inequality, technological change, climate and other threats - all but impossible. Clearly, there is no shortage of forces that believe that kind of chaos serves their interests.

In the short term, they may be right. In the longer run, however, they may find that they suffer the consequences just as harshly as the rest of us.—Reuters

Health & Science

Consumption of sugary drinks linked with cancer risk

PARIS: Consumption of sugary drinks such as soda and fruit juice is linked to a higher risk of developing certain kinds of cancer, researchers reported yesterday. The consumption of sugary drinks has exploded worldwide in recent decades and the high-calorie beverages have already been associated with a elevated risk of obesity-itself recognized as a leading cancer risk factor. A team of researchers in France wanted to assess the associations between heightened consumption of sugar drinks and the risks of overall cancer, as well as several cancer types, including breast, prostate and bowel cancers.

They surveyed more than 100,000 adults, with an average age of age of 42, 79 percent of whom were women. The participants, who were followed for an average of nine years, completed at least two 24-hour online validated dietary questionnaires, calculating their daily consumption of sugar and artificially sweetened beverages as well as 100 percent fruit juices. Researchers measured the daily intakes of sugary drinks against those of diet beverages and compared them to cancer cases in participants’ medical records during the follow-up period. They found that just a 100 ml increase per day of sugary drinks was associated with an 18 percent increased risk of cancer, and with a 22 percent increase in breast cancer. Both sugar-sweetened drinks and fruit juices saw a similar high risk association.—AFP

Major shuffle at NASA to meet Trump’s moon deadline

WASHINGTON: NASA has replaced the head of its human space exploration directorate in a major shake-up, US media reported Wednesday, as the agency scrambles to meet President Donald Trump’s ambitious deadline to return astronauts to the moon by 2024. The project-named Artemis-would be the first attempt to return humans to the lunar surface since the last Apollo landing in 2024.

“We, as a nation, are thankful for his service in advancing America’s priorities and expanding the limits of science, technology and exploration,” Bridenstine wrote of Gerstenmaier in his email, according to CBS News. Former astronaut Ken Bowersox will be the acting head of the section, according to Bridenstine’s email. The American plan to return humans to the moon-including the first woman-in-space has been beset with delays and cost overruns, according to an official audit released last month. The cost of Boeing’s giant Space Launch System (SLS) rocket—at the core of the Artemis project—has risen by nearly 30 percent to $8 billion, and its already-delayed first flight is unlikely to take place by June 2020 as planned. Costs for the Orion capsule being built by Lockheed Martin to transport astronauts have also grown. While Vice President Mike Pence, who announced the accelerated 2024 target in March, has criticized NASA for “bureaucratic inertia” and asked for a new mindset.—AFP
Frenchman at heart of legal dispute dies after life support ends

REIMS: A Frenchman at the centre of a bitter right-to-die legal feud that has raged for a decade passed away in hospital yesterday after doctors finally agreed to give up on the life-support battle over whether Vincent Lambert, 42, should die has divided the country as well as his own family, with his parents using every legal avenue to keep him alive but his wife and nephews insisting he must be allowed to die.

Doctors removed his hydration and nutrition tubes last week, following a final ruling by France’s top appeals court. “Vincent died at 8:24 am (0624 GMT) this morning,” his nephew Francois Lambert told AFP, expressing his “sadness after years of suffering for everyone”. “We were ready to let him go,” he added, saying he had been notified about his death three hours earlier.

The case rekindled a charged debate over the right to die, with the parents of a man in a near-fatal car crash who has been in a coma for years arguing that their son should be allowed to die. The case has divided the country, with Lambert’s family, backed by two of his eight siblings, refusing to accept that he is dead, and with all those who helped them until the end, with love and devotion.

And the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy said the parents’ decision to remove life support was a “failure of our humanity”, and called it “the most shameful decision in the history of medicine”. The last time they tried to do so was in May, but it was quickly overturned by a Paris appeals court. That ruling was then taken to France’s top appeals court, the Cour de Cassation, which on June 29 said doctors could legally end his life support in a definitive final judgment. With their cases rejected by the highest courts in France as well as by the European Court of Human Rights, Lambert’s parents on Friday filed a complaint for “voluntary homicide” with prosecutors in Reims, opening a preliminary inquiry.

But his wife Rachel, his doctors, six other brothers and sisters and a nephew have fought for his right to die, arguing it was the more humane option. In early May, the UN committee on disabled rights also asked France to keep Lambert alive while it conducted its own investigation into his fate, but the government said it was not legally bound to abide by its request. On July 1, his mother Viviane turned to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in a last-ditch plea for help, warning her son was about to “be euthanized because of his mental handicap”. But by Monday, just days after doctors removed his tubes, the couple had accepted that his death was now “unavoidable”, saying “we have nowhere else to turn.”—AFP

Mine waste, sewage threaten South Africa’s worshippers

JOHANNESBURG: A group of congregants dressed in long robes walked into the water of Soweto township’s Fleurhof dam, some singing their entire bodies, while their pastors loudly praying and blessings. The dam is one of many water sources across South Africa of spiritual and religious significance for hundreds of years and their religious communities. The Jukskei river, one of the only water sources with religious significance for the worshippers, is of growing concern.

The mining industry directly contributes more than 7 percent to the economy which has been struggling since the downturn in 2008 that left him a quadriplegic with severe brain damage which doctors had long said was irreversible. South Africa is one of 10 years. Located in a basin and with an estimated population of 1.5 million people, the Soweto township is surrounded by hundreds of uncontrolled mines, according to the Bench Marks Foundation, a church-linked organization that monitors corporate responsibility.

Across the road from Fleurhof dam, a tractor excavates the base of a mine dump, leaving it close to collapsing into the river flowing into the dam. In June, David Van Wyk, a researcher at the Bench Marks Foundation, tested the acidity of the water being used for baptisms around the dam. “The pH is measuring at a level of around 3.31,” said Van Wyk, dipping an electric metre into water running from a mine dump towards the dam. “This is highly acidic.”

“Normal water should be between six and seven,” he added. Below a pH of 4 things should not be living in this water. As you can see, there are no insects.” Water at other parts of the dam measured higher pH levels, “indicating possible sewage contamination”, said Van Wyk. “If this tailing collapses, even more toxic chemicals could enter the water system than we are already seeing,” he added. South African environmental groups confirmed that the city’s water quality was of growing concern.

President Cyril Ramaphosa, an environmental engineer from the University of the Witwatersrand, warned that toxic water could lead to skin and stomach problems, and in more severe cases, cancers or lead poisoning from mine drainage seeping into water. Van Wyk said his organization observed such symptoms across numerous communities surrounding the Soweto dam, including high levels of children born with cerebral palsy — which Bench Marks attributed to dust originating from the dumps.

“Government departments need to be doing inspections here,” said Van Wyk, crouching over a thin river stream running into the dam. “These (toxicity) levels are problematic, I would be very anxious to baptise here, or to drink this water.” A spokesman for the Department of Water and Sanitation said in a phone interview that it was investigating solutions to cleaning the city water supply, including working with the mining industry to rehabilitate mines contributing to water toxicity.

The Department of Mineral Resources said it had not received any ministry licences created before the promulgation of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act in 2004, including the tailings at Fleurhof dam.

Born again in the water

At Fleurhof dam, children run along the water carrying green and blue flags representing their churches. A group of women laugh as they change into dry clothes behind tall grasses, while others slowly wade into the shallow water.

“Government departments need to be doing inspections here,” said Van Wyk, crouching over a thin river stream running into the dam. “These (toxicity) levels are problematic, I would be very anxious to baptise here, or to drink this water.” A spokesman for the Department of Water and Sanitation said in a phone interview that it was investigating solutions to cleaning the city water supply, including working with the mining industry to rehabilitate mines contributing to water toxicity.

The Department of Mineral Resources said it had not received any ministry licences created before the promulgation of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act in 2004, including the tailings at Fleurhof dam.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Channel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00:00</td>
<td>Thursday Night at 11:25 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:00</td>
<td>Homicide: Hours To Kill</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:25</td>
<td>The First 48</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>02:10</td>
<td>Live PD: Police Patrol</td>
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<tr>
<td>02:55</td>
<td>Live PD: Police Patrol</td>
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<tr>
<td>03:45</td>
<td>Live PD: Police Patrol</td>
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<tr>
<td>04:40</td>
<td>Live PD: Police Patrol</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>05:35</td>
<td>The First 48</td>
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<tr>
<td>06:30</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
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<tr>
<td>07:00</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07:30</td>
<td>SSPCA: On The Wildside</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>SSPCA: On The Wildside</td>
<td></td>
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<td>08:30</td>
<td>Amelia To The Rescue</td>
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<td>09:00</td>
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<td>11:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>And Then There Were None</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Dinner Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
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<td>Death In Paradise</td>
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<td>14:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Showdown</td>
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<td>15:00</td>
<td>Death In Paradise</td>
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<td>15:30</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>Last Tango In Halifax</td>
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</tr>
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<td>17:00</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
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<tr>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
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<td>EastEnders</td>
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<td>18:30</td>
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<td>19:30</td>
<td>Death In Paradise</td>
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<td>EastEnders</td>
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<td>20:30</td>
<td>Death In Paradise</td>
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<td>21:00</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
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<td>21:30</td>
<td>Death In Paradise</td>
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<td>22:00</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
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<td>22:30</td>
<td>Death In Paradise</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23:00</td>
<td>EastEnders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23:30</td>
<td>Death In Paradise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We are not promised tomorrow. This is weighing heavy on your mind. Time is ticking. You are fully aware that time seems to be passing by at a high rate of speed. This is a day you decide to live each day to the fullest. To live, love, and laugh. From this point on you will pass your time surrounded by the children and younger people to make your point without offending. You have a knack for telling your premise. You present your case as facts, leaving little room for discussion. You know it to be true. If you argue, which is rare, you are sure of your facts.
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Canadian Board of Otolaryngology
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
A rare subspeciality in Microscopic Ear Surgery, Cochlear Implant & Ear diseases
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3. Minimally invasive Microwave Endoscopic Ear surgery
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- Member of American Academy of Cosmetic Dermatology
- Referee reviewer of international journal of Dermatology.
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- Laser Treatments, Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- Body & Face Contouring, Injectables Fillers & Botulin.

SHARJAH, Ahmad Alesar et al., Building 20, 2nd Floor.
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- Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- Treatment of allergic rhinitis.
- Treatment of sinus.
- Treatment of vertigo.

Hadi
A bdullah
Dr

Friday, July 12, 2019
Dr. Husain Alenezi

- Board Certified Urologist.
- Endourology Society-Approved Fellowship in Endourology And Robotic Surgery At Western University, Ontario, Canada.

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2. Prostate Cancer And Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia
3. Lower Urinary Tract Symptoms In Males And Females
4. Tumors And Malformations Of The Urinary Tract (Kidney, Urethra, Bladder And Testes)
5. Male Factor Infertility And Varicoceles (Microscopic Surgery)
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- **Jet Airways**
- **FlyDubai**
- **Qatar Airways**
- **KLM**
- **Royal Jordanian**
- **British Airways**
- **Air France**
- **Emirates**
- **Air India**
- **Sri Lanka Airlines**
- **Egypt Air**
- **Swiss Air**
- **Saudia**

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**Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours**

**BY DAY:** Very hot with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 42 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

**BY NIGHT:** Hot to relatively hot with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 32 km/h.

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**WEATHER WARNING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATION</th>
<th>MAX. EXP.</th>
<th>MIN. REC.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>KUWAIT CITY</strong></td>
<td>48 °C</td>
<td>35 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KUWAIT AIRPORT</strong></td>
<td>48 °C</td>
<td>29 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABDALY</strong></td>
<td>47 °C</td>
<td>31 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BUBYAN</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JAHRA</strong></td>
<td>44 °C</td>
<td>35 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAILAKA ISLAND</strong></td>
<td>45 °C</td>
<td>30 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SALMIYAH</strong></td>
<td>43 °C</td>
<td>34 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AHMADI</strong></td>
<td>44 °C</td>
<td>35 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NUWAISIB</strong></td>
<td>45 °C</td>
<td>31 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WAFFRA</strong></td>
<td>46 °C</td>
<td>28 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SALMY</strong></td>
<td>45 °C</td>
<td>28 °C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**4 DAYS FORECAST**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>WEATHER</th>
<th>MAX.</th>
<th>MIN.</th>
<th>Wind Direction</th>
<th>Wind Speed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>07/12</td>
<td>Very hot with a chance for rising dust over open areas</td>
<td>47 °C</td>
<td>30 °C</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>15 - 45 km/h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>07/13</td>
<td>Hot and rising dust</td>
<td>46 °C</td>
<td>33 °C</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>20 - 55 km/h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>07/14</td>
<td>Very hot with a chance for rising dust over open areas</td>
<td>47 °C</td>
<td>31 °C</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>12 - 45 km/h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>07/15</td>
<td>Very hot</td>
<td>47 °C</td>
<td>32 °C</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>12 - 40 km/h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**PRAYER TIMES**

- **Fair:** 03:23
- **Sunrise:** 04:56
- **Zuhur:** 11:53
- **Asr:** 15:28
- **Sunset:** 18:50
- **Isha:** 20:21

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**RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT**

- **MAX. Temp.:** 47 °C
- **MIN. Temp.:** 30 °C
- **MAX. RH:** 20 %
- **MIN. RH:** 07 %
- **MAX. Wind:** NW 53 km/h
- **TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.:** 0 mm

---

**Hospitals**

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

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**Clinics**

- Kaizen center 25716707
- Rawda 22517733
- Adaliya 22517144
- Khalidiya 24848075
- Kaifan 24849807
- Shamiya 24848913
- Shuwaikh 24814507
- Abdullah Salem 22549134
- Nuzha 22526804
- Industrial Shuwaikh 24814764
- Qadiya 22515088
- Dasmah 22532265
- Bneid Al-Gar 22531908
- Shaab 22518752
- Qibla 22459381
- Ayoun Al-Qibla 22451082
- Mirqab 22456536
- Sharq 22465401
- Salmiya 25746401

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**Change of Name**

- Old name - MANUEL ROSARIO DIAS, new name - MANUEL DIAS. (C 5555)
- Old name - REGINA DIAS, new name - LUISA GOIS. (C 5556) 11-7-2019

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**Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988**
France imposes tax on digital giants

US opens probe into French tax

PARIS: France yesterday became the first major economy to impose a tax on digital giants, with parliament passing the legislation in defiance of a probe ordered by President Donald Trump that could trigger reprisal tariffs. The new law aims at plugging a taxation gap that has seen some internet heavyweights paying next to nothing in countries where they make huge profits.

The legislation-dubbed the GAFA tax—an acronym for Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon—was passed by a simple show of hands in the Senate upper house after previously being passed by the National Assembly lower chamber. But the French move drew an angry response from Trump even before the legislation was passed, with the president ordering an investigation that the French economy minister said was unprecedented in the history of French-US relations.

The law will levy a 3.0 percent tax on total annual revenues of the largest tech firms providing services to French consumers. “The United States is very concerned that the digital services tax which is expected to pass the French Senate tomorrow unfairly targets American companies,” US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said in a statement.

rejected the US reaction yesterday, saying “threats” were not the way to resolve such disputes. “Between allies, I believe we can and must resolve our differences in another way than through threats,” he said. He added that the French vote was a step towards a consensus-based solution with a final report by 2020, they said in a statement.

Unfair trade practices?

Le Maire said he was warned about the so-called Section 301 investigation during a “long conversation” with US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on Wednesday, saying it was the first time such a step had been taken in the history of French-US relations. This type of investigation is the primary tool the Trump administration has used in the trade war with China to justify tariffs against what the United States says are unfair trade practices.

The measure was initially adopted by the lower house on July 4. Last month, top G20 finance chiefs meeting in Japan agreed there was an urgent need to find a global system to tax internet giants like Google and Facebook but clashed over how to do it. But they welcomed a set of proposed measures laid out by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a forum for advanced economies. “We will redouble our efforts for a consensus-based solution with a final report by 2020,” they said in a statement.

Washington has been pushing through the G20 for an overarching agreement on taxation. Such a move is supported by Google which believes it would mean Silicon Valley tech giants would pay less tax in the US and more in other jurisdictions, in a departure from the longstanding practice of paying most taxes in a company’s home country. The section 301 investigation, which is being run by the US Trade Representative’s office, has said it will hold hearings to allow for public comment on the French tax issue for several weeks before issuing a final report.

The move was applauded by the Computer & Communications Industry Association which said the French law would retroactively require US internet giants to turn over a percentage of their revenues from the start of 2019. “This is a critical step toward preventing protectionist taxes on global trade,” CCIA official Matt Schruers said in a statement, calling on France “to lead the effort toward more ambitious global tax reform, instead of the discriminatory national tax measures that harm global trade.”—AFP
Stocks gain, dollar sags as Fed chief shores up rate cut prospects

**European stocks snap four-day losing streak**

LONDON: World stocks rose, global bond yields fell and the dollar weakened after Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell bolstered expectations the Fed would cut US interest rates soon. The pan-European STOXX 600 climbed 0.2 percent after losing 1.4 percent over the past four sessions, Germany’s DAX futures rose and Britain’s FTSE futures gained 0.3 percent. The oil and gas sector as well as defensive stocks led the gains.

In his first day of testimony before Congress on Wednesday, Powell confirmed the US economy was still under threat from disappointing factory activity, tamer inflation and a simmering trade war, and said the Fed stood ready to "act as appropriate". "Powell’s statement confirmed we are going in the direction of a cutting cycle," said Charles Zerah, a fund manager at Carmignac. "The main question now is, are investors pricing too much in terms of rate cuts by year end? The way you see equity markets behaving, risk is that what markets are pricing could lead to disappointment."

The Europe gains follow healthy rises in Asia, where MSCI’s broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares ex-Japan rose 1 percent. Japan’s Nikkei added 0.5 percent. US futures pointed to a stronger opening for Wall Street as well with E-Minis for the S&P 500 at 0.2 percent. US stocks ended higher on Wednesday and the S&P 500 briefly crossed 3,000 points for the first time following Powell’s remarks. Some questioned how much momentum there was behind the latest rally.

"We are in the camp and have been all year, and arguably wrongly, that the Fed becoming more dovish and cutting rates is not good for risk assets," said Neil Dwane, global strategist and portfolio manager at Allianz Global Investors. Nine of 12 Fed rate cutting cycles had not stopped a recession, he noted. "Given we are in the longest expansion and have only had rates lifted to 2.5 percent, for me it begs the question, is a soft landing possible?"

A strong June US jobs report earlier this month heightened expectations the Fed was more likely to cut by 25 basis points than by 50. But Powell’s cautious stance helped fuel bets on a softer easing at its next policy meeting on July 30-31.

The chance of a 50 bps cut rose to 27.6 percent from 3.3 percent on Tuesday, according to CME Group’s FedWatch tool. Minutes from the Fed’s last meeting, in mid-June, however, showed some policymakers felt there was not yet a strong case for easing.

The rate cut prospects also weighed on the dollar. The dollar index against a basket of six major currencies slipped 0.2 percent to 96.929, extending losses for a second straight session after reaching a three-week peak on Tuesday. The dollar was down 0.4 percent at 108.03 yen, forced off a six-week high of 108.990 the previous day. It was still some distance from a six-month trough of 106.780 set on June 25.

Zain unveils BMW X5 as mega prize for ‘Score with Zain’ campaign

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, unveiled the all-new BMW X5 as the mega prize for the second edition of its promotional campaign ‘Score with Zain’, which the company will offer at the end of the campaign that continues to offer customers a chance to win exciting prizes including weekly cash prizes, smart devices, and other valuable prizes. Zain launched ‘Score with Zain’ campaign for the second consecutive year as part of its continuous efforts to offer its customers the latest innovative solutions in the world of Value Added Services.

The company is always keen on offering the best and most advanced services to the largest family of subscribers in Kuwait. As soon as a customer subscribes to the Score with Zain service, they will automatically enter the draw for a chance to win one of the exciting prizes offered as part of the campaign. The prizes include a weekly cash prizes, smart devices, and other valuable prizes, as well as the BMW X5 Executive mega prize at the end of the campaign.

Score with Zain offers customers informative content and exclusive videos through SMS on a daily basis, including facts about the best athletes, the most exciting tournaments, and the most important sporting events around the world. Customers can subscribe to the service by sending “Yes” to 999915 for 150 fils daily only, giving them the chance to enter the draw on one of the exciting valuable prizes offered by the campaign.

Zain strives to offer customers the latest services and solutions in the world of Value Added Services, all with the aim of surpassing customers’ expectations. The company will continue leading the market by launching unprecedented services, products, and solutions in addition to value added services geared at maintaining its leading position in Kuwait. Zain launched this exciting promotional campaign to reinforce its leadership position and its pledge in offering the best products and services to meet its customers’ personal and professional telecommunications needs.
Japan-South Korea trade spat threatens global tech market

Moon calls on business leaders to prepare for drawn-out crisis

SEOUL: A simmering diplomatic row with Japan is threatening South Korea’s output of components that drive smartphones and computer displays, which analysts say could batter the global tech market and hike prices for consumers. Tokyo last week said it would restrict exports of three chemicals vital to South Korea’s world-leading chip and smartphone industry in an escalation of a decades-long dispute over Japanese forced labor during World War II.

And with the issue showing no sign of ending any time soon, there are worries it could also delay the rollout of 5G technology and futuristic folding screens. “If this situation persists, there may be reductions in production, which will drive up memory (chip) prices and certainly drive up end-product prices in turn,” said Avril Wu, senior research director at Taipei-based market intelligence firm TrendForce. While South Korea holds stockpiles, shortages could set in after three months, she told AFP.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in has called the situation an “unprecedented emergency” and told business leaders to prepare for a drawn-out crisis. Yesterday, the country’s ruling party called for an extra budget of 300 billion won to help local firms survive the upheaval, saying this week again on Twitter its high tariffs were “significantly impeding” production. “Because of the volume of chemicals required within the semiconductor manufacturing process, it is unlikely that the major chip suppliers will be able to find suitable quantities from suppliers outside of Japan,” he said. Two of the chemicals targeted, hydrogen fluoride gas and photoresists, are essential to making memory chips, while the third chemical, fluorinated polyimide, is used for high-spec TV screens and smartphone displays, including in boldly anticipat-ed folding models. — AFP

India-US trade talks to restart amid signs of compromise

NEW DELHI: India and US trade negotiators will meet today, with few signs of a compromise on a series of protectionist measures taken by the two governments in recent months that have strained ties between the strategic partners. US President Donald Trump has been putting pressure on India to do more to open its markets, saying this week again on Twitter its high tariffs were “unacceptable”.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, re-elected in May, has been pushing nationalist policies with higher tariffs on everything from electronic goods to tighter controls on foreign firms in the fast growing e-commerce market to help foster domestic companies and create jobs for millions of youth. A delegation led by Assistant US Trade Representative (AUSTR) for South and Central Asia, Christopher Wilson, will meet Indian officials to try and re-start negotiations on tit-for-tat tariffs that were put on hold because of India’s election.

“Since India’s election period has now passed, USTR officials are visiting India for relationship-building with Indian government counterparts,” a USTR spokesperson said. The USTR delegation is likely to meet Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal along with key trade officials on Friday. The delegation is also likely to meet top officials at the IT ministry.

Trump and Modi met in Osaka on the sidelines of a G20 summit in June where they agreed to build ties between the two countries and sort out thorny trade issues. — Reuters

Bolsonaro pension reform passes first vote in Congress

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro’s ambitious pension reform bill passed an initial vote in Congress Wednesday, a major step for his efforts to boost confidence in the country’s lagging economy. In the first of two votes, the lower house of Brazil’s Congress approved the reform measure, a boon for Bolsonaro whose signature economic policy has faced stiff resistance from trade unions and a hostile Congress.

Social activists and union members protested the proposed measure in Sao Paulo on Wednesday evening. “I don’t want to work until I die,” said one demonstrator’s sign. But the measure received support from 379 deputies, above the required 308, while 131 voted against. The proposal to introduce a minimum retirement age and increase contributions over a longer period of time is seen as crucial to Bolsonaro’s ability to deliver on other promised measures to shake up Latin America’s biggest economy, which is on the brink of recession.

The reform is expected to generate savings of around one trillion reais ($266 billion) over 10 years. Bolsonaro took to Twitter to praise the vote result. “Brazil is getting closer and closer to the path to jobs and prosperity,” he wrote. The lower house will hold a second vote before the bill can move to the Senate for two votes, most likely ahead of a two-week recess that starts on July 18. Changing the pension system requires three-fifths of Congress to support a constitutional amendment. Bolsonaro has warned that Brazil’s generous pension system would bankrupt the country if the changes were not adopted.

Crude, unjust

In 2018, Brazil’s pension deficit-including public, private, state, municipal and military-reached 362 billion reais, which is the equivalent of 5.5 percent of GDP. In 2011 it was 2.1 percent. The deterioration is largely due to the 2015-2016 recession, from which the country is still struggling to recover. There has been growing consensus in Congress that pension reform is necessary, particularly as the population ages.

The opposition, led by the Workers Party (PT), acknowledged the need for reform but attempted to postpone the vote, saying the law would increase inequality by affecting pensions for the poorest citizens, in particular black women, rural workers and teachers. “It’s a cruel, unjust, inept and useless reform,” said PT deputy Margarida Salomao. “It’s not a problem of expenses, it’s a problem of collection, and this reform protects the rich.”

The protesters outside Congress shared her sentiment. Protester Maria Silva Vasconcellos said the working class was living in “misery.” “Before they mess with the pockets of the poor, they have to reach inside their own pockets, because there are many people there (in Congress) retiring at 40, 50 years (old), and we have to die to retire,” the 54-year-old domestic worker said. — AFP
Wall Street banks bailing on troubled US farm sector

WASHINGTON: As trade talks resume between China and the United States, President Donald Trump’s advisers are confident he can portray his stance against Beijing as a strength in the 2020 election, despite making concessions and having no deal in sight. Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed in Japan last month to another Osaka agreement kick-start talks stalled since May. Chinese and US negotiators spoke by phone on Tuesday and are discussing a face-to-face meeting in the future.

Moving in the right direction?

Democrats have criticized Trump’s tactics on China, while seeking to walk a careful line. Toughness against Beijing has significant bipartisan support. Biden has had to walk back comments that China was not a threat, but he has criticized Trump’s tactics. Senator Bernie Sanders, who identifies as a democratic socialist and is also high in the polls in the crowded Democratic presidential field, considers China a currency manipulator. — Reuters

Osaka agreement kick-start talks stalled since May

WASHINGTON: As trade talks resume between China and the United States, President Donald Trump’s advisers are confident he can portray his stance against Beijing as a strength in the 2020 election, despite making concessions and having no deal in sight. Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed in Japan last month to another Osaka agreement kick-start talks stalled since May. Chinese and US negotiators spoke by phone on Tuesday and are discussing a face-to-face meeting in the future.

Moving in the right direction?

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Business

Last ever VW Beetle model rolls off Mexican production line

Loss of Beetle after seven decades provokes emotions

PUEBLA, Mexico: German auto giant Volkswagen launched the final edition of its iconic “Beetle” car from its Mexican factory on Wednesday at a ceremony accompanied by a Mariachi band. The bug-shaped sedan rolled off the production line to rapturous applause, the last iteration of a model first manufactured in the late 1930s in Germany and 1954 in Puebla, central Mexico. “The loss of the Beetle after three generations and almost seven decades should provoke a wide variety of emotions,” said Steffen Reiche, the CEO of Volkswagen Mexico.

The limited, 65-unit run of the “Beetle Final Edition” will be sold in Mexico on the internet for a base price of $21,000 per vehicle, and can be reserved with a $1,000 payment. Each car includes a commorative plaque on its left side, numbered from one to 65. It will be available in metallic blue, black, white and beige. Dozens of factory employees had turned up from early morning to put the final touches on the car, which was unveiled after seven hours of work.

The employees wore bright yellow tops bearing the words: Thanks Beetle, as the unveiling proceeded in a festive atmosphere tinged with nostalgia for a car that has generated a loyal following like almost no other. “Who couldn’t want a car like this, made with Mexican hands?” said Roberto Benitez, a 40-year-old production technician. “It’s always sad, you feel like part of one. That’s the daily work, full shifts to get the best results, it makes me proud,” added Francisco Bueno, a 25-year-old employee.

Movie stardom

The production of the final Beetle model was announced last September by Volkswagen, still trying to turn the page after the costly 2015 “dieselgate” scandal in which it paid out huge government settlements after rigging 11 million cars to cheat regulatory emissions tests. The vehicle’s history goes back to the Nazi era, having first been developed by Ferdinand Porsche with support from Adolf Hitler, who in 1937 formed the state-run Volkswagenwerk, or “The People’s Car Company.”

After the war, the Allied countries made Volkswagen a priority in an effort to revive the German auto industry. The advertising agency Doyle Dane Bernbach in 1959 rechristened the car the “Beetle,” and began touting its small size as an advantage to consumers, according to the History Channel. The car attained further popularity with the 1968 Disney movie “The Love Bug,” the story of a racing Volkswagen with a mind of its own. Andy Warhol did prints featuring the car while a Beetle featured prominently on the cover of “Abbey Road,” the final studio album by the Beatles. The current “New Beetle” model, first launched in 1997, is a far cry from the original that ceased production in 2003, but it retains the distinctive bug-shape and large headlights that appear like eyes on a smiling face.

Robust, easy to maintain and high-performance, it reached its apogee in the 1960s and 70s before its popularity waned and Volkswagen ceased European production in 1978. Eventually its high fuel usage, weak brakes and poor handling led to it being overtaken by the competition, not least VW’s own “Golf” model.—AFP

Nintendo announces smaller, cheaper new Switch console

TOKYO: Game giant Nintendo has announced the release of a scaled back, cheaper version of its runaway success “Switch” game console, expected out in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for $199.99, will be a strictly handheld device, expected out in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for $199.99, will be a strictly handheld device, expected out in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for $199.99, will be a strictly handheld device, expected out in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for $199.99, will be a strictly handheld device, expected out in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for $199.99, will be a strictly handheld device, expected out in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for $199.99, will be a strictly handheld device, expected out in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for $199.99, will be a strictly handheld device, expected out in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for $199.99, will be a strictly handheld device.

The new device will be able to play many Switch games but with fewer features, Nintendo added. The original Switch has enjoyed huge popularity, helped by innovative, family-friendly software titles. Nintendo, the creator of Super Mario and Pokemon, is aiming to roll out the flagship model to China via Tencent to further boost its global reach.—AFP

Health giant Reckitt settles opioid treatment spat

LONDON: British consumer health giant Reckitt Benckiser announced yesterday it will pay up to $1.4 billion to settle a dispute with US authorities over the sale and marketing of an opioid addiction treatment. The case concerns the pharmaceutical company Indivior, which was an RB subsidiary before demerging in 2014. The US authorities criticized Indivior for having sought to take advantage of the opioid addiction crisis in the United States by exaggerating the safety of its drug Suboxone.

RB said it had reached agreements with the US Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to resolve the long-running investigation. “RB will pay a total of up to $1.4 billion to fully resolve all federal investigations into RB in connection with the subject matter,” the firm said in a statement. The agreements cover the Indivior indictment and claims relating to state Medicaid programs for those states choosing to participate in the settlement, said the group.

“While RB has acted lawfully at all times and expressly denies all allegations that it engaged in any wrongful conduct, after careful consideration, the board of RB determined that the agreement is in the best interests of the company and its shareholders,” a statement said. “It avoids the costs, uncertainty and distraction associated with continued investigations, litigation and the potential for an indictment.”

Indivior was indicted in April over an alleged scheme to push its treatment for opioid addicts and reap billions of dollars from it. A grand jury in the federal court in Abingdon, Virginia said that Indivior marketed Suboxone Film, an opioid-based drug, as a safe and controllable treatment for opioid and heroin addiction. But the indictment said that Indivior sought to boost sales by exaggerating the safety of Suboxone Film and connecting patients with doctors who were known to over-prescribe it and other opioids, taking advantage of the country’s huge opioid addiction crisis.

Beginning in 2010, the indictment claimed, Indivior told health care providers and programs that Suboxone Film, which contains the opioid buprenorphine, was better and safer than similar drugs, when in fact it was not. Indivior left the RB group in 2014. The pharmaceutical company is based in Richmond, Virginia, and is listed on the London Stock Exchange. In a statement at the time, Indivior called the indictment “wholly unsupported by either the facts or the law.”—AFP
British Grand Prix secured with five-year deal

LONDON: Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton's home British Grand Prix will stay at Silverstone for at least the next five years under a new deal announced yesterday. The race's future had been in doubt since 2017, when a break clause was activated to terminate the contract after this weekend's grand prix.

Circuit owners the British Racing Drivers' Club (BRDC) had argued that the previous contract negotiated with former supremo Bernie Ecclestone was no longer financially viable due to escalating fees. Formula One said in a statement the new deal ensured the circuit, which hosted the first world championship grand prix in 1950, would remain on the calendar until at least the end of 2024.

“We have always said that, if it is to have a long-term future, our sport must preserve its historic venues and Silverstone and Great Britain represent the cradle of this sport,” said Formula One chairman Chase Carey. “Formula One is a global sport, held on five continents, watched by an audience of over 500 million fans around the world and our aim is to grow this number by bringing the sport we love to new countries, while also maintaining its roots,” he added. “Silverstone and the British Grand Prix are an integral part of that vision. No financial details were immediately available.

Big boost

Britain and Italy are the only two countries that have always featured on the Formula One calendar since the debut championship. A new contract will be a big boost to British motor racing, with seven of the 10 F1 teams based in the country and the motorsport industry providing tens of thousands of jobs. Mercedes’ five times world champion Hamilton has won five times at Silverstone and last year’s race at the former World War Two airfield was the best attended of any grand prix with a 140,500 crowd on race day.

“This deal has met all of the tests that we set ourselves at the beginning of this exercise,” Silverstone managing director Stuart Pringle told Reuters when asked how the new contract differed from the old one. He added that it was now financially viable. “It will be different, this deal, because it places an emphasis on both parties working in a far more collaborative fashion to try and develop the British Grand Prix to our mutual benefit,” he added.

Pringle stressed, however, that it would be misleading to suggest there was any sharing of the risk with Formula One management. “We’re still absolutely on the hook,” he said. Pringle said last month that contract negotiations had been complicated by Formula One’s desire to also hold a street race in London, but he sounded more relaxed on Wednesday. “We have had our concerns satisfactorily addressed in this agreement,” he said.

The deal switches the focus to Spain, Germany and Mexico—all races without contracts for 2020 and at risk of dropping off the calendar. Italy has also yet to confirm a new deal, although there is an agreement in principle, but the race at Monza is expected to continue given the history surrounding it. A street race in Vietnam and a Dutch Grand Prix at Zandvoort are due to debut next year on what is set to remain a 21-race championship. —Reuters

Silverstone to host British Grand Prix till at least 2024

Hamilton aiming to bounce back with a record 6th home win

SILVERSTONE: Lewis Hamilton is aiming to bounce back from a rare weekend of disappointment by winning his home British Grand Prix for a record sixth time this weekend - and in front of the biggest crowd at the historic Silverstone circuit in nearly three decades. After suffering in the heat and rarefied atmosphere of Austria’s Styrian Alps, where he finished a hot-and-bothered fifth two weeks ago, the defending world champion and his Mercedes team are expected to revel in the gentler undulations and wider mix of corners in cooler conditions in central England.

A sixth victory overall and fifth in six years at a track he loves would also be his seventh in 10 races this year and extend his 3-point lead ahead of team-mate Valtteri Bottas in the drivers’ championship. “This is the race that has become the most anticipated event of the season for me and it is the weekend I always enjoy the most,” said Hamilton, who was quick to celebrate Wednesday’s confirmation of a new five-year contract that will keep the British Grand Prix on the Formula One calendar until 2024.

“Having the support of your country concentrated into one weekend really makes for the most incredible few days. It is difficult to count what you gain from all that positivity - everyone’s energy is priceless,” he added. “If we win, Hamilton will move clear of fellow Briton Jim Clark and Frenchman Alain Prost, with whom he shares the current record of five wins. After suffering their first defeat after an unprecedented run of eight victories, Mercedes are keen to restore their supremacy in the team’s home event - both the car and engine factories are based close to Silverstone.

“The high temperatures in Austria exposed our vulnerability and meant we could not challenge to win,” said team boss Toto Wolff. “But, fortunately, the English summer is known for more moderate temperatures so cooling should not be such a major issue. We’ve had some of our best performances this year on tracks with a wide range of corner speeds so, on paper, we should be in relatively good form.” His Ferrari counterpart Mattia Binotto played down their chances of a repeat of Sebastian Vettel’s triumph last year, despite their stronger showing in Austria where Charles Leclerc finished second from pole behind the triumphant Max Verstappen of Red Bull. —AFP

Kuwait set to host handball tourney

KUWAIT: Kuwait is set to host the Asian Men’s Handball Championship next January 19, which will be the starting point for hosting similar events after lifting the ban on the country’s sports by the International Olympic Committee. In remarks to KUNA yesterday, Kuwait Handball Association’s Trustee Qayed Al-Adwani said that training has started for the team; taking part in the Arab juniors’ tournament in Tunisia next October as part of the overall preparation.

However, the national team will go on a training camp outside Kuwait in September to prepare for upcoming events, including a tournament held in Qatar in October to qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Moreover, Kuwait’s handball youth team will prepare for the Asia and the world youth tournaments in 2021, Al-Adwani said. —KUNA

Kuwait Handball Association’s Trustee Qayed Al-Adwani
Sports Authority seeks to improve health care

By Abdulatef Al-Sharza

KUWAIT: The Acting director of the Public Authority for Sports and deputy director for competitive sports Dr Sager Al-Mulla has stressed that sports medicine has become a basic element in revolutionizing and developing sports. Speaking on the sidelines of opening the physiological tests department at the Sports medicine and health awareness center, Al-Mulla emphasized that the Sports Authority is keen on directing much of its effort and support to improve the level of health care provided to sportsmen at the center and cope with the latest international developments.

Al-Mulla also said that the new lab forms a substantial shift in sports medicine in Kuwait, adding that the center has a role in determining sportsmen health and fitness using standard scientific medical and physical tests. “Mandating all coaches to undergo special first aid training courses is a top priority to protect all players. It has become a necessity that all sports clubs and unions player procure their medical fitness certificates from the lab after undergoing advances tests for hearts, chest and veins in addition to other tests to determine their body mass and analyze their bodies’ physical stamina and capacities in a most professional and developed manner,” Al-Mulla said.

He added that the lab will examine professional players and classify their professional quality as well as issue health fitness certificates to make sure it is safe for them to join various sports clubs.

NBA Clippers sign Kawhi, finalize deal for George

Details of Leonard’s contract were not revealed

LOS ANGELES: Kawhi Leonard and Paul George made their move to the Los Angeles Clippers official on Wednesday, with the NBA team announcing Leonard’s signing and George’s trade deal with Oklahoma City. Details of Leonard’s contract were not revealed by the Clippers, but ESPN and The Athletic website said Leonard’s deal was for three years and not four as originally thought when the decisions were unveiled last week.

The reported three-year deal worth $103.1 million, rather than a four-year contract for $142 million, and with George’s 2018 deal for four years at $136.9 million to give each player an opt out clause ahead of the 2021-22 season, according to unnamed sources in the reports. If true, the Clippers could offer Leonard four years at $196 million in 2021 and pitch George a five-year deal worth $254 million at the same time. “This is a historic moment for our organization and our fans,” Clippers president of basketball operations Lawrence Frank said.

Leonard, who is from Los Angeles, departed the Toronto Raptors after leading them to the NBA title in his one season with the Canadian club after a trade from San Antonio. “We are grateful and honored that Kawhi Leonard has decided to come home and join the L.A. Clippers, Kawhi is a peerless two-way player, a relentless worker and a natural fit for the serious, professional culture our group has established,” Frank said.

“When having him on our side is a tremendous privilege and a massive responsibility, one we will take very seriously. His expectation, and ours, is to contend for championships.” Leonard reportedly would not agree to the deal unless the Clippers obtained George and they did by dealing Canadian guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Italian forward Danilo Gallinari and five future first-round NBA Draft picks to the Thunder for George.

“Paul George is one of the greatest two-way players in our game,” Frank said. “He’s both an elite scorer and a relentless defender whose versatility elevates any team. “When you have the opportunity to acquire a contributor of his caliber, you do what it takes to bring him home. Paul is a native of the Los Angeles area and an ideal fit for the Clippers, thanks to his selflessness and drive. ‘We’ve plotted an aggressive course to build a championship contender and acquiring Paul is a critical step.’

Defensive stalwarts

Leonard, 28, won the NBA Finals Most Valuable Player award in 2014 with San Antonio and last month with the Raptors. He was also the 2015 and 2016 NBA Defensive Player of the Year. Leonard averaged 30.5 points, 9.1 rebounds and 3.9 assists for Toronto in the playoffs after producing 26.6 points, 7.3 rebounds and 3.3 assists during the regular season. For his career, the 2011 NBA Draft’s 15th pick has averaged 17.7 points, 6.3 rebounds and 2.4 assists. George, 29, averaged career highs of 28.0 points, 8.2 rebounds, 4.1 assists and 2.2 steals with the Thunder last season. He was among the NBA’s to defensive talents with four deflections and 2.7 loose ball recoveries a game. —AFP

NHL: Penguins’ Cullen retires after 21 years

PITTSBURGH: Matt Cullen, who was the oldest player in the NHL last season, retired Wednesday at the age of 42. The forward played 21 seasons in the NHL, including last season with the Pittsburgh Penguins, when he had 20 points (seven goals, 13 assists) in 71 regular-season games. “It was an emotional time, but I knew it was coming,” Cullen told NHL.com. “It just felt right, and I was really at peace with everything when it was over. I felt like it was only right to retire in Pittsburgh with everything that the organization had given me and done for me.”

Cullen’s first stint with the Penguins was from 2005 to 2007, when he helped Pittsburgh to back-to-back Stanley Cup titles. Cullen also hoisted the Stanley Cup with the Carolina Hurricanes in 2006, when he scored a career-high 25 goals.

Micheal Ferland

The Vancouver Canucks signed free agent left winger Micheal Ferland to a four-year contract worth $4.5 million. “Micheal is an energetic player that drives the play and can contribute in all three zones,” general manager Jim Benning said in a statement. “He’ll make our team harder to play against on a nightly basis and we’re excited that he’ll call Vancouver home.” Ferland, 27, is coming off his second straight 40-point campaign, collecting 17 goals and a career-high 23 assists in 71 games with the Carolina Hurricanes last year. He ranked fourth on the team in plus/minus (plus-13) and third in hits (182).

Alex Iafallo

The Los Angeles Kings re-signed restricted free agent Alex Iafallo to a two-year, $4.5 million deal. The agreement means the sides will avoid an arbitration hearing, which was set for July 20. Iafallo was the Kings’ only player to elect for arbitration; Iafallo, 25, collected 15 goals and 18 assists while playing in all 82 games last season, finishing fourth on the team in goals and sixth in points. According to the team, he was named the Kings’ player of the year based on fan voting.

Alaksei Protas

The Washington Capitals signed forward Alaksei Protas, their third-round pick in the 2019 NHL Draft, to a three-year, entry-level contract worth $750,000 per year. Protas, 18, posted 40 points (11 goals, 29 assists) in 61 games last season to rank seventh in points among rookies in the Western Hockey League. — Reuters
Indian fans hurt by World Cup exit but proud of team

NEW DELHI: Cricket-mad Indians tried yesterday to come to terms with their shock World Cup exit, with the Times of India telling readers “The Sun will still rise tomorrow” and Ravindra Jadeja emerging as a new national hero. The unexpected defeat to New Zealand in Wednesday’s semi-final came after a top-order batting collapse had left them teetering at 24-4.

Indian fans were feeling pain rather than anger as they tried to come to terms with their team’s shocking World Cup semi-final defeat to New Zealand. Cricket is like a religion in India, where players can enjoy godlike status when they win but see their egotistical burnt and houses pelted with stones when they lose.

While Virat Kohli’s men had been favorites to go all the way in the World Cup, their exit did not spark a furious response for fans back home who had been captivated by their run to the last four as the tournament’s top team. Their efforts lauded on social media, the team were also congratulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who said he was proud of the way they played during their run at the World Cup, which also saw them wrest the world No. 1 ranking from England.

“A disappointing result, but good to see #TeamIndia’s fighting spirit till the very end,” said Laxman, who was India’s班主任 (head coach) in the WC semi-final. “Wins and losses are a part of life. Best wishes to the team for their future endeavours.”

In his post-match news conference, a glum captain Kohli said it was heart-breaking that his team, also the bookies’ favorites to lift the trophy on Sunday, had to exit the showpiece due to some ordinary cricket in a 45 minute spell.

And former greats Sourav Ganguly and VVS Laxman said that Dhoni’s experience meant he should have batted higher in the order. “It was a tactical blunder... The stage was set for Dhoni,” Laxman said. Former captain Ganguly said that the “composure” of Dhoni would have had a calming effect had he come in sooner.

“India needed experience at that stage. If Dhoni was there when (Rishabh) Pant was batting, he would not have allowed Pant to play that shot against the breeze,” Ganguly said after the youngster held out on the boundary to put India in further strife at 71-5. On the streets of Delhi, fans were disappointed but philosophical. “Well I thought we should have won. But well I suppose cricket is cricket,” said Gorinder Wallia.

“We have to accept it.”

The New Zealand Herald hailed the victory as "one of New Zealand's best and most significant victories". Ahead of the critical knockout match, New Zealanders had largely consigned Kane Williamson and the Black Caps to the scrap heap.

The only qualified for the final four by having a better run-rate than Pakistan, although Pakistan had beaten New Zealand by six wickets and were seen by many critics and callers to talkback radio as more worthy semi-finalists. Even former New Zealand great Daniel Vettori said before the match that Old Trafford fans would “see the bright side to this game”.

The semi-final between hosts England and Australia was a damp squib after New Zealand and India at Old Trafford in Manchester, northwest England. —AFP

What is the legend behind cycling’s La Planche des Belles Filles?

MULHOUSE: The Tour de France tackles its first major mountain stage yesterday with a final ascent to a summit as famous for its difficulty as its catchy name: La Planche des Belles Filles, which literally translated means the Plank of Beautiful Girls. It is the summit where four-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome broke free for a thrilling breakaway victory in 2012, proving he was equally adept in the mountains as he was at time-trialling.

Since then two Italians, Vincenzo Nibali in 2014 and Fabio Aru in 2017, have taken emotional wins on the Vosges peak. But were any of them wondering about the origins of that name? According to the locals, the story goes back to the Thirty Year War (1618-1648) when the lower part of the mountain was occupied by a band of Swedish mercenaries. “Their leader fell in love with one of the local girls and to avoid being raped she and other young women took refuge up on the mountain,” Andre Bancala, coordinator of the regional department’s organization team said.

"But the leader of the mercenaries was unable to control his troops and when the worst came to the worst a group of young ladies committed suicide in the lake. They killed themselves by jumping into the lake from a ‘planche’ (plank) on the banks so there you have the Planche des Belles Filles,” “That’s the first version,” says Bancala. “The second version, because there are two, is equally heart-wrenching... In this lake, the girls also drowned themselves in the lake.”

"But in this version the mercenary commander was overcome with grief. In the depth of his despair he carved the names of the girls concerned into a plank and placed it beside the lake as a memorial plaque. “The beautiful girl that he loved was called Ines and that is why the most recent of the skiing piste, the new green piste at the ski resort has been named Ines, in her memory.”

For food for thought, the Stuff website after the nation had largely written off struggling New Zealand’s chances against a red-hot India.

Radio Sport declared it “eat your words Thursday” after the sensational 18-run win at Old Trafford which finished in the early hours of yesterday morning, New Zealand time, while Stuff senior writer Mark Geenty called it “one of New Zealand’s best and most significant victories”.

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Former New Zealand Test batsman Craig Cumming, a co-host on Radio Sport, said he too believed New Zealand “would struggle to make the semi-finals, but sometimes when you’re playing poorly like they have you are dangerous.”

There had been calls to axe long-serving, but sadly out-of-form opener Martin Guptill.

Once again he did not star with the bat but his match-turning, pinpoint runout of MS Dhoni made him an instant hero, joined by Jimmy Neesham for a sizzling catch and bowling spearheads Matt Henry and Trent Boult who destroyed India’s star-studded top-order batting line up. Johnstone, who had labelled the Black Caps’ batting “boring” before the India clash, said there was “a need to acknowledge their brighter qualities-brilliant bowling, fabulous fielding and unquestionable character.”

The New Zealand Herald hailed the victory as “the Manchester miracle” after heading their match preview earlier in the week: “Damp squib exit looms for Black Caps at Cricket World Cup”. James Nokise noted on Radio New Zealand that New Zealand “are incapable of simply winning or losing. They insist on nail-biting, nerve-destroying, adrenalin-exhausting, rollercoasters that are edge-of-the-seat thrillers.”

The constant theme of calls to talk radio stations was an apology for even doubting New Zealand in the first place. A man called Steve summed up the national feeling when he told Radio Sport: “What an absolute dickhead I was, I was wrong, Yan.” —AFP

Red-faced NZ eat ‘humble pie’ after shock semi win

WELLINGTON: Red-faced New Zealanders who had written off the Black Caps’ chances in the World Cup were forced to eat their words yesterday after their shock semi-final win over India. "Humble pie tasting good as Black Caps defy the odds," sports columnist Duncan Johnstone wrote on the Stuff website after the nation had largely written off struggling New Zealand’s chances against a red-hot India.

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Thai Thidapa defends LPGA title; Lincicome has a baby

WASHINGTON: Thailand’s Thidapa Suwannapura defends the biggest title of her career this week at the LPGA Marathon Classic while the rival she beat in a 2018 playoff, Brittany Lincicome, celebrates a new baby. The 26-year-old from Bangkok, who goes by her nickname “Jasmine”, defeated Lincicome last year at par-71 Highland Meadows in suburban Toledo, Ohio, with a birdie on the first extra hole after finishing eagle-birdie to force the playoff. “It’s a really good feeling coming back here,” Jasmine said. “Winning, it’s like telling me just don’t give up on things. You have to believe you’re good enough to be out here and you’re good at what you’re doing.”

The confidence from that victory has bolstered 10th-faced Jasmine, who overcame a broken back in 2016 that forced a swing change upon her. “It definitely took a lot of pressure off me,” Jasmine said. “I feel like I don’t need to concentrate on keeping my tour card. I’m actually concentrating on growing the game. ‘Like my emotions, I feel way happier to play golf. I have more confidence and believe there will be a good day for me and I’ll probably win again sometime.’

Lincicome, meanwhile, has taken a break from the tour to have a baby and she gave birth to daughter Emery on Monday afternoon in Chicago, exactly eight weeks earlier than expected. “Our little bundle of joy decided she didn’t want to wait anymore to make her grand entrance,” Lincicome posted on social media. Lincicome, still ranked 47th despite her absence, posted that the baby was taken off oxygen support on Tuesday. Jasmine’s best finish this season was a share of seventh at the Kia Classic in March, but since then she has cracked the top 45 only once in 13 starts, missing six cuts.

“I’m definitely working on my mental,” Jasmine said. “When a thing doesn’t go right for you, when you hit a good shot and somehow kick right, kick left, doesn’t go well on your day, you can’t just look down and say, ‘Oh, I had a bad day!’ Your energy is going down and it affects your mood and everything. So I try to get better on that and see more positive things. It doesn’t matter if you hit a good shot. Doesn’t mean the result will come out good. ‘Just tell myself I’m good enough to play from any shot in the golf course. You know, even though I hit it bad, I will be able to get up and down, make par from anywhere. I just work on believing that.’

Matt Kuchar

Matt Kuchar might have been able to shrug off withering social media criticism after paying less than the going rate to his stand-in caddie, but disappointing his grandmother was a whole different matter. Kuchar’s reputation as one of pro golf’s nice guys took a big hit earlier this year when word leaked out that he had paid David Ortiz $5000 from prize money of almost $13 million upon winning the PGA Tour’s Mayakoba Classic in Mexico last November. Three months later Kuchar upped the payment to Ortiz to $50,000, but only after being pummelled on social media for his perceived stinginess.

‘Rafa can hurt you’

Federer is wary of the dangers presented by Nadal. His loss in Paris, which took place in what he described as “insane” windy conditions, was his heaviest at the Slams in 11 years. “Rafa really can hurt anybody on any surface,” said Federer. “He’s serving way different. I remember back in the day how he used to serve, and now how much bigger he’s serving, how much faster he finishes points.”

The eager anticipation of their 40th clash has relegated defending champion Novak Djokovic’s push for a fifth title to second billing. The top seed and world number one reached the semi-finals for the ninth time, racking up his 70th career win at the All England Club by sweeping past David Goffin in straight sets, reeling off 15 of the last 17 games. In his 36th Grand Slam semi-final, the 15-time major winner faces Spain’s Roberto Bautista Agut who is in his maiden last-four at the majors for the 27th attempt.

Djokovic leads the 31-year-old 7-3 in career meetings, including 3-0 at the majors. However, the unwhelmed Spaniard, who had to cancel plans for his stag party in Ibiza as a consequence of his run to the semi-finals, has defeated Djokovic twice in 2019, in Doha and Miami. “He’s got amazing consistency,” said Djokovic. “Very flat from both forehand and backhand. He has improved his backhand. I think he’s got more depth on his backhand. “The ball bounces lower on the grass, which is I think more suitable to his style of game.” —AFP

NFL notebook: Rams’ Gurley unsure how knee will hold up

NEW YORK: Todd Gurley, the Los Angeles Rams’ primary ball-carrier, said he isn’t certain how his arthritic knee will hold up over the long haul. An “arthritic component” in his knee became problematic in the playoffs last season, when the team attempted to manage his workload on the fly. “I’m just like, hey, we’re going to find out in training camp, you know? Once training camp comes, you’ve got the preseason, but you don’t have a lot in preseason,” Gurley told NFL Network.

Gurley said the lingering issue won’t cause him to change his playing style. However, NFL Network’s Terrell Davis, who retired in his prime because of knee issues, said the joint will be able to get up and down, make par from any shot in the golf course widely regarded as the greatest ever played. Nadal emerged triumphant that day, winning in five sets in a four-hour-48-minute epic of fluctuating fortunes that stretched out over seven hours because of constant, momentum-shifting rain interruptions. The Spaniard won 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-7 (8/10), 9-7 as the clock ticked past 9pm and with the famous stadium in near-darkness. Over a decade later, the sport’s two most successful players now have 38 Grand Slam titles between them and more than $100 million in prize money each. Nadal, the 2008 and 2010 champion at Wimbledon, has the edge overall, leading his great rival and friend 24-15.
‘Lazy pothead’ skateboarders get serious with their Olympic dream

Skateboarders to compete in the ‘street’ and ‘park’ categories

BARCELONA: Hamburgers are out, going to the gym is in. With skateboarding set to make its Olympic debut at the Tokyo 2020 Games, top skateboarders are settling down and preparing as athletes in the bid to qualify. “Now we are athletes, with quotation marks, urban athletes,” joked 24-year-old Spaniard Danny Leon, who sports surfer-style hair, at a skateboarding competition in Barcelona.

Decked out in jeans, a loose dark shirt and the almost obligatory baseball cap, Leon is well positioned to fly the flag for Spain in Tokyo—and he is taking it seriously. “Before it would be just hitting the streets with your skateboard and skating. Now we train,” says Leon. “We exercise and stretch after and before, we take care of our bodies more, eat better, no hamburgers and pizzas.” Leon is one of several top skateboarders currently in Barcelona to take part in the World Roller Games, the world’s largest event comprising all championship roller sports disciplines. “Right now I go to the gym a lot to improve my resistance and then I train every day four hours a day, repeating tricks all the time,” said Portugal’s Gustavo Ribeiro.

The 18-year-old is ranked number two in the world in the “street” skateboarding category and has a good chance of finishing on the podium at the Olympics. In Tokyo, skateboarders will have the chance to compete in the “street” and “park” categories. Street skateboarding features stairs or benches, intended to mirror a natural street. Park boarding takes place in a hollowed-out course, with bowling bowls that give boarders extra height, allowing for more complex tricks. “It sounds crazy that I can get a gold medal representing my country at the Olympics,” said Ribeiro.

‘Lazy and potheads’

His excitement contrasts with the misgivings many in the skateboarding community displayed when Olympic chiefs in 2016 supported a proposal to allow the sport in the Tokyo 2020 Games. They feared it could curb skateboarding’s street culture roots. “If you want to do it for fun, you can go to the street, do your tricks, have fun and have some beers. But I want to take it seriously,” said Argentina’s Matias Dell Olio. “I get up early, I work out at the gym, I stretch, I eat better. I have been skateboarding since I was six, that’s my lifestyle. But it’s also my job.”

Peru’s Angela Caro, 19, said the inclusion of skateboarding in the Tokyo Games opened the doors to him of his country’s top training centre and the chance to compete in the “street” and “park” categories. Street skateboarding features stairs or benches, intended to mirror a natural street. Park boarding takes place in a hollowed-out course, with bowling bowls that give boarders extra height, allowing for more complex tricks. “It sounds crazy that I can get a gold medal representing my country at the Olympics,” said Ribeiro.

Wardrobe woes

World Skate president Sabatino Aracau told AFP that skateboarding will bring “fresh air” and “young blood” to the Olympics. A total of 80 skateboarders will compete in Tokyo 2020 — 40 in the “street” category and 40 in the “park” category. An equal number of men and women will compete in each category. A country can send a maximum of three representatives per category.

Qualification depends on points obtained during major international competitions, a system which discourages them from attempting spectacular tricks. “We work with a calculator. There are tricks that are worth eight or nine points, but if you only need seven, you do an easier one to secure a spot on the podium,” said Dell Olio. Aside from preparing tricks, Leon is worried about one other thing ahead of the Olympics. — AFP

MLB notebook: ‘Right deal’ could reportedly net Mets’ Syndergaard

NEW YORK: Right-hander Noah Syndergaard could be traded if the New York Mets are approached with the “right deal,” MLB Network reported. Syndergaard and Zack Wheeler are reportedly available, but the Mets are soliciting offers, according to the report. Last week, MLB Network linked Wheeler to American League East rivals the New York Yankees, who have scouted multiple right-handed starters, including Trevor Bauer of the Indians, and the Boston Red Sox are also said to be looking for starting pitchers.

Syndergaard, 6-4 this season with a 4.68 ERA in 17 starts, is up for arbitration this offseason. The San Diego Padres, the Houston Astros and the Milwaukee Brewers have all inquired about Syndergaard, according to Jon Morosi of the MLB Network.

Jake Arrieta

The Philadelphia Phillies will continue to use right-hander Jake Arrieta despite a bone spur in his right arm, manager Gabe Kapler said in a local radio interview, and the Phillies’ medical staff will continue to evaluate Arrieta. He is currently scheduled to start Friday’s game against the Washington Nationals. Arrieta last pitched on Saturday in a 6-5 loss to the New York Mets, giving up six runs (five earned) in 11 hits in 4 1/3 innings. He took the loss, sending his record to 8-7 with a 4.67 ERA.

TOKYO: This picture shows the competition course (left) and the warming-up course (right) at the Kasai Canoe Slalom Centre, which will host canoe (slalom) competitions during the upcoming Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. — AFP

Chicago White Sox

The Chicago White Sox have started installing extended protective netting at Guaranteed Rate Field, the team announced. The expansion of the netting is expected to be completed Wednesday, with the netting fully ready for next week’s Double Duty Classic, a high school baseball event held at the ballpark. Chicago returns home from a post-All-Star break road trip on July 22 to play the Miami Marlins.

Corey Seager

The Los Angeles Dodgers activated shortstop Corey Seager from the 10-day injured list, clearing the way for him to return from a month-long absence. Seager strained his left hamstring on June 11 and went on the IL two days later, though the severity of the injury was initially feared to be worse. He is expected to be in the lineup Friday when the Dodgers open the second half of the season at the Boston Red Sox. According to the Orange County Register, center fielder A.J. Pollock is also expected to return from the IL for Friday’s game, having been out since April 28 due to right elbow surgery.

Tyler Thornburg

The Red Sox released relief pitcher Tyler Thornburg a day after he refused a minor league assignment. Thornburg, 30, had a 7.71 ERA in 16 appearances, spanning 18 2/3 innings, for Boston this season. He struggled in a rehab stint at Triple-A Pawtucket after a hip injury, with a 12.66 ERA in 11 games. When the rehab assignment ended Monday, Boston needed to put him on the major league roster or have him accept a minor league assignment, which he had the right to refuse due to his service time in the majors. Thornburg is now a free agent, with the Red Sox owing him the balance of his $1.75 million salary for this season. — Reuters
Nigeria grab late winner against South Africa to reach semi-finals

Troost-Ekong lifts Nigeria past South Africa in quarter-finals

CAIRO: William Troost-Ekong’s late winner sent Nigeria through to the semi-finals of the Africa Cup of Nations on Wednesday after a tense 2-1 victory over South Africa in Cairo. Samuel Chukwueze fired the Super Eagles ahead in the first half in front of a healthy, largely pro-Nigerian crowd at the 75,000-capacity Cairo International Stadium, but Bongani Zungu’s looping header brought South Africa level on 70 minutes, the goal awarded with the aid of VAR-introduced for the first time at the level on 70 minutes, the goal awarded with the aid of VAR-introduced for the first time at the level on 70 minutes, the goal awarded with the aid of VAR-introduced for the first time at the level on 70 minutes, the goal awarded with the aid of VAR-introduced for the first time at the level on 70.

Centre-back Troost-Ekong then turned home at a corner a minute from time to set three-time champions Nigeria up with a clash against Algeria or Ivory Coast for a place in the July 19 final. “We were lucky in the end to score this second goal because in the second half South Africa played much better,” said Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr. “We’re happy, we have to recover well because the next game, either Algeria or Ivory Coast will be very difficult also.”

South Africa boss Stuart Baxter admitted the nature of the defeat was tough to digest. “It’s difficult when you’ve lost a game in the dying minutes, it’s difficult to find positives. I’m sure in one week’s time I will find some positives, but at this moment I’m finding it very difficult,” he said. Left-back Jamilu Collins made his first appearance in Egypt after shaking off a pre-tournament injury while Villarreal forwards re-...
Federer, Nadal face off

This combination of file pictures shows Spain's Rafael Nadal and Switzerland's Roger Federer (inset) during the 2019 Wimbledon Championships. — AFP

See Page 45