The beautiful of the everyday: Water fountains of Kuwait

India's ‘dosa king' dies one week into life term

Mahrez, Mane duel in rematch for Africa Cup of Nations glory

33 killed in arson attack on Japan anime studio
Local

Animal care or trade?

I got a pet a year ago, and while I was always criticizing those who abandon their pets after a while, now I feel that maybe I wasn’t fair to them. I think animal care in Kuwait is difficult in a diverse society with double standards towards animal care and rights. This article is from my real-life experience dealing with a pet in Kuwait for about a year now.

I believe getting a pet in the house means you are ready to add a new member to your family, as it has sentiments and needs like humans and possibly more. You will be on your own without insurance or a hospital that offers your pet free medications or even consultancy. It is your full solo responsibility.

My tip for anyone thinking to have a pet is to ask themselves if they can afford it or not. I do not mean space, but financially. Can you allocate enough of a budget for pet food, waste disposal, vaccination and possibly medical care in case your pet gets sick at any time and for any reason? You will probably end up with a KD 100 bill to pay for consultation, vaccinations and medicine - sometimes more. I intend to discourage people from having a pet, but I am trying to convey the message that taking care of an animal in Kuwait is not easy and you will need full family support to keep your pet happy and healthy.

Secondly, I am really surprised that while we have an animal rights law in Kuwait which stresses the rights of animals and owners’ duties, animal hospitals don’t receive financial support from the government. For example, emergency consultations and vaccinations for pets should be free with no charges or minimal fees. The hospitals will not be in loss if they are given funds to support their work.

Finally, I think it is time to have a community for animal lovers who are ready to submit a petition to the government to support animal hospitals in Kuwait. I believe we have an ethical duty towards animals and thus we should support those who love to keep a pet but may let go of their beloved animals forcibly after experiencing difficulties.

Thousands fall for job recruitment scams every year

Recruitment scams targeting people seeking a better life abroad are common, especially in labor-exporting countries like Egypt and India as well as Bangladesh, Jordan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and other countries.

Kuwait Times was recently informed about one such scam taking place in India. According to a source close to the issue, 41 candidates were recruited without any selection process. The recruitment agency allegedly demanded 260,000 to 300,000 rupees (KD 1,250 to 1,350) from each candidate and it’s unclear if they will in fact be hired or have a job if and when they arrive in Kuwait.

Recruitment scams often cost low-income workers thousands of dinars in illicit bribes, only to find upon arrival in Kuwait that no job awaits them.

Sibi U S, Second Secretary at the Indian Embassy in Kuwait, told Kuwait Times that this year the embassy has received 14 complaints regarding recruitment scams. “Many people and companies have contacted the embassy to complain about fake recruitment, where many people came to Kuwait to find themselves jobless or in different jobs other than the ones they signed up for in the contract,” he said.

Sibi affirmed the embassy is taking this issue seriously. “There are two procedures that the embassy follows - contacting the sponsors and asking them to give back the passport and letting the worker go back to India, or we send an employee from the embassy with the worker to the ministry of social affairs and labor to translate for both sides and explain the Kuwaiti law to the worker, because many have difficulties communicating,” he explained.

“In 2018, the embassy received 1,327 complaints from workers holding article 18 visas. We also had 67 complaints about illegal residents holding article 14 visas (family visit visas). In 2017, we received 1,415 work visa and 53 visit visa complaints,” he added.

There are nearly a million Indian workers in Kuwait. Visa traders and human traffickers target populations in labor exporting countries in the region as well as elsewhere in Asia. Sibi said some unscrupulous businesspeople create small businesses just to allow them to sell visas and bring people from outside, and this is a problem for many.

He noted that people must check the visa, company, and the contract. “The Kuwaiti system asks for contracts in Arabic; the only thing written in English is the name. Fake recruitment agencies use this to scam people in India. We received an email from a person in India who wanted to check his contract. The contract was written in random Arabic alphabets that made no sense - just to scam the person, as he could only understand his name that was written in English, and as a non-Arabic speaker, did not understand the rest,” Sibi said.

In view of the large number of complaints being received by the embassy, the mission suggested some procedures to be followed to safeguard Indian citizens seeking employment in Kuwait and the welfare of Indian workers in Kuwait. The person must be sure of the recruiting agent. Ask them to show the original registration certificate issued by the Protector General of Emigrants, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Do not deal with them unless they are registered and make sure the registration is valid and not suspended or canceled.

Ask the recruiting agent to show you the demand letter and power of attorney from the foreign employer and the agreement between the sponsor and recruiting agent. Also, carefully go through the employment contract detailing the salary and other service conditions. Women below the age of 30 (Emigration Check Required category) may not be granted emigrant clearance for employment as a housemaid, domestic worker, hairdresser, beautician, dancer, stage artist, general worker, etc.

In case of any doubts about the genuineness of the visa sent to you, check with the Embassy of India to Kuwait (e-mail: labour@indeambkw.org; attachelabour@indeambkw.org).
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In the desert, one of the most important places is where water can be found. In Kuwait, a country with almost no natural water resources, fresh water is freely available on nearly every street corner, roundabout and city block. Public water fountains, known locally as sabeel or ma’a sabeel (water fountain of the street or way), they are often sponsored by families in the name of a departed loved one and come in many designs that reflect Kuwaiti, Gulf, Arab and Persian heritages.

The oldest water fountain in Kuwait lives in Kuwait City. The Bin Duaij water fountain was established as a charity by Abdulaziz Mohammad Al-Duaij in 1876. The fountain is a natural treasure and charitable trust, governed by the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation.

Kuwait often showcases ma’a sabeel during international exhibitions and artists and architects from all over the world have designed sabeel for Kuwait both at home and abroad. The water fountain in the shape of the 1970s Kuwait Water Tower was designed by Swedish architect Sune Lindstrom to represent the iconic water towers in Kuwait, for instance. There’s even an Instagram account dedicated to Kuwait’s sabeel. The account @drinkingfountainsofkuwait showcases the diversity of sabeel that can be found all over the country - from simple stainless steel water colors to elaborately tiled sabeel as monuments to the departed.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat
KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah reviewed yesterday the structural framework of the northern economic zone of Kuwait. A defense ministry press release said Sheikh Nasser headed a meeting dedicated to the review. Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Jenan Boushehri and a number of officials from the defense and public works ministries were present at the meeting. The northern economic zone is part of Kuwait’s 2035 vision, which aims at transforming Kuwait into a regional center for commerce.

Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also stressed yesterday the need for well-defined scientific research and plans that address the shortcomings and deficiencies in the health and education sectors. This came in a press statement issued by the ministry of defense after Sheikh Nasser’s reception of a number of academics and founders of the scientific research incubator (facts and figures), which is interested in the aforementioned sectors. Sheikh Nasser voiced encouragement and support for such initiatives, pointing out that such endeavors should develop effective solutions to improve the level of health and educational services. — KUNA

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah heads a meeting to review the structural framework of the northern economic zone. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives at his office yesterday Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Ghulam Dastgir and German Ambassador to Kuwait Karlfried Bergner. — KUNA photos

FM receives outgoing Pak, German envoys

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives at his office yesterday Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Ghulam Dastgir and German Ambassador to Kuwait Karlfried Bergner. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at his office yesterday Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Ghulam Dastgir, out of respect for ending his term as ambassador to Kuwait. During the meeting, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled commended the ambassador’s efforts during his tenure in the country and his contributions in supporting and strengthening the strong bilateral ties between both sides. Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Sabah also received yesterday German Ambassador to Kuwait Karlfried Bergner on the occasion of his term ending. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled praised the German ambassador’s works on strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.

Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister’s Office Ambassador Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and a number of high ranking officials in the foreign ministry attended the meetings. — KUNA

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KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives the founders of the scientific research incubator yesterday. — KUNA photos

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Kuwait Times
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf
KAF honors ‘Do the Write Thing’ student ambassadors

Program aims to reduce youth violence in US schools, communities

WASHINGTON: The Kuwait-America Foundation (KAF), in partnership with the National Campaign to Stop Violence (NCVS), hosted its annual ceremony honoring the “Do the Write Thing” (DTWT) National Student Ambassadors under the theme “Of One Voice, Of One Heart”. The event recognized and honored 47 young students from across the US who have “committed to making communities safe for themselves and future generations” by participating in the DTWT Challenge, where they shared their compelling stories of distressing and often tragic situations, as well as hope.

This year alone, the program has heard stories from over 85,000 students who shared, through their writings, their experiences with violence and their solutions to reducing violence. KAF Chairman Dr Hassan Al-Ebraheem told KUNA: “What began as a pilot program in 1994 with only 850 students participating in the ‘Do the Write Thing’ Challenge, has grown into almost 85,000 students submitting writings from 25 communities across the US in 2019.” He added: “This year’s writings alone are 100 times the amount we received 25 years ago, and since the launch of the program, over two million students have continued to exemplify the work of the Kuwait-America Foundation.”

On this year’s student ambassadors, Ebraheem noted: “They just like you, have reached deep within themselves and have put pen to paper to say that enough is enough. They have taken a stand for what they believe, united in a cause greater than an individual with an impact that is far-reaching and life changing. The longevity of DTWT is a testament to its success. It reaches students who live with violence every day and empowers them, through their writings, with the ability to reduce violence and help create an America that is safe for all.”

The DTWT Challenge has established itself as a successful program aimed at reducing youth violence in schools and communities across the US as it seeks to empower youth, through their writings, with the ability to reduce violence and create an America in which all children enjoy safe schools, peaceful neighborhoods and loving homes.

Since 1996, the challenge has given over two million students a platform for sharing their experiences. The program reaches out to most vulnerable students, offering them an experience that proves to be both therapeutic and cathartic. The “Do the Write Thing” Challenge was founded by the Kuwait-America Foundation. The connection between KAF and the DTWT is a “proud reminder” of the cooperation that can exist and the ties that can be forged between two nations for a common good. The event was attended by Kuwait’s Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, his wife Sheikha Rima Al-Sabah and Dean of the World Bank Group’s Board of Executive Directors Dr Merza Hasnan, in addition to several government officials and community service leaders. — KUNA

MoI foils plans to hold yacht party

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The interior ministry’s relations and security information explained that the public morals protection department saw an ad about a party on a yacht and contacted the person who placed the ad, who said the concert was cancelled, but he was summoned to face legal action.

No-parking patrol being trialed

The interior ministry’s relations and security information said the video of a police vehicle seen on social media roaming the streets to check for parking violations is true. It said the vehicle belongs to the traffic department and issues tickets for no-parking violations or parking on pavements, and it is currently on a trial basis. Its implementation will be preceded with awareness campaigns before it is officially introduced.

Panel to probe custodial death

The interior ministry’s relations and security information also said Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah ordered the formation of a committee over the death of a detained expat.

KSFSD shuts 5 facilities

Kuwait Fire Service Directorate’s prevention sector closed down five violating facilities, as the prevention sector continues its inspection campaigns of all facilities in Kuwait to check for violations. KFSD also concluded a sea rescue campaign of all facilities in Kuwait to check for violations. KFSD’s prevention sector officers closed a violating facility.

Kuwait, Luxembourg initial tax protocol

BRUSSELS: Kuwait Ministry of Finance and Luxembourg Ministry of Finance yesterday in Luxembourg, initialled a protocol amending the convention for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and capital. Aseel Al-Munifi, Assistant Undersecretary for Financial and Tax Affairs in Kuwait Ministry of Finance, initialled the protocol on behalf of Kuwait, and Paul Roller, Head Manager of Department of International Relations and Tax Administration, on behalf of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

In a phone statement from Luxembourg to KUNA, Munifi explained that Kuwait and Luxembourg had signed the tax convention in 2007, and it was ratified only by Kuwait in 2010, but not ratified by Luxembourg yet. The major articles amended in the protocol are corresponded to the minimum standard of the BEPS project (base erosion and profit shifting), as demanded by the OECD to further develop the economic relationship and to enhance the co-operation in tax matters between the countries specially in automatic exchange of information (AEOI), Munifi said the tax convention between Kuwait and Luxembourg is intended to be signed during the expected visit of the Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel to Kuwait later this year. H.H the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had invited Bettel to visit Kuwait this year during their meeting on the sidelines of the EU–Arab League Summit in Sharm El Sheikh in February. — KUNA
Iran seizes foreign tanker accused of fuel smuggling

British defense minister urges Iran to de-escalate Gulf tensions

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday they had detained a “foreign tanker” and its crew for allegedly smuggling fuel, in the latest incident to send tensions soaring in the Gulf. The announcement follows Iran saying it had come to the aid of a foreign tanker after receiving a distress call - making no mention of the vessel being seized. The Guards did not confirm whether the vessel they detained Sunday in the strategic Strait of Hormuz was the same ship as that mentioned Tuesday by the foreign ministry.

“The tanker’s registered manager is Prime Tankers in the UAE,” TankerTrackers reported that the Panamanian-flagged tanker Riah, used in the Strait of Hormuz “for fueling other vessels”, had crossed into Iranian waters on Sunday. According to the online oil shipment tracking service, at that point the tanker’s automatic identification system stopped sending signals. Refinitiv data showed that the last signal received from the vessel was on Sunday when it was in the Strait of Hormuz off the Iranian island of Qeshm, heading towards Oman from Laral Island.

The tanker’s registered manager is Prime Tankers in the UAE. That company told Reuters it had sold the tanker to another UAE-based company, Mowj al-Bahar. An employee at Mowj al-Bahar said that the firm did not own it but had been managing the vessel up to two months ago, and that it was now under the management of a company called KRB Petrochem. Reuters could not reach KRB Petrochem for comment. The Revolutionary Guards said in yesterday’s statement they had seized no other ship in the Gulf, as Western countries expressed concerns over alleged Iranian actions in the region.

Britain meanwhile urged Iran to ease tensions in the Gulf yesterday and said it was seeking information about the latest incident. “But it is vital that we send a very clear message to Iran that we want them to step back from this situation, that we want them to de-escalate, but we have always and we will continue to protect shipping and the free flow of goods in that area,” Defense Secretary Penny Mordaunt told a defense conference. Iran accused Britain of piracy earlier this month after British Royal Marines seized an Iranian tanker off the coast of Gibraltar on suspicion it was shipping oil to Iran’s ally Syria in breach of EU sanctions on that country. — Agencies

US Centcom chief vows to boost Gulf maritime security

ABOARD USS BOXER, Arabian Sea: At a thumbs-up sign from a sailor, a US Harrier fighter jet takes off from the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer in the Arabian Sea as an oil tanker passes, a nautical mile away. The patrol is “standard” but the situation - growing tension between the United States and Iran - is not. Soon after the roar of the Harrier fades, two combat helicopters and two unmistakable Osprey aircraft with their tiltable rotors land back on the flight deck.

“With a capacity of two million barrels and 12 foreign crew on board, the vessel was on route to deliver contraband fuel received from Iranian boats to foreign ships in further regions when it was intercepted,” the force’s Sepahnews website said. It was seized south of the Iranian island of Laral, the Guards said without detailing the name or provenance of the vessel. The Guards’ statement came after officials said Iran had come to the aid of an ailing tanker on Sunday, “Iranian forces approached it and using a tugboat brought it into Iranian waters for necessary repairs,” foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said last month that he hopes more than 20 countries, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, would work together on building maritime security. McKenzie said the US was in “exploratory talks” with potential partners to ensure free passage through strategic waterways, including the Strait of Hormuz. This is “not a United States problem, it’s an international problem... We’re eager to be part of an international solution”, McKenzie added.

He refused to confirm a CNN report that US President Donald Trump’s administration plans to send 500 troops to Saudi Arabia, in what would serve as a show of force to Iran. The troops will be stationed at the Prince Sultan air base, CNN reported, citing two officials at the US Defense Department. The US announced in May that it was deploying 1,500 additional troops to the Middle East to counter “credible threats” from Iran. McKenzie’s visit to Saudi Arabia comes a day after the US House voted to block $8.1 billion in arms sales to the kingdom and other allies, in a move likely to be vetoed by Trump. — AFP

This handout picture released by the US Navy on July 14, 2019 shows the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (left) and amphibious dock landing ship USS Harpers Ferry (right) conducting a replenishment-at-sea evolution with fast combat support ship USNS Arctic (center) in the Arabian Sea. — AFP

US amphibious group patrols Arabian Sea

On the Boxer, officers stand on a viewing gallery known as Vulture's Row, using binoculars to follow a traditional Arab dhow sailing by and report its movements. In the hangar bay below, Marines test machine guns. Three hovercraft, each loaded with three Light Armored Vehicles, stand ready to launch, with trucks, Humvees and other gear lined up behind.

Daily training spans the ship’s main roles, “whether it’s aviation, ground combat or combat support”, says Brigadier General Matthew Trofaring, commander of the Fifth Fleet’s Naval Amphibious Force 51. Burns insists the deployment is nothing unusual: “We do our standard presence operations and provide stability to the region, as the navy has done since World War Two.” — Reuters

AL KHIRJ, Saudi Arabia: US Marine Corps General Kenneth McKenzie Jr (left) and Lieutenant General Fahd Al-Saud (center) are shown by coalition spokesman Colonel Turki Al-Malki (right) reportedly during a visit by the US Central Command chief Kenneth McKenzie pledged yesterday to work “aggressively” to ensure maritime safety in strategic Gulf waters after a spate of attacks blamed on Iran. “We are currently talking with the international community about the importance of the right of freedom of navigation in the Middle East,” McKenzie told reporters at Prince Sultan air base near Riyadh. “We are going to work very aggressively with our partners... to come to a solution that will enable the free passage of critical oil and other commodities... through the region.”

His comment comes after US General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, last week said the US aims to form a coalition to guarantee freedom of navigation in the Gulf amid fraught relations between Washington and Tehran. Tensions in the area - through which nearly a third of the world’s oil is transported – have spiked in recent weeks, with the US blaming Iran for multiple attacks on tanker ships in the region, and Tehran shooting down an American drone.

US Centcom chief vows to boost Gulf maritime security
33 dead in Japan arson attack

Suspected arsonist shouted ‘drop dead’ as he doused building

TOKYO: A suspected arson attack at an animation production company in Japan killed 33 people and injured dozens more yesterday after a man reportedly doused the building with flammable liquid and shouted “drop dead.” A motive for the apparent attack remained unclear hours after the blaze. If arson is confirmed, the attack will be among the deadliest criminal acts in decades in Japan, where violent crime is extremely rare.

The fire gutted the three-storey building in the city of Kyoto that housed Kyoto Animation, behind famous anime television productions. The incident sparked an outpouring of support from the industry and fans worldwide, including a viral fundraising campaign. Late yesterday evening, a local fire department official said the toll stood at 33 dead. "Of the 33, two were found on the ground floor, 11 on the second and 20 on the third and also on the staircases that lead to the rooftop," the official said.

Another 36 people were injured, including 10 in serious condition, he said, adding that all those inside the building during the blaze were now accounted for. The horrific fire appeared to have been set in the middle of Thursday morning, with the fire department saying they began receiving emergency calls around 10:30am.

The blaze left people with serious wounds, eyewitnesses said. "I saw people who were totally black or covered in blood, or who had suffered burns all over their body," a 53-year-old woman told the Kyodo news agency. As the fire gutted the building, it sent thick white smoke out through the windows, and the flames charred the facade black before firefighters were eventually able to tame it hours after it began.

Lost for words

Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took to Twitter to express his horror. "It’s so dreadful that I’m lost for words," he wrote. “I pray for those who passed away.” Police said they were still investigating the cause of the fire but that it was a suspected arson attack. “A man threw a liquid and set fire to it,” a Kyoto prefectural police spokesman told AFP.

Public broadcaster NHK reported that a man had been detained in connection with the blaze and was later taken to hospital for treatment. He reportedly suffered serious injuries in the fire. NHK said the suspect had poured a gasoline-like substance around the building and said “drop dead” as he set fire to it. The eyewitness who spoke to Kyodo said one of the injured “claimed to have been splashed with kerosene or something like it". Local media reported that the suspected attacker appeared to also have been armed with knives.

Why, why, why?

Kyoto Animation’s president Hideaki Hatta told reporters “there have been emails with death threats”, without giving further details. He said the building gutted by the blaze was "the core of the company", which has produced several well-known television anime series including “The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya” and “K-ON!” “It’s unbearable that those who have led Japan’s animation industry were hurt and lost their lives.” The blaze prompted an outpouring of support from those in Japan’s anime industry, one of the country’s best known cultural exports, and fans around the world. "No, I don't know what I should be thinking now,” tweeted Yutaka Yamamoto, an animation director who once worked at Kyoto Animation. “Why, why, why?"

An online fundraiser organized by an American anime licensing firm had raised more than $420,000 by late Thursday night, and anime fans around the world were tweeting their support with the hashtag #KyAniStrong and #PrayForKyAni. Japan has a famously low crime rate. Arson is considered a serious crime and people convicted of deliberately setting fires in a country where many people still live in wooden houses can face the death penalty. A man convicted of setting a fire that killed 16 people in Osaka in 2008 is currently on death row. In 2016, a knife-wielding man went on the rampage at a care home for the mentally disabled, killing 19 in the country’s worst mass killing in decades. —AFP
WASHINGTON: The US House voted Wednesday to block $8.1 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other allies, a rebuke of Donald Trump that will likely lead to a veto by the president. Lawmakers, many of whom are outraged with the kingdom over Riyadh's role in the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year, approved three resolutions that would prevent the controversial sales announced under emergency measures earlier this year by Trump.

The resolutions blocking the sales have already cleared the US Senate, and now go to the White House, where Trump is expected to issue the third veto of his presidency. While the House blocked the sales with a comfortable majority, it was about 50 votes shy of the two-thirds needed to override Trump’s veto. Trump is seeking to approve the sale in May, as his administration declared Iran to be a “fundamental threat” to the stability of the Middle East.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said the administration was responding to an emergency caused by Saudi Arabia’s arch-foe Iran. But lawmakers including some Senate Republicans said there were no legitimate grounds to circumvent Congress, which has the right to disapprove arms sales.

Signal to Saudi Arabia

Last month Senator Lindsey Graham delivered a stinging rebuke of the arms sales and Riyadh, saying he hoped the vote would “send a signal to Saudi Arabia that if you are going to say there is no space for a strategic relationship.” The senator was referring to last year’s brutal murder of Khashoggi in Turkey at the hands of Saudi agents, an incident that triggered a full-blown crisis in Riyadh’s relations with the West.

But Michael McCaul, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, criticized the resolutions as “dangerous” at a time Iran is expanding its reach. “Iran is stretching its tentacles of terror across the Middle East,” he said in a statement. “If we allow them to succeed, terror will flourish, instability will reign, and the security of our allies, like Israel, will be threatened,” he added.

In a move that would bolster its support for Riyadh and serve as a show of force to Iran, the Trump administration plans to send 500 troops to Saudi Arabia, CNN reported late Wednesday. The troops will go to the Prince Sultan Air Base, east of Riyadh, CNN reported, citing two officials at the Defense Department. The move comes after the US announced in May that it was deploying 1,500 additional troops to the Middle East to counter “credible threats” from Iran. —AFP

Protests as Ethiopian ethnic group seeks breakaway region

ADDIS ABABA: Protesters set tires alight and lobbed stones at security forces yesterday in the Ethiopian city of Waassa, where residents are demanding the creation of their own federal state. The Sidama ethnic group, the largest in the southern region, has been agitating for their own semi-autonomous state, and expectations were high they would declare their own region unilaterally yesterday. While one prominent party elder said it had agreed to delay the formation of the state, not everyone appeared happy with this decision.

An activist for the cause, Mate Mengesha, said security forces had blocked a planned meeting of Sidama elders and youth activists in the morning, where it was hoped officials would declare the formation of the new region. However, the officials never showed, and the activists threw stones at security forces blocking them from the site. “The expectation was today is July 18 and on July 18 they want to have a declaration,” he told AFP. “The meeting didn’t happen.”

Elsewhere protesters set tires on fire, and blocked off roads, while several residents reported that mobile internet was down in the city. “There are some fires around the outskirts of the city, Tyre fires in the road and so on. Most of them are on the outskirts,” said Dr. Abel Gedefaw, director of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Hawassa University. “Everybody is not allowed to go out. There are a lot of security forces and nobody is allowed to move.”

He said the university’s medical facilities had not received reports of casualties as of early afternoon.

Not happy

The Sidama issue is the latest headache for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who is determined to reform the nation after decades of iron-fisted rule, but is facing ethnic violence in the diverse region, two military sources said yesterday. Heavily-armed fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group opened fire on a patrol vehicle Wednesday near Jakama, 30 kilometers from the state capital Maitama, killing all the soldiers on board. “We lost all six soldiers in the ambush, including a colonel,” said the first of two military sources, who both spoke on condition of anonymity.

The soldiers were on their way to Maitama from Maitama, the capital of neighboring Yobe state, when the jihadists attacked them around 1620 GMT, said the source. “The gun truck the soldiers were driving in was destroyed,” the second source said. Following the ambush the jihadists attacked a military base just outside Jakama in seven trucks fitted with machine guns, engaging troops in an hour-long battle, the sources said.

Six Nigerian soldiers killed in ambush

KANO: Six soldiers have been killed in an ambush by jihadists in northeast Nigeria’s Borno state, two military sources said yesterday. Heavily-armed fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group opened fire on a patrol vehicle Wednesday near Jakama, 30 kilometers from the state capital Maitama, killing all the soldiers on board. “We lost all six soldiers in the ambush, including a colonel,” said the first of two military sources, who both spoke on condition of anonymity.

The soldiers were on their way to Maitama from Maitama, the capital of neighboring Yobe state, when the jihadists attacked them around 1620 GMT, said the source. “The gun truck the soldiers were driving in was destroyed,” the second source said. Following the ambush the jihadists attacked a military base just outside Jakama in seven trucks fitted with machine guns, engaging troops in an hour-long battle, the sources said.

The attack was repelled by soldiers at the base, with ISWAP fighters abandoning weapons and one vehicle as they fled. The attacks came hours after a military chief in the northeast warned terrorists in the region to disarm or be destroyed. Major-General Abdulmalik Bulama said the juggernauts that should lay down their arms “or prepare for a fierce encounter with me.”

The army have not officially confirmed the attacks. The 120-km Maiduguri-Damaturu road has seen repeated attacks, on military bases and markets in villages like Jakama, committed by ISWAP and Boko Haram fighters—the two jihadist factions operating in the region. In December last year at least 13 soldiers were killed in an ISWAP ambush near Kareto village along the highway. The jihadists have also carried out several attacks on motorists on the highway, killing passengers and burning vehicles.

After nearly a decade, the insurgency in northeast Nigeria wages on, spilling into neighboring Chad and Cameroon. More than 27,000 people have been killed and some two million forced to flee their homes. Complicating the conflict further was a split within Boko Haram in 2016, which saw the breaking away of ISWAP, a group that has sworn allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. —AFP
Turkey brands US move to bar Ankara from F-35 program ‘unfair’

Turkish technicians, pilots training in US to be sent back

ANKARA: Turkey on Wednesday lambasted an “unfair” US move to exclude the country from the F-35 stealth fighter jet program over Ankara’s controversial purchase of a Russian missile defense system. “This one-sided step neither complies with the spirit of alliance nor is it based on legitimate reasons,” the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement. “It is unfair to remove Turkey, one of the partners in the F-35 program,” the ministry said, as it dismissed claims the Russian S-400 system would be a danger to the F-35s.

Turkey has ordered more than 100 of the F-35 fighter jets, while its defense industry has invested significant sums into the production of the warplanes. “We invite the US to take back this error which will pave the way to irreparable damage to our strategic relations,” the Turkish ministry added. Earlier on Wednesday, the United States confirmed Turkey’s exclusion from the program after repeated warnings.

The US-made F-35 Joint Strike Fighter “cannot coexist with a Russian intelligence collection platform that will be used to learn about its advanced capabilities,” White House spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham said. Turkish F-35 technicians and pilots training in the US would also be sent back by the end of this month. The first delivery of the S-400 system from Russia began last week and further equipment has since been arriving every day by plane to an airbase in Ankara.

Relations between the NATO allies have deteriorated since Ankara’s purchase from Russia but there have been strains over multiple issues including US support to a Syrian Kurdish militia viewed as terrorists by Turkey. The Turkish ministry called on the US to show the importance of the Ankara-Washington relationship “not just through words but through action and especially in the fight against terrorist organizations.”—AFP

‘You had the Nobel Prize?’ Trump learns of Yazidi activist Murad

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Wednesday appeared unfamiliar with the work and cause of Nobel laureate Nadia Murad as she pleaded with him to help the Yazidis of Iraq. Murad, one of thousands of women and girls from the ancient faith abducted by the Islamic State group as they overran swathes of Iraq in 2014, joined a group of survivors of religious persecution who met Trump in the Oval Office on the sidelines of a major meeting at the State Department. After Murad explained how her mother and six brothers were killed and that 3,000 Yazidis remained missing, Trump said, “And you had the Nobel Prize? That’s incredible. They gave it to you for what reason?” With little pause, Murad, who was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year, repeated her story. “After all this happened to me, I didn’t give up. I make it clear to everyone that ISIS raped thousands of Yazidi women,” she said, referring to the Islamic State group. “Please do something. It’s not about one family,” she said. Trump, who has boasted of crushing the self-styled caliphate of the Islamic State group that once stretched across Iraq and Syria, also appeared at a loss when Murad asked him to press the Iraqi and Kurdish governments to create safe conditions for the Yazidis to return. “But ISIS is gone and now it’s Kurdish and who?” Trump asked, before later telling her, “I know the area very well.”

Murad also explained how Yazidis took dangerous routes to find safety in Germany, whose welcome to refugees has been vocally criticized by Trump. The US leader also appeared unfamiliar when he met a representative from the Rohingya, a Muslim minority targeted in a brutal campaign two years ago in Myanmar. One day earlier, his administration banned travel to the United States by Myanmar’s army chief and three other senior officers, calling the violence “ethnic cleansing.”

The Trump administration frequently speaks of promoting religious freedom, a key issue for much of his evangelical Christian base. Government ministers and representatives of persecuted groups are spending three days at the State Department for a meeting on religious freedom, which Vice President Mike Pence will address yesterday. —AFP

Minibus overturns in Turkey killing 15

ANKARA: Fifteen people were killed and 28 wounded after a minibus carrying migrants overturned in eastern Turkey yesterday, the private news agency DHA reported. Women and children figured among the victims and their nationalities were not known. Police and ambulance services were rushed to the scene in Van province near the Iranian border, DHA reported, adding that they had entered Turkey illegally.

The death toll was initially reported to be 14 but Van governor Emin Bilmez was quoted by DHA later saying the death toll had risen to 15. Images in Turkish media showed the damaged minibus in a field with several rescue workers tending to the injured in Ozalp district close to the border with Iran. The agency reported that the driver lost control of the vehicle but there was no immediate details on the cause of the accident which took place at 0900 GMT. —AFP
NEW YORK: The chart-topping Russian-made FaceApp, which allows users to see how they will look as they age, found itself in the eye of a political storm in the US Wednesday, with one senator urging an FBI investigation into its “national security and privacy risks.” A celebrity favorite, the app deploys artificial intelligence to modify users’ photos, adding wrinkles or subtracting years from their faces.

On Wednesday, US Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer sought the alarm over FaceApp’s Russian developer, calling for the FBI and the Federal Trade Commission to “look into the national security & privacy risks” connected to the application. “FaceApp’s location in Russia raises questions regarding how and when the company provides access to the data of US citizens to third parties, including potentially foreign governments,” the New York senator said in a letter to the FBI.

“I would be deeply troubled if the sensitive personal information of US citizens was provided to a hostile foreign power actively engaged in cyber hostilities against the United States,” he added. Currently the most downloaded free app on Google Play with more than 100 million users, FaceApp was launched two years ago and went viral after its latest editing tool, an aging filter, sparked a flood of celebrity selfies.

Its developers, Wireless Lab, are based in the Skolkovo high-tech hub near Moscow, often called Russia’s Silicon Valley—a fact that has stirred concern within the US Democratic Party.

The Washington Post has reported that the Democratic National Committee has warned campaign officials in the primaries ahead of the 2020 presidential election to “delete the app immediately.” The party is particularly sensitive to any possibility of surveillance involving Moscow after some Democratic officials were targeted by Russian hackers during the 2016 presidential election campaign.

Fear of cyber espionage have flared in recent years, with US authorities worried about foreign governments having access to and potentially releasing personal data held by the tech giant.

With millions of users in the US, FaceApp’s Russian hackers have not responded to Schumer’s letter. But its CEO told the Post that Russian authorities did not have any access to any user data. Yaroslav Goncharov also told the newspaper that most photos are deleted from its servers within 48 hours and said the app did not use the pictures for any other purpose. Goncharov and Wireless Lab could not immediately be reached by AFP for comment. FaceApp is no stranger to controversy. Soon after its launch, a ‘hot’ filter that automatically lightened faces sparked accusations of racism. The same year, FaceApp’s developers were forced to remove a feature that allowed users to change their ethnic appearance, prompting some to liken the practice to ‘digital blackface’. But the controversies have done little to dim the app’s allure among selfie-lovers and celebrities including music superstar Drake, rapper Cardi B and NBA champion Steph Curry. Last week Goncharov commented on his application’s viral success in a rare Facebook post. “Overtake Instagram and WhatsApp once again? A small thing but feels good,” he wrote.—AFP

Argentine police have named Hezbollah in the 1994 bombing of Jewish center

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina marks the 25th anniversary of the bomb attack on a Jewish center that left 85 people dead with a day of mourning yesterday, but the relatives of victims are still waiting for justice. “What comes to mind when I think of it is this moment of obscurity, a moment that was interminable, a noise, but also the silence of those of us who were there. I don’t think our minds could understand,” Anita Weinstein, a survivor of the attack, told AFP.

“This attack, even if there was a large anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic component-of course—was an attack on Argentina and Argentine society,” said Weinstein, who worked at the Argentine Israeli Mutual Association (AMI), where the attack was carried out. A truck loaded with explosives was driven into the AMIA center in a densely populated central area of Buenos Aires, also leaving 300 people wounded.

On Wednesday, three commemorative murals to the victims were unveiled at the adjacent Clinicas Hospital where many of the victims were treated. With its 300,000-strong Jewish community—second only to the US in the Americas—Argentina is the only country in Latin America to have suffered such an anti-Semitic attack. But the AMIA bombing wasn’t the only one.

Two years earlier, in a context of extreme tensions between Israel and Iran, the Jewish state’s Buenos Aires embassy was hit by a suicide bomber driving a truck, killing 29 people and wounding 200. That attack was claimed by the Islamic Jihad group while the later bombing was widely blamed on Iran and its ally, the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah movement. Islamic Jihad is widely believed to have been assimilated into Hezbollah when it disappeared in the early 1990s.

AMI president Ariel Eichbaum hopes Argentina will soon declare Hezbollah a terrorist organization. On Wednesday, Argentina created a register of people and entities linked to acts of terrorism, an important step in allowing it to declare any group or person a terrorist not already listed as such by the United Nations. But there’s no guarantee this move will ever lead to justice.

Argentina has accused top Iranian ex-officials of being behind the AMIA attack but has never been able to question them. Decades of investigations have been beset by political interference and allegations of high-level corruption. In 2012, then-president Cristina Kirchner signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran, which was never ratified, that would have allowed Iranian suspects in the bombing to be questioned back home.—AFP

The only non-Moroccan in the group, Guervos is accused of having taught the main suspects how to use an encrypted messaging service and to use weapons. His lawyer, Saad Sahli, said Guervos had cut ties with the other suspects “once he knew they had extremist ideas” more than 18 months ago. All but three of those on trial had said they were supporters of the Islamic State group, according to the prosecution, although IS itself has never claimed responsibility for the murders.—AFP
German rescue ship captain questioned by Italy prosecutor over migrants

Salvini insists Italy’s ports remain closed

AGRIGENTO, Italy: German captain Carola Rackete, who sparked international headlines by forcibly docking in an Italian port with rescued migrants, was questioned by an Italian prosecutor yesterday over allegedly aiding illegal immigration. The captain of the Sea-Watch 3 arrived at court in the southern Sicilian town of Agrigento just before 10 am. She was met by a media scrum as she climbed the steps to the court under a baking sun but made no comment.

Rackete was arrested on June 29 for entering Italy’s Lampedusa port despite a direct order to stop, saying the 31-year old had merely acted to save lives. Rackete remains in police custody in the Sicilian port of Licata and is still the object of two investigations—one for entering Italian waters despite a direct order to stop, and another for aiding illegal immigration.

She will be heard on the latter yesterday, and will have to explain why her crew rescued migrants without waiting for the Libyan coastguard, which has jurisdiction over the stretch of water in which they were found. The 31-year-old will also be asked why she then sailed the Dutch-flagged vessel to Italy rather than a Libyan or Tunisian port.

Salvini insists that Italy’s ports remain closed to people who attempt the perilous Mediterranean crossing. Prosecutors in Agrigento appealed to Italy’s highest court this week against the decision to drop charges against Rackete for forcibly entering the port of Lampedusa, in the hope of establishing a precedent to put off other privately run ships. A few days after the Sea-Watch drama, another charity vessel forcibly landed in Lampedusa, a scenario that is likely to recur.

Salvini’s hardline stance has led to an upsurge in investigations into charity rescue vessels. In March 2017, the Spanish vessel Open Arms was seized and its captain and head of mission were prosecuted after the crew refused to hand saved migrants over to the Libyan coastguard, which arrived at the scene during a rescue operation. A month later a judge ordered the vessel be released on the grounds that crisis-hit Libya could not be considered a safe port.

And the prosecutor’s office in Catania, eastern Sicily, recently archived the case against the captain and mission head. The same prosecutor closed a similar probe against the NGO Sea-Watch after a rescue operation in January, concluding that the crew’s actions were justified. But the Sea-Watch 3’s dramatic port entry in June marked a new chapter in the war between Salvini and charity vessels.

The arrest of the dreadlocked Rackete sparked an online campaign which raised over 1.4 million euros in a few days to pay her legal fees and enable the German NGO to continue its operations—with a new boat if necessary. On Tuesday the parliament of Catalonia in Spain voted unanimously to honour Rackete with a Gold Medal, its highest award. And the city of Paris announced a donation of 100,000 euros to Sea-Watch, as well as a medal for Rackete and Pia Klement, another German captain prosecuted in Italy.

Paris’s move infuriated Italy’s far right, which noted that the French government had remained silent throughout the 15 days the ship had been blocked at sea, despite Rackete’s numerous appeals for a safe port. Salvini has stepped up his attacks on the rescue charities, which he has accused of aiding people-smugglers, while calling Rackete a “bigmouth” and a “criminal.” Rackete filed a complaint last week for defamation and incitement to violence, noting that Salvini’s hostile messages on social networks have prompted an outpouring of sexist, violent and threatening comments from users.—AFP

‘Christ of Theft’ statue poses dilemma for Peru

LIMA: A giant statue of Jesus Christ that looms over Lima is causing controversy in Peru because of its financing by the graft-tainted Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht and late ex-president Alan Garcia.

The 37-meter acrylic and concrete structure, which cost $800,000, is viewed by some as a symbol of corruption, giving rise to a local nickname “Christ of Theft.” Thousands are demanding its removal. A few weeks ago, the Ex-Momento (It’s Time) non-governmental organization began a campaign to have the statue, which sits on the Chorrillos mountain to Lima’s south, taken down.

“It’s impossible for this to remain as part of the city’s public space,” said Cristian Rojas, the Ex-Momento leader. The statue, whose official name is ‘Christ of the Pacific,’ was given by company chief Marcelo Odebrecht to Garcia and unveiled in 2011, right at the end of his second five-year term as president. He had previously held the presidency from 1985-90. Odebrecht has admitted to paying $29 million in bribes in Peru between 2005 and 2014.

Prosecutors say a former top Garcia official has confessed to acting as a frontman, receiving money from Odebrecht to pass on to the ex-president. Garcia, who committed suicide in April when police arrived at his home to arrest him for money laundering, was one of four Peruvian ex-presidents embroiled in various corruption scandals, along with Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, Ollanta Humala and Pablo García.

Odebrecht has admitted to paying hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes in a dozen Latin American countries and has agreed to pay even more in reparations in various deals with individual governments. But the company’s association with corruption means the Christ statue has become a pebble in the shoe of Peru’s government.

Garcia, who contributed $30,000 to the statue’s cost while Odebrecht covered most of the rest, said at the time that it would be similar to the world-renowned figure that overlooks Rio de Janeiro from the Corcovado hill. “I have gathered a group of friends and companies” to build the statue “and also put in some of my savings, because maybe it will be a blessing for Peru,” Garcia said.

When it was inaugurated, a month before Garcia’s term ended, Odebrecht was almost ready to unveil the Lima Metro, for which it had paid a bribe of seven million dollars to win the tender. Es Momento sent its removal petition, containing 4,700 signatures, to the government a month after Garcia’s death. President Martin Vizcarra’s government says it doesn’t have a budget to do so. Unlike the famous Christ the Redeemer in Rio, this statue attracts few visitors. It also appears neglected and dirty, in stark contrast to two military monuments to heroes of the 1879-83 war with Chile located just 200 meters away.

Rojas says the NGO has nothing against the statue itself—they don’t want to upset sensibilities in a country that is majority Catholic and conservative—but rather what it represents. “We don’t want to demolish it or attack the religious aspect of the monument, but rather attack the symbolism of corruption,” stressed Rojas.

“Alan Garcia used a religious image to clean a symbol of corruption.”

When the statue was erected, then-bishop Benedict sent a message of congratulations while the ultra-conservative Peruvian bishop Juan Luis Cipriani urged the faithful to turn the monument into an “object of pilgrimage.” Peru’s Episcopal Conference thanked Odebrecht and Garcia “for this gift to our Catholicism.” Now, though, the bishops have remained silent amid Es Momento’s petition.—AFP
Trump urges ethnic congresswomen to ‘go back’

GREENVILLE, United States: A fired-up Donald Trump took aim once more at Democratic lawmakers who “hate” America as he hit the campaign trail Wednesday, hours after an opposition bid to impeach the US president over “racist” attacks was shot down in Congress.

Trump's attacks have been widely criticized as a bid to rally his right-wing base as the 2020 White House race heats up at the risk of inflaming racial tensions and deepening partisan divisions in America. He himself has given credence to the notion, telling reporters he was "enjoying" his battle with the congresswomen "because I have to get the message out to the American people." Democratic leaders have rallied around their colleagues-Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley. All are American citizens and all except Omar, who is of Somali origin, were born in the United States.

But even as anger simmered in Democratic ranks, many in the party joined Republicans in the House of Representatives in voting to block an attempt to launch impeachment proceedings against Trump—highlighting divisions in the Democratic-controlled chamber. Trump meanwhile put a virtuoso spin on the evening's news as he arrived in Greenville, pumped up for his first rally since announcing his 2020 re-election bid. "We have just received an overwhelming vote against impeachment," he told reporters, calling it a "most ridiculous project. "And that's the end of it. Let the Democrats now go back to work," Trump said.

Those words are racist

Trump's four-day attack on the congresswomen—including taunts such as "if you hate our territory, or if you don't want us to be great again—leave!"—and the Democratic response have laid bare deep rifts in Washington. While the rhetoric has enraged liberals, just four Republicans voted to condemn Trump for "racist comments that have legitimized and increased fear and hatred of new Americans and people of color," Pelosi stood by her resolution condemning Trump's language. "By its definition, those words are racist," she said. But she told reporters she would rather see ongoing investigations of Trump play out before launching any divisive impeachment effort. Pushing back at Democrats, the president—who years ago pushed the "birther" conspiracy that Barack Obama was not born in the United States—has insisted he does not "have a Racist bone in my body!" According to a Wednesday poll from USAToday/ Ipsos, two-thirds of respondents disagree, judging that telling minority Americans to "go back to where they came from" is racist. —AFP

US diverts Central America aid to boost Venezuela’s Guaido

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump’s administration is diverting nearly $42 million in development aid from Guatemala and Honduras to promote Venezuela’s opposition chief Juan Guaido, including paying staff salaries, an internal document showed. In a memo obtained by AFP, the US Agency for International Development called Venezuela's political crisis "a significant, urgent event in the US national interest" that required a switch in $41.9 million in funds.

The United States and more than 50 other countries recognize Guaido as president of Venezuela, but leftist leader Nicolas Maduro remains in power despite nearly half a year of international efforts. Trump earlier this year declared Guaido’s leadership authorized by the US government. An American official told AFP in January that Guaido would not have new funds for programs in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

In the memo, which was first reported by the Los Angeles Times, the US aid agency said that $19.4 million in the funding earlier intended for El Salvador would go to “good governance” in Venezuela. Among other uses, that portion will go to “interim government staff salaries or stipends, work-related travel and other costs necessary to ensure full deployment of a transparent financial management system and other activities necessary for a democratic transition.” It will also be directed to non-governmental organizations to “create media content and activities necessary for a democratic transition.”

It will also be directed to non-governmental organizations to “create media content and time to provide greater reach to Venezuelan citizens,” the memo said. Another $2 million will go to support diplomatic efforts by Guaido’s supporters as they negotiate with Maduro, the memo said. The sides have been meeting in Barbados in talks mediated by Norway, although limited progress has been seen. —AFP

Thousands demand resignation of Puerto Rico’s governor

SAN JUAN: Thousands marched in Puerto Rico for a fifth day on Wednesday demanding the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rossello, following corruption accusations and the leak of text chats in which he made sexist and homophobic remarks. To the chagrin of "Ricky, renuncia!"—"Ricky, resign!"—large crowds gathered in the capital San Juan clamoring for Rossello to leave office—which he is refusing to do.

Local celebrity performers such as rapper Bad Bunny, pop icon Ricky Martin and Rene Perez (“Residente”) had urged their fellow Puerto Ricans to demonstrate. “Not just me, but many Puerto Ricans will hit the streets to demonstrate for what is correct,” Martinez told the Spanish-language Telemedio network before heading to the march. "We want him to leave and we will be here every day until he resigns or is removed," Joan Lopez, a 48-year-old teacher, told AFP at the demonstration. Police fired tear gas at the crowd on Monday after a fire broke out near the government headquarters. Five protesters were arrested. The Caribbean island of Puerto Rico is a US territory and residents are American citizens, but it does not have the same congressional representation accorded to states. Rossello is under pressure after US federal agents arrested contractors and government officials—including former education secretary Julia Keleher—on corruption charges.

The protests erupted after the Center for Investigative Journalism on Saturday released 889 pages of text chats on the encrypted messaging app Telegram in which Rossello and 12 other male administration members criticized officials, politicians and journalists. They shared memes, jokes and crude sexual insults, according to the Center and an excerpt published by local daily El Nuevo Dia. In one exchange, chief financial officer Christian Sobrino makes homophobic references to Latin superstar Martin. Martin, of “Livin’ la Vida Loca” and “She Bangs” fame, vents his fury in a video posted on Twitter. —AFP
Bangladesh floods worsen after breach, death toll nears 100 in India

Floods force millions to makeshift settlements, camps

GUWAHATI, India: One of Bangladesh’s main rivers breached an embankment, flooding a northern district and forcing thousands from their homes, an official said yesterday, as the toll from monsoon rains in neighboring India climbed to 97 in two flood-hit states. Hundreds of people were rescued in camps and makeshift settlements in India’s eastern state of Bihar and northeastern Assam, officials said, with heavy rains and flooding since last week driving even animals to seek shelter in people’s homes.

The monsoon brings heavy rains to South Asia between June and October, often triggering floods later in the season. In Bangladesh, the Jamuna river broke through an embankment on Wednesday night, inundating at least 40 villages and displacing more than 200,000 people, government official Rokhsana Begum said.

“We have enough supply of dry food and drinking water but we cannot reach many areas due to high water levels,” said the official in the district of Gaibandha, one of 21 hit by floods. Inadequate supplies are also a concern in the Indian state of Assam, where more than 5.8 million people have been forced out of their homes, but the situation is improving. “No fresh areas have come under floodwaters since Wednesday night,” Assam’s health and finance minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, said.

The state’s Kaziranga National Park, home to endangered one-horned rhinos and tigers, has been waisted deep in water, with animals sheltering in higher areas, and some straying into villages. Yesterday, an adult tiger was found sleeping on a bed in a house on the edge of the sanctuary. “It appears the tiger strayed into a human settlement area to escape the floods and now appears very tired,” park director Shiv Kumar told Reuters.

“We are preparing to tranquilize the tiger,” a park official said. “The floods have killed at least 43 animals, but authorities worry that poachers could take advantage of the deluge to target animals, especially one-horned rhinos, whose numbers are down to about 3,500 worldwide.”

The biggest worry during the floods is from poachers who might take advantage of the rhinos moving to the hills and kill the animals for their horn,” said Assam Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya.

The death toll in Bihar, which was worst-affected regions during the monsoons, but as one of the poorest regions in South Asia, residents feel helpless faced with the annual deluge. This year’s floods—caused by torrential rains in Bihar and from across the border in Nepal—have been unrelenting. Some 67 people have been killed in the state and 4.5 million residents affected by the floods so far, and water levels are still rising.

Thatched huts have been washed away and entire communities cut-off as roads and bridges are destroyed and crops devastated. In Sitamarhi district, floodwaters cover roads and homes as far as the eye can see. Marooned villagers, tired from hours of wading through the churning waters, wait for help to arrive on small islands of higher ground. Farmer Sonabati Devi managed to save some of her goats, but not much more.

Trump mocked for tweet on arrest of Mumbai attacks suspect

ISLAMABAD: Pakistanis yesterday mocked US President Donald Trump’s claim that the alleged Mumbai attacks mastermind had been arrested “after a ten-year search” while he was actually in the public eye for much of the decade. Hafiz Saeed, a firebrand cleric accused by Washington and New Delhi of being behind the 26/11 attacks, was taken into custody on Wednesday, days ahead of a trip by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan to Washington for his first meeting with Trump.

“After a ten-year search, the so-called ‘mastermind’ of the Mumbai Terror attacks has been arrested—after a ten-year search!” Trump tweeted Wednesday. But Saeed, who heads the UN-designated terrorist group Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and has a $10 million US bounty on his head, has never been missing.

Instead, when he has not been in the custody of the Pakistani authorities, he has courted the limelight, giving public speeches and televised interviews and even attempting to launch a political party to contest last year’s general election. Among the wave of social media users pointing this out to Trump were journalists highlighting the easy access they have been given to Saeed over the years.

“It’s Hafiz Saeed. Not Jason Bourne,” tweeted Pakistani news anchor Amber Shamsi. “I also interviewed Hafiz Muhammad Saeed for @AJEnglish back in 2015 at a JuD-run mosque and school in Islamabad. Did not take a lot of finding that time, either,” added Al Jazeera’s Islamabad-based correspondent Asad Hashim. “Finding him was never an issue. He operated freely and was highly visible.”

Hunger and despair for India flood victims

MUZAFFARPUR, India: Chest-deep in brown, flowing monsoon water and holding bags of clothes and utensils above their heads, residents in the Indian state of Bihar are hungry and despairing. “When many of us poor people are drowned, then the politicians suddenly take notice... But otherwise, nobody cares about us,” shopkeeper Raj Majhi told AFP. Majhi’s home-like many others—is submerged, with only rooftops remaining above floodwaters. His family have found their way to a small patch of land beside a highway, where they cook on a small stove.

Bihar is no stranger to floods, and is usually one of the worst-affected regions during the monsoons, but as one of the poorest regions in South Asia, residents feel helpless faced with the annual deluge. This year’s floods—caused by torrential rains in Bihar and from across the border in Nepal—have been unrelenting. Some 67 people have been killed in the state and 4.5 million residents affected by the floods so far, and water levels are still rising.

The move against Saeed also comes as Pakistan is facing a potential blacklisting by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) — an anti-money-laundering monitor based in Paris—for failing to do enough to combat terror financing.—AFP

HIMACHAL PRADESH: Floods across northern Indian states have claimed the lives of at least 16 people, while 10 remain missing as of Friday, July 19, 2019. The monsoon has caused widespread destruction, with roads and communities submerged in water.

Nepal, situated between India and China, has been particularly hard hit. The country has been battered by heavy monsoon rains, with floods and landslides causing widespread damage. At least 47 people have died in Nepal, with more than 100,000 people displaced.

The worst-hit region is the eastern district of Saptari, where floods have destroyed homes and farmland. The damage has been particularly severe in rural areas, where residents are struggling to salvage what remains of their livelihoods.

The government has declared a state of emergency in affected areas, and has deployed military personnel to help with rescue and relief operations. Aid has been pledged by countries around the world, including the United States and China.

However, the Indian government has been criticized for its response, with some指责 it for not doing enough to assist its neighbors. The government has denied these allegations, stating that it has done everything it can to help.

The monsoon season, which runs from June to September, is a crucial period for agricultural production in the region, and the damage caused by floods has raised concerns about food security. The government has assured that it will work to minimize any impact on food supplies, but the situation remains grim for many.

The floods in Nepal are a reminder of the vulnerability of the region to climate change. As global temperatures rise, it is expected that the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events will increase, posing a serious threat to the livelihoods of millions of people in Asia.
India demands Pakistan release accused ‘spy’ after world court ruling

ICJ reviews sentence, gives India consular access to the prisoner

NEW DELHI: India yesterday demanded that Pakistan release an alleged spy after the International Court of Justice called for a review of a death sentence against him. The arch-rivals each declared victory after the world court ruling made late Wednesday. But with 49-year-old Kulbhushan Jadhav still held in secret, his case risked setting off new tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbors.

India’s Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said Jadhav, a former navy officer, “is in the illegal custody of Pakistan under fabricated charges” as he welcomed the court ruling. “Yesterday’s judgment is not only a vindication of India and Mr Jadhav but for all those who believe in the rule of law and the sanctity of international conventions,” the minister added.

Jaishankar insisted that Jadhav “is innocent of the charges leveled against him” and had been forced to confess without access to a lawyer. “We once again call upon Pakistan to release and repatriate him forthwith.”

The ICJ said Pakistan must give India consular access to the prisoner, give Jadhav proper representation and review the death sentence. But it rejected India’s demand that Jadhav be freed.

Pakistan said Jadhav was detained in its southwestern province of Baluchistan in March 2016. It released a “confession” video in which Jadhav said he worked for Indian intelligence. A military court sentenced him to death in 2017. According to Indian officials, Jadhav retired from the navy in 2001 and was running a “logistics” business in the Iranian port of Chabahar.

India insisted he was taken captive in Iran before being moved to Pakistan and then forced to confess. It started an ICJ case in 2017. Throughout the hearings, Jadhav has been kept under strict lock and key in Pakistan. Apart the video in which he said he graduated from India’s premier defense academy and began to help Indian intelligence in 2001, the only sighting of Jadhav was when his mother and wife saw him for 40 minutes on December 25, 2017.

Indian officials say relatives reported that he appeared to have been tortured. Relations between the neighbors frequently boil over. They have fought three wars since independence in 1947 and staged air battles on their border in February. New Delhi frequently says there can be no improvement in relations until its neighbor takes action to rein in militant attacks in India.

Keeping up the rivalry, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi said late Wednesday that “truth and justice have prevailed” with the ruling. His Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan hit back through his Twitter account, “Appreciate ICJ’s decision not to acquit, release and return Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav to India,” Khan said. “He is guilty of crimes against the people of Pakistan. Pakistan shall proceed further as per law,” Khan added.

Pakistan’s foreign ministry said the incident is a “clear case of Indian state terrorism”. Media in the two countries also claimed victory in the case. “India Wins in World Court,” said a Mail Today headline. “Justice in International Court,” declared The Indian Express. “Pakistan vindicated” ran a banner front-page headline in Pakistan’s Express Tribune.—AFP

Pakistani ex-PM Abbasi arrested by anti-graft agency

LAHORE: Pakistan’s anti-corruption agency arrested former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi yesterday, drawing a furious response from opposition parties, which accused the government of trying to silence its opponents. The National Accountability Bureau said in a statement Abbasi had been arrested in a case that was opened last year over a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal project.

The arrest, as Abbasi was on his way to a news conference in the eastern city of Lahore, adds to a political scene already thick with accusations of corruption and abuse of office with opposition parties planning a day of protest next week. “I believe today is yet another black day in Pakistan’s history,” Ahsan Iqbal, a senior parliamentarian from Abbasi’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, told reporters, accusing Prime Minister Imran Khan of trying to suppress opposition.

“We are not afraid of your fascist acts. Don’t think that you will gag our voices through such arrests,” he said. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the head of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), the other main opposition party, condemned Abbasi’s arrest which he said was part of a government “witchhunt” against elected representatives.

The PML-N was already engaged in a bitter stand-off with the Khan government, which came to power last year accusing Abbasi and his predecessor, Nawaz Sharif, of large-scale corruption and mismanagement of the economy. Sharif was disqualified by the Supreme Court in 2017 over accusations that eventually led to a seven-year jail sentence for receiving undeclared income. Abbasi took over as premier and served for less than a year before losing an election to Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in 2018.

The PML-N accuses the government of being behind Sharif’s arrest and last week produced video footage that it said showed the judge who heard the case confessing that he had been blackmailed to ensure a conviction. The judge denied the accusation but was sacked from his position with the Accountability Court. The government has rejected opposition accusations of using the National Accountability Bureau, an independent body, to suppress its critics and opponents.

It says corruption by past governments is the main reason for an economic crisis that has forced Pakistan to seek a $6 billion loan package from the International Monetary Fund, its 13th IMF bailout since the 1980s. Last year, the NAB ordered an inquiry against Abbasi. Sharif and others “for granting a 15-year contract of LNG terminal to a company of their liking in violation of rules and by misuse of their powers, which caused national exchequer a loss of billions of rupees”, — Reuters

India’s ‘dosa king’ dies one week into life term

NEW DELHI: An Indian restaurant tycoon known as the “Dosa King” died in hospital yesterday, a week after beginning a life sentence for the murder of a love rival. P Rajagopal, 71, was convicted for the murder of his love interest’s husband in 2004, but only went to jail this month when the Supreme Court rejected his final appeal. Rajagopal, who turned his Saravana Bhawan restaurant into a global chain, died at Chennai’s Vijaya hospital where he was taken on Tuesday with heart problems.

“We failed to revive him and he passed away this morning due to cardiac failure,” a hospital official told AFP. Before beginning his sentence, Rajagopal had pleaded to be allowed to remain free because of his ill-health. When he gave himself up on July 9, he arrived at the Madras High Court in an ambulance with an oxygen mask strapped to his face. Rajagopal rose from rags to riches to create a chain which now has more than 80 restaurants in India and around the world, from London’s Leicester Square to New York’s Lexington Avenue but also Singapore, Sydney and Stockholm.

The chain became an international success with a winning formula of affordable South Indian delicacies such as dosa pancakes, deep-fried vadas and idli rice cakes. But his success was overshadowed by his conviction for the killing of the husband of a woman he wanted to make his third wife. His trial heard that an astrologer told him to marry the woman, then in her 20s, but she was already wed and repeatedly rejected Rajagopal’s advances. — AFP
WHO invokes emergency provision hoping to bring attention to crisis

KINSHASA: The World Health Organization on Wednesday declared the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo a “public health emergency of international concern,” a rare designation only used for the gravest epidemics. The year-old Ebola epidemic in eastern DR Congo, the second deadliest on record, has largely been contained to remote areas, but this week saw a patient diagnosed with the virus in provincial capital Goma, the first case in a major urban hub.

“It is time for the world to take notice,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement, as he accepted the advice of his advisory board to invoke the emergency provision, activated by the UN health agency only four times previously. Those included the H1N1, or swine flu, pandemic of 2009, the spread of poliovirus in 2014, the Ebola epidemic that devastated parts of West Africa from 2014 to 2016 and the emergence of the Zika virus in 2016.

The Ebola virus is highly contagious and has an average fatality rate of around 50 percent. It is transmitted to humans from wild animals and spreads among people through close contact with the blood, body fluids, secretions or organs of an infected person. Responders had hoped that this Ebola outbreak would be easier to control, thanks in part to a new vaccine.

While more than 60,000 people in the affected provinces of North Kivu and Ituri have been vaccinated, containment efforts have been hampered by chronic unrest in the region and a lack of trust in communities for health workers. A panel of top WHO officials that met in Geneva on Wednesday to issue the emergency call expressed “disappointment about delays in funding which have constrained the response.”

A fresh UN funding appeal for $700 million to cover the ensuing six months is expected in response. “It is time for the world to take notice,” Tedros said in a statement. The WHO’s international health emergencies welcomed the decision, voicing hope that the emergency call will bring the international attention that this crisis deserves.”

Goma case game-changer

Since August last year, the DRC Ebola outbreak has killed more than 1,600 people out of more than 2,500 cases. WHO has held off on making the emergency declaration on three previous occasions, but the confirmation of a case in North Kivu’s capital Goma escalated the crisis. Tedros this week called the Goma patient a “potential game-changer,” because the city is a “gateway” to Africa’s Great Lakes region and the wider world.

The Goma patient has been described as an evangelical preacher who travelled to Goma from Butembo, one of the towns hardest hit by Ebola. He had reportedly touched several Ebola patients in Butembo and concealed his identity in order to evade health screenings while en route to Goma. The emergency committee cited the patient, who has died, as a “specific cause for concern.”

Even if the risk of global spread is “still low”, the Goma case posed “worrying signs of possible extension of the epidemic,” the committee said. A city of about one million people, Goma sits on the northern shore of Lake Kivu, adjacent to Rwanda’s town of Gisenyi. It has a port that links to DRC city Bukavu and the South Kivu province as well as an airport with flights to the capital Kinshasa, Uganda’s Entebbe and Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

WHO urges against border closures, which the head of the WHO’s international health emergencies welcomed the decision, voicing hope that the emergency call will bring the international attention that this crisis deserves.”

Message in a bottle found in Australia 50 years on

SYDNEY: An Australian boy who discovered a message in a bottle on a remote beach may have a new penpal after the Englishman who dropped it from an Australian-bound ship 50 years ago was tracked down. But Jyah Elliott, aged nine, may have to wait some time as the message’s now 63-year-old author is once again at sea—this time on a cruise in the Baltic, the ABC reported. Jyah discovered the decades-old treasure in sand dunes on a South Australian beach on Tuesday and by the next day the writer had been located.

Paul Gilmore was just 13 when on November 17, 1969 he dropped the bottle into the Indian Ocean hoping to reach a new friend. The letter, which gave the ship’s location as “1,000 miles east of Fremantle, Western Australia, asked its recipient to “Please Reply”. Although Jyah initially thought the letter was a fake, he was quick to post a reply on Wednesday, “He was so excited,” his mother Carla Elliott told the ABC.

Gilmore’s sister Annie Crossland told the ABC that her brother was currently cruising but would be sure to contact Jyah when he returns home. “It’s amazing, absolutely incredible,” Crossland said. “He’ll be chuffed to bits.” She said the family had long ago moved on from the reply address on the letter. Gilmore sent six bottles from the TSS Fancy, a ship that transported so-called “10-pound Pom” migrants from Great Britain to Australia. “The last time he was on a ship was probably going to Australia,” she said. “Cruises aren’t his thing.” —AFP

India to make new bid to launch Moon rocket

NEW DELHI: India will make a new bid to launch a landmark mission to the Moon on Monday, a week after aborting lift-off at the last minute because of a fuel leak, officials said. The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) said it had rescheduled the launch of Chandrayaan-2, or Moon Chariot-2, for 2:43 pm (0713 GMT) on Monday. India is aiming to become just the fourth nation after Russia, the United States and China to land a spacecraft on the Moon.

Indian space chiefs called off the planned launch of the rocket 56 minutes before blast-off on Monday morning because of what ISRO called a “technical snag”. Media reports quoted ISRO scientists saying a helium fuel leak had been detected. India has spent about $140 million on preparations for the project, which is one of the cheapest among international space powers.

By comparison, the United States spent about $25 billion—the equivalent of more than $100 billion in current prices—on 15 Apollo missions in the 1960s and 70s. The rocket will launch from a space centre in Sriharikota, an island off the coast of the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. It will carry an orbiter, lander and a rover which has been almost entirely designed and made in India.

The orbiter is meant to keep circling the Moon for about one year, taking pictures of the surface and sending back information on the atmosphere. A lander named Vikram will take the rover to the surface near the lunar South Pole. India’s first lunar mission in 2008 — Chandrayaan-1 — did not land on the Moon, but carried out a search for water using radar.

A soft landing on the Moon would be a huge leap forward in India’s space program, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi determined to launch a manned mission into space by 2022. India also has ambitions to land a probe on Mars. In 2014, India became only the fourth nation to put a satellite into orbit around the Red Planet. —AFP
Britain’s Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex (left) and Britain’s Meghan, Duchess of Sussex (right) arrive to attend the European premiere of the film The Lion King in London. — AFP

Taiwanese ‘graffiti village’ eases elderly loneliness

See Page 24
Hebrew opera takes on Israeli Palestinian conflict at French festival

It features an Israeli prime minister, Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike, a hit squad and a tunneling into the world of Jewish dreams and nightmares and wake up in the night speaking in dreams and carrying out terror attacks!” declares an aide to the prime minister in the opera. 

The prime minister then decides to send in the aide as a spy in Palestinian garb to kill them. The different characters, all of them Israelis, are taken on by four singers. And at the back of the stage are the “sleeping” Palestinians, all played by volunteers lying on beds. Referring to his

Singers perform during the rehearsal of ‘The Sleeping Thousand’ opera as part of the International Festival of Lyric Art in the French southeastern city of Aix-en-Provence. — AFP

Blood-soaked ‘It’ sequel jolts Comic-Con to life

San Diego Comic-Con kicked off with a chorus of shrieks-and gallons of blood-as New Line Cinema unveiled spine-chilling footage from “It: Chapter 2,” the sequel to the highest-grossing horror movie of all time. The Warner Bros.-owned studio used Wednesday’s preview night of the world’s largest pop culture fan gathering to showcase its concluding film of Stephen King’s 1986 novel about a terrifying clown who lurks in the sewers, preying on children’s most nightmarish fears.

The adaptation was split into two by director Andy Muschietti—the first part, released in 2017, took a stunning $700 million at the global box office. The sequel, out September 6, stars Jessica Chastain and James McAvoy as grown-up versions of the haunted children returning to their creepy hometown 27 years later to battle Pennywise the clown.

Asked by host Conan O’Brien about a clip showing his character covered head-to-toe in blood, Chastain said she had volunteered for the full immersion—but later regretted it. “I just was like, let’s make ‘Carrie’ on steroids,” she told a packed downtown theater. “And that’s what he (Muschietti) did. And it literally tortured me through the whole movie.” Chastain claimed that a world-record 1,500 gallons of fake blood were used in the production-all of which had to be kept freezing-cold to stop it fermenting in the summer heat.

One haunting clip showed McAvoy’s character—an adult Ben Denbrough-racing through a claustrophobic house-of-mirrors in a bid to stop the clown’s murderous spree. McAvoy said he pulled muscles and developed tendinitis during an arduous, physical shoot in which Muschietti demanded endless multiple takes. “Zero Dark Thirty” actress Chastain also praised the genre’s portrayal of strong women in the age of #MeToo.

“Right now a lot of people are talking about female characters and arcs... I find that in horror films, they really honor women, in that women beat the monster at the end and usually the men die.” The 50th anniversary edition of Comic-Con opened Thursday with a cho- 

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“Right now a lot of people are talking about female characters and arcs... I find that in horror films, they really honor women, in that women beat the monster at the end and usually the men die.” The 50th anniversary edition of Comic-Con opened Thursday with a screening of the CW’s upcoming “Batwoman” series, featuring Ruby Rose as an openly lesbian, feminist superheroine. The show’s groundbreaking protagonist has already stirred controversy in some of the internet’s darker depths, but the early glimpse drew praise. “Ruby Rose is fun as hell. Plot is an origin story. And it is SPECTACULARLY gay!” tweeted SyFyWire journalist Jacob Oller.

Much-anticipated panels later in the week include a “Terminator” sequel reunion Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton, a “Star Trek” showcase welcoming back Patrick Stewart, and a “Game of Thrones” reunion. Marvel Studios is also expected to lift the lid on the next set of films in its hyper-successful “cinematic universe” of superhero movies. — AFP

Guests attend the 2019 Comic-Con International preview Night at San Diego Convention Center.
The ballroom of Queen Victoria’s Buckingham Palace has been brought back to life through Pepper’s Ghost: a 19th-century illusion recreated by Hollywood animation whizkids. The dancing, music and color scheme has been revived inside the palace ballroom as part of an exhibition for the 200th anniversary of Queen Victoria’s birth. The 1856 ball celebrating the end of the Crimean War has been recreated using a Victorian technique called Pepper’s Ghost. Film is projected upwards and then reflected off a near-invisible glass screen set at 45 degrees, making dancers seem to appear magically in the room. Scientist John Henry Pepper’s trick stunned and terrified people in theatres when it first came out.

The palace’s original wallpaper, friezes, windows and ceiling decorations are projected onto the walls to complete the recreation, digitally repainting the now-white walls with the reds, golds, blues and greens of the time. “It’s a melding of 21st-century and 19th-century technology,” said curator Amanda Foreman. “Victoria had been deprived of normal socialization when young,” she explained. “Dancing helped to make her feel alive. She loved the sensation of it.”

Built in 1854, the palace’s largest room is now used for state banquets such as that thrown last month for US President Donald Trump, and for conferring honors such as knighthoods. The central London palace was unoccupied before Victoria moved in on becoming queen in 1837 at the age of 18. The exhibition shows how Victoria and her husband Prince Albert turned it into the palace of today: the headquarters of the monarchy, a family home and a focal point for national celebrations.

Many of the modern British monarchy’s hallmarks started with Victoria at Buckingham Palace, such as the balcony appearances, garden parties and public receptions. Victoria’s throne is displayed in the Throne Room, in front of those of her great-great-granddaughter Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip. “It’s low down, because she was tiny,” said Foreman.

Casket of teeth

Victoria had nine children in 17 years, eight of whom were born in the palace. The exhibition has a gift casket of the children’s baby teeth, marble casts of her children’s arms and legs, and the first shoes worn by her eldest son, the future king Edward VII. Among the items on show never before seen by the public are Victoria’s watercolours of trees in the palace gardens.

Victoria all but left Buckingham Palace after Albert’s death in 1861. She reigned for a further 40 years until her own death in 1901. Queen Elizabeth visited the exhibition on Wednesday. The palace opens to the public when the royal family retreat to the private Balmoral estate in Scotland for their summer break. The exhibition, which costs £25 ($31, 28 euros) to enter, runs from Saturday until September 29. More than 500,000 people are expected to visit. — AFP

Buckingham Palace conjures up Victorian ghosts in new show

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Dancing to feel alive

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Madrid emerges as TV series production hub

Media firms are racing to set up television production centers in Madrid following the runaway global success of Spanish series such as Netflix’s crime caper “Money Heist”. Spanish multimedia group Mediapro and its foreign rivals Viacom and Netflix have set up shop or increased their activity in the Spanish capital to meet soaring demand for content sparked by the rise of subscription video streaming services. During a recent visit to Mediapro’s studios north of Madrid, film crews were busily recording a dialogue between two actresses on a set depicting an upscale law office.

The scene will be used in a series that the company is producing for Spain’s most watched television channel, Telecinco. The company used to produce “two or three” series at that studio per year, now it makes 10, an “unimaginable” amount just a few years ago, said Javier Pons, who is in charge of television production at the firm.

Mediapro is also preparing a sitcom for HBO, which has a streaming service that competes with Netflix, as well as “projects” for other platforms that it could not discuss. Producing series for a streaming service requires the “narration to be a bit different, so viewers get, in a way, addicted to the content” since users of the platforms tend to binge-watch shows, said Mediapro content director Javier Mendez.

‘Much cooler’

Madrid’s status as a new hub for TV series production was thrown into the spotlight when Netflix in April opened its first European production center in Tres Cantos in the outskirts of the city. The third season of “Money Heist”, which Netflix will release worldwide on Friday, was filmed in this sprawling 22,000-square-metre (237,000-square-foot) complex. The Emmy-winning series about a long-prepared, multiple-day assault on the Royal Mint of Spain is Netflix’s most watched, non-English language show.

Initially broadcast on private Spanish TV channel Antena 3, the US streaming giant bought the series in late 2017 and re-released it worldwide, turning the show into a global phenomenon. The unexpected success of the series weighed heavily on Netflix’s decision to set up shop in Madrid, said Elena Neira, a specialist in new media at the Open University of Catalonia.

And the success of other Spanish series on streaming services such as “Elite” about teens at an exclusive private school in Madrid has led Spanish producers to set their sights higher, she added. “For many people in Spain, who suddenly see Spanish content associated to a powerful brand like Netflix, it becomes much cooler than when it is broadcast on Antena 3,” Neira said.

The number of TV series made in Spain rose to 58 last year from 38 in 2015, according to a PricewaterhouseCoopers report. The sector contributed 655 million euros ($738 million) to Spain’s economic output in 2018, up from 429 million euros in 2015, it added. PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that Spain could produce 72 series a year once the sector is “consolidated”, which would generate over 18,000 direct and indirect jobs, compared to less than 10,000 in 2015. —AFP

Spanish actress Ursula Corbero.

Spanish actors Alvaro Morte (right) and Pedro Alonso (left) pose during a photocall for the presentation of the third season of the Spanish TV show “La Casa de Papel” in Madrid.

Spanish actress Alba Flores (left) and Serbian actor Darko Peric pose during a photocall for the presentation of Spanish TV show “La Casa de Papel”.

People wearing masks of the Spanish TV show “La Casa de Papel” pose before a photocall for the presentation of the 3rd season of the show. —AFP photos

Netflix shares slide on disappointing subscriber growth

Netflix shares plunged in after-hours trade Wednesday after its quarterly update showed weaker-than-expected subscriber growth for the streaming television sector leader. Netflix said it added 2.7 million new subscribers worldwide in the April-June period, well below expectations, as the firm prepared for offerings from rival groups including Walt Disney, Apple and others. Shares in Netflix skidded 11.97 percent to $319.07 in after-market trade following the results, which showed revenues and profits largely in line with analyst forecasts.

Netflix said that it still sees long-term growth on target, dismissing concerns that consumers were gravitating to rivals. “I think our position is excellent,” Netflix chief executive Reed Hastings said in an earnings presentation. “If investors believe in internet television, then our position in that market is very strong.”

Hastings maintained that while there may be a streaming television war going on, the market is so vast that rival services can thrive. He quipped that many Netflix employees are fans of HBO shows.

Netflix, known for its original shows such as “The Crown” and “Orange is the New Black,” said the latest shows did not attract as many subscribers. That, along with hits in the price of subscriptions in some regions, appeared to dampen growth, Hastings and other top executives said. Subscriber growth rekindled in the opening weeks of the current quarter, with the release of the latest season of blockbuster original series “Stranger Things,” according to executives. Netflix has a difficult road ahead with looming competition and the removal of popular content, but a strong content schedule in Q3 should draw many former subscribers back in, said eMarketer forecasting analyst Eric Haggstrom. Netflix said revenue for the recently ended quarter grew 26 percent from a year ago to $4.9 billion and profit fell 29 percent to $271 million.

Farewell to ‘Friends’

Netflix will be losing some of its hit shows such as “Friends” to rival platforms being launched in the coming months, but argued that it will make up for that with original content. “Much of our domestic, and eventually global, Disney catalog, as well as ‘Friends,’ ‘The Office,’ and some other licensed content will wind down over the coming years, freeing up budget for more original content,” the company said. “From what we’ve seen in the past when we drop strong catalog content, our members shift over to enjoying our other great content.”

WarnerMedia will launch its new Netflix rival “HBO Max” in early 2020 after reclaiming the rights to stream its popular television comedy “Friends,” the company said Tuesday. The new service will enter an increasingly crowded TV streaming marketplace, vying for customers with Netflix, Hulu and Amazon as well as the soon-to-be-launched Disney+, and Apple’s upcoming product. — AFP
For Russian director, facing trial, 'art is resistance'

For Russian theatre and film director Kirill Serebrennikov some one-and-a-half years of house arrest and a serious court case have been no obstacle to artistic creation. Consigned to his Moscow flat as he faced embezzlement charges he strenuously denies, Serebrennikov pressed on with staging theatre productions, finishing a film and even opera remotely abroad. His house arrest, which began in August 2017, was finally lifted in April this year to the delight of the supporters of the artistic director of the trendy Gogol Centre in Moscow. Now, Serebrennikov has drawn inspiration from the trailblazing Chinese photographer Ren Hang, who troubled the Beijing authorities but took his own life in 2017.

The play called “Outside” premiered at France's prestigious Avignon Theatre Festival on Tuesday without Serebrennikov, who is unable to leave Moscow under terms set by the court.

The performers, who donned white T-shirts with the slogan ‘Free Kirill’ at the curtain call, were given a standing ovation by the audience. “Theatre, cinema and photography are always an act of resistance,” Serebrennikov told AFP in an interview conducted by email ahead of the premiere of “Outside”. “Art is always the resistance of lying, slander and obscenity because this is the free territory of human activity where everything is possible,” he added.

'Became close to me'

Serebrennikov said the inspiration for the play came from messages over social media with Hang and a meeting that tragically never happened when the photographer killed himself in February 2017. “Literally two days before the time when we were supposed to get to know each other personally, he committed suicide,” the director said. Hang had in his short life built up an international reputation with erotically-infused photographs that broke taboos on sex in China.

“I had the feeling that a person had died who I had already become close to me,” said Serebrennikov, adding he wrote the play during the house arrest. “Hang said that he does not try to influence or interfere in the politics of China but China tries to interfere in his work,” he said.

'Repression makes nothing better'

Serebrennikov is accused of creating an organized criminal group with his colleagues and embezzling more than $2 million of state funding for a theatre project called Platforma. He has insisted the money was used properly and calls the charges “absurd”. For new productions of Nabucco by Verdi at the Hamburg State Opera and Mozart’s Cosi fan Tutte in Zurich, he sent instructions to the bar and restaurant. But the phone—which the defense wanted to examine—has disappeared, as confirmed by Little and his parents, who were also called on to testify. A police officer said he returned the phone after extracting all the information but admitted he neglected to ask for a receipt upon its return. The family said they never received it. Little’s mother Heather Unruh, a television news anchor in the Boston area, admitted she had deleted some potentially embarrassing photos before handing the phone over, but said she had not erased anything related to the alleged assault.

Hollywood’s reckoning

It is the latest chapter in Hollywood’s reckoning over sexual assault and harassment, which has already seen television icon Bill Cosby jailed, with movie mogul Harvey Weinstein’s trial set to begin in September. Spacey had insisted on his innocence of the charges, which would have carried a penalty of up to five years in prison. The two-time Oscar-winner recognized for his supporting role in “The Usual Suspects” in 1996 and his lead role in “American Beauty” in 2000 — was considered one of the finest actors of his generation. —AFP
Located in the mist-covered foothills of Taiwan’s central mountain range, Ruan Chiao village is virtually devoid of young people, but artist Wu Tsun-hsien is coaxing the Instagram generation back by transforming local homes into a canvas of color. Dipping his brush into a tin of beige emulsion, he carefully applies new layers of paint to his latest production—a vibrant rural scene depicting farmers in traditional weave hats tending to a flock of animals. Behind him an elderly villager with a walking stick shuffles his way down the main street, which is plastered with Wu’s colorful paintings.

“This village is full of old people,” the 55-year-old laments, explaining how the vast majority of youngsters—including his own children—have moved to the city, leaving elderly residents listless and lonely. But paintings have started to bring young visitors—always keen for a selfie in a photo-friendly location—back. “These drawings attracted many tourists to come visit. The old people who were left here are no longer so bored. This was my biggest gain,” he beams. Wu is not alone in this adopting this strategy.

There are now some half a dozen so-called “graffiti villages” in Taiwan that have been festooned with artwork in a bid to inject some life into rural places that have been emptied of its young.

### Empty villages

Like many industrialized places, Taiwan’s remarkable economic transformation over the past few decades has upended rural communities and unleashed huge demographic changes. “It’s perhaps a more recent phenomenon than it would have been in some other places,” explains Shelley Rigger, an expert on Taiwan at Davidson College in North Carolina, who said much of Taiwan’s industrial manufacturing stayed in the villages. “People sewed Barbie doll clothing in their houses and then carried it down to a packaging plant in the middle of a village,” she tells AFP, as an example. Ruan Chiao village, for example, used to churn out paper temple offerings.

But once much of the manufacturing shifted to mainland China in the late 1990s and Taiwan moved up the value chain, many of
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those jobs left. “That’s when you see rural areas kind of emptying out,” Rigger adds. Taiwan’s 23 million population is also rapidly ageing. The birth rate has plummeted—only 180,000 children were born last year, an eight-year low. The Wu family have experienced this flight first hand. The ancestral home is occupied by his wife’s father, 81, and mother, 72, who still work a few plots of land in the hills above the village growing organic vegetables. But Wu’s own children both went to university and have left, one to Australia, the other to a nearby city.

Wu’s wife Fan Ai-hsiu explains their bid to draw Instagram-happy crowds of youngsters was less about economics and more about giving her parents something to look forward to. “They want to have conversations with people, that’s what they miss, it’s not about money,” Fan says.

But it was not initially an easy task to persuade fellow villagers to use their houses as a canvas. “People here are fairly conservative,” she recalls, adding: “But once the first few paintings went up, they could see it brought people in.”

**Political themes**

Most of Wu’s paintings in the village stick to rural pastiches or traditional symbols of good fortune. It is the family home where he really gets to express himself—and which has quickly drawn a mass following on social media. Perched on a slope overlooking the village, the whole house is covered in images, many of which detail Wu’s politics. He’s an avid believer that not enough is being done to tackle climate change, so some of the scenes show apocalyptic scenes of environmental devastation. Others are commentaries on social issues like gay marriage—which he opposes—or how the elderly are treated in an increasingly consumerist society.

“This mural depicts the present Taiwanese corrupt society,” Wu remarks as he walks along a huge painted wall featuring hundreds of images. “This one is society’s mayhem due to mobile phones, computers and television... and this one is our cultural loss where many of our Hakka young generations don’t know the culture,” he adds. The Hakka are linguistically distinct group of people who trace their origins back to southern China. They have lived in Taiwan for some four centuries and make up 15-20 percent of the population.

Evelyn Sun puts on art and food events in Taipei and found out about Wu’s paintings via social media. She visited with friends who all soon found themselves sitting around a table with the Wu family, eating traditional Hakka vegetable dishes and tucking into eggs boiled in a secret recipe of local herbs. The 25-year-old enthuses: “Taiwan has many ‘graffiti villages’ that are beautiful scenic spots where people will just leave after taking pictures.” “But I realized when I came here that every mural here is depicting a social problem faced by society.” She hopes other young Taiwanese will explore the nation’s rural villages more often. She explains: “These people are our culture, they are our history, we have to get to know them.”—AFP
Bursting with the aromatic flavors of saffron, chorizo and garlic, this chicken and couscous dish is a winning weeknight dinner. When developing this recipe, we started with classic chicken and rice, but found that the rice was not cooking at the same rate as the chicken in the multicooker, we ended up with either stubbornly crunchy rice or egregiously overcooked chicken.

Since tasters loved the Spanish flavor profile of the dish, we went in search of a different grain that would work in tandem with the chicken. A few tests revealed that couscous was the crowd favorite, and it couldn’t have been simpler: Couscous doesn’t require cooking at all, just soaking, which meant we could add it to the pot after pressure or slow cooking and allow it to simply absorb the ultra flavorful cooking liquid. If using the slow cook function, begin checking the chicken’s temperature after 1 hour and continue to monitor until it is done.

SPANISH-STYLE CHICKEN AND COUSCOUS

Ingredients
Servings: 4
Pressure cook total time: 1 hour
Slow cook total time: 2 hours, 40 minutes
4 (12 ounce) bone-in split chicken breasts, trimmed
Salt and pepper
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped fine
4 ounces Spanish-style chorizo sausage, cut into 1/4 inch pieces
1/8 teaspoon saffron threads, crumbled
1/2 cup chicken broth
1 1/2 cups couscous
1 cup frozen peas, thawed
2 teaspoons lemon juice
3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

Preparation
Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Using highest sauté or browning function, heat oil in multicooker for 5 minutes (or until just smoking.) Place half of chicken, skin side down, in multicooker and cook until browned, 5 to 7 minutes; transfer to plate. Repeat with remaining chicken; transfer to plate.

Add bell pepper, chorizo, and 1/4 teaspoon salt to fat left in multicooker and cook until bell pepper is softened, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and saffron and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in broth, scraping up any browned bits. Nestle chicken, skin side up, into multicooker, adding any accumulated juices.

To pressure cook: Lock lid in place and close pressure release valve. Select high pressure cook function and cook for 17 minutes. (If using Instant Pot, decrease cooking time to 9 minutes.) Turn off multicooker and quick-release pressure. Carefully remove lid, allowing steam to escape away from you.

To slow cook: Lock lid in place and open pressure release valve. Select low slow cook function and cook until chicken registers 160 F, 1 to 2 hours. (If using Instant Pot, select high slow cook function.) Turn off multicooker and carefully remove lid, allowing steam to escape away from you.

Transfer chicken to serving dish and discard skin, if desired. Tent with aluminum foil and let rest while preparing couscous. Stir couscous, peas, and lemon juice into multicooker, cover, and let sit until couscous is tender, about 5 minutes. Add parsley and fluff couscous gently with fork to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve with chicken.

Nutrition information per serving: 597 calories; 165 calories from fat; 18 g fat (5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 111 mg cholesterol; 586 mg sodium; 60 g carbohydrate; 6 g fiber; 4 g sugar; 45 g protein.
Get that sticky rice crispy chew that kids and adults love

While almost everyone is familiar with the classic recipe for Rice Krispies Treats, slight variations on the original abound. We think our recipe gets them just right, with the perfect ratio of marshmallow and butter to cereal for a bar with the sticky chew that kids love and that adults remember fondly.

The basic procedure is the same as the back-of-the-box recipe: Melt butter and marshmallows, mix in cereal, and press into a pan—it couldn’t be simpler. But we like a generous portion of these cereal treats; for thick, substantial squares, we pat the mixture into an 8-inch square pan instead of the usual 13-by-9 inch pan. Adding a little salt to the mix kept sweetness in check.

Greasing the knife we used to slice the bars ensured that we were able to produce neat, easy-to-cut squares. These rice crispy treats are delicious as is, but their simplicity also makes them an ideal backdrop for a whole host of flavorings and mix-ins, so we developed several variations sure to please any crowd. Any brand of toasted rice cereal will work in this recipe.

### RICE CRISPY TREATS

**Ingredients**

- **Servings:** 16
- **Start to finish:** 1 hour
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 10 ounces marshmallows
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 5 cups (5 ounces) crispy rice cereal

**Preparation**

Make foil sling for 8-inch square baking pan by folding 2 long sheets of aluminum foil so each is 8 inches wide. Lay sheets of foil in pan perpendicular to one another, with extra foil hanging over edges of pan. Push foil into corners and up sides of pan, smoothing foil flush to pan. Spray with vegetable oil spray.

Melt butter in Dutch oven over low heat. Add marshmallows, vanilla, and salt and cook, stirring constantly, until melted and smooth, about 6 minutes. Off heat, stir in cereal until incorporated. Transfer mixture to prepared pan and press into even layer with greased spatula. Let treats cool for 30 minutes.

Using foil overhang, remove treats from pan. Cut into 16 squares and serve.

### Variations

**Almond Joy Rice Crispy Treats:** Stir 1 cup toasted sweetened shredded coconut; 1 cup toasted sliced almonds; and 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips into marshmallow mixture with cereal.

**Chocolate-Cherry Rice Crispy Treats:** Add 1/2 cup white chocolate chips to pot with marshmallows. Stir 1 cup dried cherries, chopped, into marshmallow mixture with cereal. Microwave additional 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips in bowl at 50% power, stirring occasionally, until melted. 30 to 60 seconds. Drizzle over cooled treats and let set for 15 minutes before cutting treats.

**Double Chocolate Caramel Turtle Rice Crispy Treats:** Add 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips to pot with marshmallows. Stir 1/2 cup quartered soft caramels into marshmallow mixture with cereal. Microwave additional 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips in bowl at 50% power, stirring occasionally, until melted. 30 to 60 seconds. Drizzle over cooled treats and let set for 15 minutes before cutting treats.

**Loaded Rice Crispy Treats:** Stir 1 cup pretzels, broken into 1/2-inch pieces; 1/2 cup salted dry-roasted peanuts; 1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips, and 1/2 cup toffee bits into marshmallow mixture with cereal.

**Peanut Butter Rice Crispy Treats:** Add 1/2 cup white chocolate chips to pot with marshmallows. Stir 1 cup dry-roasted peanuts into marshmallow mixture with cereal. Microwave additional 1/2 cup white chocolate chips in bowl at 50% power, stirring occasionally, until melted. Drizzle melted peanut butter chips over cooled treats and let set for 15 minutes before cutting treats.

**Salty Cashew-Caramel Rice Crispy Treats:** Stir 1 1/2 cups salted roasted cashews, chopped coarse, and 4 1/2 ounces quartered soft caramels into marshmallow mixture with cereal.

**Nutrition information per serving:** 138 calories; 20 calories from fat; 2 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 6 mg cholesterol; 96 mg sodium; 22 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 11 g sugar; 1 g protein.
Renowned as the historic and cultural jewel of Japan, the enchanting city of Kyoto captivates visitors with its shrine-dotted streets and temple-laden paths. But should you have a thirst for a change of scenery, there are plenty of options. Japan's ancient capital city sits in the heart of the Kansai region, home to some of the nation's top destinations boasting magnificent castles, quaint shopping streets, lush hiking trails, and charming hot spring towns. The following day trips from Kyoto can be reached within an hour or two by train. If you make several day trips by train within a five-day period, you may be able to save some cash by using the Kansai Wide Area Pass.

Peaceful parks and gardens in Nara

Famed for its inquisitive deer that roam the sprawling grounds of Nara Park (and have even been designated as a national treasure), the tranquil Nara City is home to some of Japan's most historical sites, such as the massive Todaiji temple and the lantern-lined Kasuga Shrine. While making your way to leafy Nara Park, stroll through exquisite Japanese gardens at Yoshiki-en. At nearby Isui-en, see a prime example of shakkei - the Japanese concept of borrowed scenery - with Mt. Wakakusa rising up in the distance as the garden's backdrop. Getting there: From Kyoto Station, take a 55-minute rapid train on the JR Nara line to Nara Station.

Eat and shop till you drop in Osaka

Known in Japan as 'the nation's kitchen', Osaka's motto 'kuidaore' literally means 'to eat oneself bankrupt'. Chow down on okonomiyaki (savoury pancakes) and takoyaki (fried octopus balls) along the Dotombori River. Try
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Kushikatsu (fried meat and vegetable morsels on sticks) near the Tsutenkaku Tower in the kitschy, neon-lit neighbourhood of Shinsekai. Wind through the alleys of Ura-Namba to Torame Yokacho (Tiger Alley) where you can try myriad favourite dishes under one roof. After wandering the expansive grounds of the iconic Osaka Castle, browse boutique and vintage clothing shops in the hip hoods of Amerika-Mura, Horie, and Nakazakicho. If you want more bang for your buck, head to the Rinku Town outlets by the airport to grab a bargain.

Getting there: From Kyoto Station, take a 30-minute JR special rapid train bound for Himeji to Osaka Station. Bullet trains also run between Kyoto and Osaka.

Harborside and mountaintop excursions in Kobe

Kobe has long been a cosmopolitan hotspot with an infusion of international influences. At the heart of Kobe lie the popular retail districts of Motomachi and Sannomiya. Wander uphill from Sannomiya Station to an area of tree-lined streets with a collection of old-style merchant houses, quaint cafes, and one-of-a-kind shops. The city boasts a well-established Chinatown, Nankinmachi, and nature is close by with Mt. Rokko - a popular hiking spot (featuring a cable car for those less inclined to hike) - towering over the narrow streets. If you happen to have extra time on your hands, consider a trip to the city of Himeji to visit the magnificent World Heritage Site of Himeji Castle.

Getting there: From Kyoto Station, take a JR Limited Express Super Hakuto train for 50 minutes to Sannomiya Station. This service only runs a few times a day, so check the Hyperdia train website in advance. To get to the Kobe Port area, take a short ride on the JR Kobe line to Kobe Station.

Get a history lesson in Hiroshima

The Kyoto to Hiroshima leg is a well-trodden path for visitors who want to see the Peace Memorial Park and museum dedicated to the history of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. A good pick-me-up after a tour through the museum is a trip over to the gorgeous little island of Miyajima.
which is home to Itsukushima - a bright orange shrine rising out of the ocean. This is a celebrated scenic spot, considered one of the ‘three great views of Japan’. There, you can wander through streets lined with machiya (old wooden townhouses), do plenty of souvenir shopping, eat grilled Hiroshima oysters on the street, and take a cable car up to the top of Mt. Misen for breathtaking views of the Seto Inland Sea.

Getting there: From Kyoto Station, take the 100-minute Shinkansen Nozomi bullet train to Hiroshima. To reach the ferry port from Hiroshima Station, take the JR Sanyo Line for 25 minutes to Miyajimaguchi Station.

Kayak or bike around Japan’s largest freshwater lake
Lake Biwa in neighboring Shiga Prefecture is the perfect spot for a nature break with kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding, cycling, and lake cruises. The Biwako bike trails and road networks that circle Biwako make cycling an easy choice, and rental shops at Maibara Station are a convenient place to pick up a set of wheels. Ride south from Maibara to the charming little town of Hikone where you can climb up to Hikone Castle for spectacular views out over Lake Biwa. Or ride north to Nagahama, a town perched on the northeast coast of the lake with highlights including the reconstructed Nagahama Castle on the waterfront, the brewery Nagahama Roman Beer serving craft brews and omi-gyu beef sushi from the Lake Biwa region, and the impeccably manicured garden of Keiunkan. Getting there: From Kyoto Station, take a one-hour rapid train or 19-minute bullet train on the JR line to Maibara Station.

Soak in Kinosaki’s abundant hot springs
An atmospheric hot-spring town with seven public bathhouses and a whole host of private ones, Kinosaki is the ultimate relaxation getaway. The public baths are esteemed for their remedial properties and promises of good fortune. If you arrive in the picturesque canal town in the winter, enjoy a feast of snow crab freshly caught from the Sea of Japan. Many of the ryokans (traditional Japanese inns) serve delectable kaiseki (Japanese haute cuisine) multi-course crab meals, which are tasty works of art.

Getting there: From Kyoto Station, take the Limited Express Kinosaki train to Kinosaki Onsen Station. It takes around 2.5 hours. This train only runs a few times a day, so be sure to check the Hyperdia train website before travel.

Wander Kurashiki’s revered historic canal district
Situated roughly 230km from Kyoto in Okayama Prefecture lies the historic canal town of Kurashiki, known for the white and grey walls of its residences and the willow trees dotted along the banks of the Kurashiki River. During the Edo period, this river formed key trade routes for Japanese merchants. In the 1600s the town’s light-colored buildings were rice stores and granaries that have now been restored as cafes, galleries, craft and pottery workshops, denim boutiques, and accommodation. Admire the historically preserved town centre of Bikan on a traditional boat tour of Kurashiki Canal, and then tuck into a plate of barazushi, a regional specialty of sticky rice topped with over a dozen ingredients, such as seafood from the Seto Inland Sea or vegetables like snow peas, carrots, and lotus root.

Getting there: From Kyoto Station, ride the Shinkansen Nozomi bullet train for one hour to Okayama Station then change to the JR Sanyo line to Kurashiki Station (approx 20 mins).
Yesterday’s Solution

ACROSS
1. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
2. Stripped of drapery
3. (Roman mythology) Goddess of abundance and fertility
4. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment
5. Any of two families of large herbivorous aquatic mammals with paddle-shaped tails and flipper-like forelimbs, and no hind limbs
6. Pipe genus of the family Myoxidae
7. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 10 liters
8. A state in northwestern North America
9. Sour or bitter in taste
10. Type genus of the family Spiraea
11. A Soft silver-white ductile metallic element
12. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind
13. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad
14. Any of a group of antidepressant drugs that inhibit the action of monoamines to accumulate
15. A camp defended by a circular formation of wagons
16. A Japanese shrub that resembles members of the genus Spiraea
17. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
18. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
19. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element
20. The ancient name of Easter or Passover
21. A bottle with a stopper
22. Petty quarrel
23. A region of Malaysia in northeastern Borneo
24. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
25. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill
26. Largest known land species
27. Polished and usually brightly colored cover of some seeds that develops from the ovule stalk and partially or entirely envelopes the seed
28. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element (liquid at normal temperatures)
29. An aromatic ointment used in antiquity
30. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element
31. The seventh month of the Moslem calendar
32. A mediocre and stupid person
33. The first of the major Hebrew prophets (8th century BC)
34. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment
35. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment
36. Wild ginger
37. The capital and largest city of Ghana
38. A chronic inflammatory collagen disease affecting connective tissue (skin or joints)
39. Free from favoritism or self-interest or deception
40. (Akkadian) Chief god of the Assyrians
41. Tropical American tree grown in southern United States having a whitish pink-tinged fruit
42. A region of Malaysia in northeastern Borneo
43. A European river
44. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Judah
45. A chronic progressive encephalitis running primarily in children and young adults
46. Any of a group of antidepressant drugs that inhibit the action of monoamines to accumulate
47. A linear unit (1/6 inch) used in printing
48. A chronic inflammatory collagen disease affecting connective tissue (skin or joints)
49. A beverage made by steeping tea leaves in water
50. A Mid-Atlantic state
51. A pilgrimage to Mecca
52. A river that rises in northeastern Turkey and flows generally eastward through Armenia to the Caspian Sea
53. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
54. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
55. (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious
56. (South African) A camp defended by a circular formation of wagons
57. An emotional response that has been acquired by conditioning
58. The southern part of the ancient Palestine succeeding the kingdom of Judah
59. A state in northwestern North America
60. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
61. An emotional response that has been acquired by conditioning
62. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element
63. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element
64. Any of a group of antidepressant drugs that inhibit the action of monoamines to accumulate
65. An awkward stupid person
66. Any of a group of antidepressant drugs that inhibit the action of monoamines to accumulate
67. A rare chronic progressive encephalitis running primarily in children and young adults
68. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
69. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
70. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
71. A river that rises in northeastern Turkey and flows generally eastward through Armenia to the Caspian Sea
72. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America
73. Heads or butts
74. A river that rises in northeastern Turkey and flows generally eastward through Armenia to the Caspian Sea
75. Dearly loved
76. Any of a group of antidepressant drugs that inhibit the action of monoamines to accumulate
77. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
78. Before noon
79. Exhibiting or restored to vigorous good health
80. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
81. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
82. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
83. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad
84. The act or process of measuring
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DOWN
1. A familiar name for Easter or Passover
2. A translucent mineral consisting of hydrated silica of variable color
3. A pale rose-colored variety of the ruby gems
4. A European river
5. A city in central Georgia southeast of Atlanta
6. A state in northwestern North America
7. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
8. The capital of Turkey
9. A former monetary unit in Great Britain
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Yesterday’s Solution

Yesterday’s Solution

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Aries (March 21-April 19)

You've got so much energy today! It's a great day to push yourself to the limit and see what you can do. You may also find that your creativity is flowing more than usual, so don't be afraid to take a risk or try something new.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You might feel a bit overwhelmed by all the tasks you have to do today. Try to break them down into smaller, manageable chunks and focus on one thing at a time.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You're in a great mood today! Take some time to enjoy the little things in life and appreciate the beauty around you.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You may feel a bit on the emotional side today, but don't let it get you down. You're capable of handling whatever comes your way.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may feel a bit overconfident today, but remember that everyone has their limitations. Try to谦虚地 approach any challenges you face.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You can achieve a lot today if you put in the effort. You're well-suited to tasks that require attention to detail.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your social life is likely to be enjoyable today. You may even meet someone new who could be interesting to know.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You may feel a bit mysterious or even mysterious today. Don't be afraid to let your guard down and show your true colors.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You may have a lot to think about today, but try to focus on the positive things. You're capable of handling whatever comes your way.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may feel a bit anxious or even anxious today. Try to take deep breaths and focus on the present moment.

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You may feel a bit out of your comfort zone today, but try to embrace new experiences. You're capable of handling whatever comes your way.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You may feel a bit emotional today, but try to focus on the positive things. You're capable of handling whatever comes your way.
KUALA LUMPUR: A two-headed baby turtle has been born in Malaysia, captivating conservationists, but it only survived a few days after being discovered. It was found Monday on Mabul island, off the Malaysian part of Borneo, in a nest alongside more than 90 other recently hatched green turtles. David McCann, marine biologist and conservation manager for group SJ SEAS—which oversees the nesting site—said the creature was “utterly fascinating”.

“The right head seems to control the front right flipper, and the left head the front left flipper. Yet they are capable of coordinating their movements in order to walk and swim,” he said in a statement. SJ SEAS chairman Mohamad Khairuddin Riman added: “We have released around 13,000 hatchlings from the hatchery and have never seen anything like this before.” But the turtle died late Wednesday, Sen Nathan, a vet from Sabah Wildlife Department, told AFP.

He said the cause of death was not yet known but added the turtle would have had little chance of surviving long in the wild. “It would have been poached by an eagle because it could not swim well,” he said. While rare, it was not the first time a two-headed baby turtle has been found. Nathan said one was discovered in 2014, on an island off Malaysia’s east coast, which survived for three months. Green turtles are one of the largest sea turtles, and are mainly found in tropical and subtropical waters. Classified as endangered, they are threatened by habitat loss as well as by poachers who hunt them for their meat and eggs.—AFP
Established 1961

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American Airlines                     22087425
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Britain may slip into year-long recession

LONDON: Britain might be entering a full-blown recession that a no-deal exit from the European Union would compound, blowing a 30 billion-pound hole in the public finances, a budget watchdog said yesterday.

As lawmakers prepared for a vote that could hinder any attempt by the next prime minister to pursue a no-deal Brexit, the Office for Budget Responsibility said the economy probably flattened or might have contracted in the second quarter. Some of that weakness may have been payback after a rush to build up inventories before the original Brexit deadline in March.

"But surveys were particularly weak in June, suggesting that the pace of growth is likely to remain weak," the OBR said in a report on the outlook for the public finance.

"This raises the risk that the economy may be entering a full-blown recession," Britain's economy slowed by less than feared after the 2016 Brexit referendum. But many investors are worried about a sharp downturn now with the latest Brexit deadline approaching on Oct. 31 and the world economy slowing because of trade tensions. A no-deal Brexit could cause the economy to contract by 2 percent by the end of 2020, the OBR said, referring to International Monetary Fund forecasts.

It could also add 30 billion pounds ($37.4 billion) a year to public borrowing by the 2020/21 financial year, the OBR said, more than doubling the expected deficit.

Concerns about a no-deal Brexit, which have weighed heavily on the value of sterling, have mounted as the leadership contest has progressed. The OBR said promises by the candidates of higher spending and tax cuts would also put a strain on Britain's finances. "The spending control framework seems to be under pressure, with major announcements being made outside fiscal events, and the Conservative leadership making pledges that would prove expensive if pursued," it said. — Reuters
Turkey’s restructuring stalls as banks, government wrestle with bad debt

Government says no agreement reached on fund model

ISTANBUL: Efforts to clean up Turkey’s bad debt have stalled after bankers rejected or put on hold initial plans, according to people familiar with the matter, frustrating the country’s attempts to leave behind the worst of last year’s currency crisis.

Interviews with more than a dozen bankers, company executives and advisers show that there has been little progress over the past three months with plans to help lenders to Turkey’s construction, real-estate and energy companies that can no longer afford roughly $20 billion of debt.

“Everything is just at a standstill,” said a banker involved in discussions between lenders, companies and government officials, who asked not to be named. “The government and everyone is in wait-and-see mode before they take any further action, and people are looking to next year.” A key obstacle has been a lack of appetite by both the debt-laden companies and their lenders to take drastic measures to restructure the debt, in part because of hope that the economy will soon rebound and improve business.

There has also been scant direction from Ankara, the people say.

How quickly and credibly Turkey can execute the bailout could determine whether the Middle East’s largest economy returns to growth later this year, or risks a protracted recession and another crisis that again rolls other emerging markets, banking and industry officials say. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan’s government in April announced that off-balance-sheet funds would be created to help restructure energy and real-estate loans, but it has not presented a detailed strategy.

In a statement to Reuters Wednesday, the Turkish Treasury said banks “have not yet reached agreement on a fund model” but that the restructuring efforts continue. The Treasury said further that it is up to the banks to decide on which solution they choose but that the government supports a fund structure that “will transfer our banks’ problem loans to investors, provide entry of fresh resources to our financial system, and allow our banks the opportunity to focus on their primary duties of provision and management of credits.”

“The important thing is for the problem to be solved permanently without being pushed back, and for credit channels to be opened again,” the Treasury added. Loan restructuring allows a company facing cash flow problems to renegotiate delinquent debts with lenders, enabling it to continue operations and avoid potential bankruptcy.

The government has said it will not directly fund a bailout, but it does have the authority to shape restructuring procedures. Lenders and indebted companies are looking for the state’s assistance in areas such as reducing restructuring costs through tax breaks and making it easier for foreign investors to acquire bad debt, three sources say. A draft law currently being debated in parliament removes some obstacles to dealing with the bad debt by introducing tax exemptions for loan restructuring and legal protection for bankers. “A model where the state provides funding for restructuring is not on our agenda at the moment,” the Treasury said in its statement to Reuters.

Construction debt

Turkey’s large construction and energy sectors, which had for years indulged in cheap foreign credit, continue to struggle to service billions of dollars of debt after sharp declines in the lira last year. A recent rebound in the currency – albeit modest in comparison to last year’s 30% slide – has removed some of the urgency but the size of the bad debt remains significant, a restructuring consultant said.

According to official figures, non-performing loans in the construction industry totaled 15 billion liras ($2.63 billion) as of May, but some industry specialists say the total could be closer to $10 billion. The problems for construction companies are particularly acute because unlike energy providers - which continue to earn revenues from customers - they face a lack of cash flow while building projects are stalled, industry specialists say.

One key reason for the lack of progress in restructuring the construction sector’s bad debt is sharp disagreement over the value of partly built or vacant condominiums, offices and shopping malls across the country, leaving banks and companies unwilling to buy or sell assets, several of the people Reuters interviewed said. That led to the rejection in May by private banks of a proposal by state lender Ziraat Bank, which is leading restructuring talks between construction borrowers and creditor banks, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Ziraat had proposed a plan to enable banks to move bad debt from their books into an off-balance-sheet vehicle, guaranteeing them interest income in the near term and repayment of the loans within 10 years. — Reuters
Pakistan’s austerity policies under IMF bailout send prices soaring

Price squeeze hits middle class as well as poor

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government faces mounting pressure as rising prices and tough austerity policies under Pakistan’s latest bailout from the International Monetary Fund are squeezing the middle class that helped carry it to power.

Rashid Mehmood owns a small shop selling children’s clothing in Aabpara, the oldest market in the capital, Islamabad. He says he has faced a critical decline in sales over the past year, pointing to Khan’s election last August.

The last six months had been “particularly harsh”, he said. “Do you see any customers coming into my store?” he asked as he stood in the emty shop, decorated with brightly colored leggings and dresses.

He said he had not made a sale in a week. In normal times, Mehmood’s store serves the kind of middle-class shoppers who in recent years have been behind an import-led consumption spurt that propped up growth and helped hide the problems of an economy riddled with inefficiency and without a strong export base. Fed by low interest rates, heavy borrowing and an overvalued rupee currency that, for a time at least, allowed imports to pour in, consumption gave an illusion of growth that has now been replaced by a severe economic hangover. Like so many of its predecessors, Khan’s government, which came to power vowing to root out corruption and create millions of jobs, has been forced to turn to the IMF to prevent a balance-of-payments crisis as the money runs out.

Economic growth, which reached 5.5 percent in the fiscal year to June 2018, is expected to slow to 2.4 percent this financial year, according to IMF estimates, barely enough to keep pace with the growth in a population that now numbers 208 million. The rupee has lost about a quarter of its value in a slide that has driven up fuel costs and helped push a relentless increase in prices for food and other necessities.

The central bank, which this week raised interest rates to 13.25 percent, expects inflation to average as much as 12 percent this year. As ever, the poorest have been hit hardest. But the squeeze on middle-income households poses a special challenge for Khan, who has enjoyed wide support among an urban middle class that has grown over the past two decades as poverty levels have come down from two thirds of the population to about a quarter.

Further along in Aabpara market, Abida Jahan has come with her family from Haripur town, a couple of hours drive away, after the food-processing factory her husband worked in was shut down. They are looking for a gift to celebrate their daughter’s 13th birthday. However, the surge in prices has meant that they will likely go home empty handed. “This is the same government that promised to decrease oil prices to 45 rupees,” says Abida’s husband, recalling that Khan’s PTI party had promised to halve the price of fuel and build a new welfare state.

Shopping malls

Pakistan’s growing middle class has helped reshape its urban landscape, symbolizing a promise of upward mobility. Shopping malls with foreign retail brands and fast-food franchises have proliferated in recent years, serving a middle class who “define themselves by what they can buy and where they can eat”, says Ariffin Masood, author of The New Pakistani Middle Class.

In the first decade of the century, economic growth fuelled by privatization led families to a new prosperity marked by their ability to buy a motorbike, rent a home or send their children to private school. Now businesses supplying consumers with everything from mobile phones to clothing, motorbikes and cars bought on hire purchase are feeling the squeeze.

“Impartial role’

At the same time, the British, Italian and German ministers agreed that Le Maire, whose country currently leads the G7, should head informal discussions with all European countries to “foster a consensus” around a single name, the official added. “The objective remains to agree on one European name by the end of the month.” Le Maire has insisted that he is not interested in the job himself and wants to play a completely impartial role in the search.

Bruno Le Maire does not have a preferred candidate and France will play its coordination role impartially,” said a French official, who asked not to be named.

Several high-profile names have already been floated as possible successors to Lagarde who has steered the IMF since 2011. They include the Canadian-born Bank of England governor Mark Carney, who holds Canadian, British and Irish nationality, and former British finance minister George Osborne, who is now editor of the London Evening Standard newspaper. Also in the frame are EU finance ministers Pierre Moscovici of France and former finance minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem of the Netherlands as well as Spanish Economy Minister Nadia Calvino.

The IMF board picked Lagarde’s number two, American David Lipton, to serve as interim managing director, but by tradition a European always leads the fund while an American runs its sister institution, the World Bank. — AFP

France to search for European candidate to head IMF

CHANTILLY: French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire is to lead talks on finding a single European candidate to succeed Christine Lagarde as head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), sources said yesterday.

The post of IMF managing director, which by convention goes to a European, became vacant after Lagarde was tapped by EU leaders to head the European Central Bank.

Finance ministers of the four European members of the G7 — Germany, France, Britain and Italy — met informally on the sidelines of the meeting of the most developed nations in Chantilly outside Paris to discuss the issue. Sources said after the meeting that the names of several candidates had been floated but no kind of selection had been made.

“We agreed that it was important one European name was put forward. A number of names were informally discussed but no short list was established,” a European official, who asked not to be named, said.

Indonesia cuts interest rates in bid to boost growth

JAKARTA: Indonesia cut interest rates for the first time in nearly two years yesterday as Southeast Asia’s largest economy seeks to boost growth. Bank Indonesia (BI) trimmed the key lending rate 25 basis points to 5.75 percent, a decision made ahead of an anticipated rate cut by the US Federal Reserve later this month.

“The policy was taken as we estimate inflation will remain low and we need to maintain the momentum for economic growth,” Bank Indonesia governor Perry Warjiyo said. BI also lowered its deposit and lending facilities rates by 25 basis points to 6.5 percent and 5 percent respectively.

Indonesia’s economy grew 5.07 percent in the first quarter from a year earlier, amid softening prices for key commodities including palm oil and coal and an ongoing trade war between the US and China. Warjiyo said although global uncertainty was improving, the bank was ready for prolonged tensions between Beijing and Washington.

“Bank Indonesia still sees room for accommodative monetary policies,” he said. Looking ahead, the slowing economy and muted inflation could lead to more cuts, economists said. “But the uncertain outlook for the currency means that this is unlikely to be the beginning of a prolonged easing cycle,” said Gareth Leather, Asia economist from Capital Economics. The country has been wrestling with a weak rupee, dented by a sell-off in emerging-market currencies that saw the unit slump to levels last seen during the Asian financial crisis 20 years ago. — AFP
Social media giant seeks to ease pressure on users

SYDNEY: Instagram started hiding “likes” on its platform in Australia, Brazil and several other major markets yesterday saying it wanted to ease pressure on users, following criticism about its impacts on mental health. The Facebook-owned social media giant’s trial changes mean users in the six countries will no longer be able to see the number of likes other people’s posts receive.

“We want Instagram to be a place where people feel comfortable expressing themselves,” Facebook Australia and New Zealand policy director Mia Garlick said in a statement.

“We hope this test will remove the pressure of how many likes a post will receive, so you can focus on sharing the things you love.” Australia, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Brazil and New Zealand are involved in the new trial, which follows an initial test that was launched in Canada in May.

Although Instagram described the hiding of the likes for users as a “test”, no deadline was given for when it would end. Instagram, which has more than one billion users worldwide, is a platform that allows users to post images and videos that others can then like or comment on.

But, in the chosen test countries, likes will not be visible on people’s profiles, the main image feed or permalink pages. And while Instagram users will still be able to view the total number of likes on their own posts, they will need to click through to another page in order to do so.

Social media scrutiny

Social media giants have faced increased scrutiny over the impact their platforms can have on users, and there is some research to suggest Instagram can negatively affect the mental health of young people who use it.

A 2017 study by the Royal Society for Public Health ranked Instagram as the worst social media platform for young people’s mental health in the United Kingdom. A 2018 survey of teenagers in the United States by the Pew Research Center found that nearly 40 per cent felt pressure to only share digital content that had garnered a lot of likes or comments.

Another statement from Instagram as it announced the trial changes for the likes also emphasized they were in response to concerns about the pressures that users felt. “We are testing this because we want your followers to focus on the photos and videos you share, not how many likes they get,” an Instagram spokesman said.

“We don’t want Instagram to feel like a competition.” The latest measure came just a week after Instagram implemented new features aimed at curbing online bullying using artificial intelligence. In another effort introduced in February to safeguard the mental health of young users, Instagram clamped down on images related to self harm.

Instagram hides ‘likes’ from more users on its platform

Social media giant seeks to ease pressure on users

EU fines Qualcomm 242m euros for ‘predatory’ pricing

BRUSSELS: The EU hit US chipmaking giant Qualcomm with an antitrust fine of 242 million euros ($271 million) yesterday, in another blow against a giant that is fighting competition battles in Asia and the US.

The fine is the second mega penalty levied against Qualcomm by Brussels, which made it pay 957 million euros in January 2018. “Our investigation found that Qualcomm abused its market ‘dominance between mid-2009 and mid-2011 by engaging in predatory pricing,” an EU statement said.

The chips in question in the EU case “are key components so that mobile devices can connect to the internet,” EU anti-trust commissioner Margrethe Vestager said in a statement.

“Qualcomm sold these products at a price below cost to key customers with the intention of eliminating a competitor,” she added. The EU said that Qualcomm sold the chipsets to Chinese giants Huawei and ZTE, strategic customers, “with the intention of eliminating Icera, its main rival at the time”, Icera was acquired in May 2011 by the US technology company Nvidia, which decided in 2015 to liquidate the business that was subject to the Commission’s investigation. In a statement, Qualcomm said it would appeal the decision in order to “expose the meritless nature of this decision”. The EU fine “is unsupport ed by the law, economic principles or market facts, and we look forward to a reversal on appeal,” said Don Rosenberg, general counsel for Qualcomm. Huawei and ZTE chose Qualcomm chips “not because of price but because rival chipsets were technologically inferior,” Rosenberg insisted.

Buried the hatchet

The blow against Qualcomm comes after a US court ruled in May that the firm “strangled competition” and must renegotiate price deals in a case with major implications for the smartphone market. In recent years, Qualcomm was also slapped with fines in South Korea and Taiwan over anti-trust concerns. Qualcomm meanwhile in April buried the hatchet with Apple after two years of legal battles over royalties. For two years, the companies had fought a multi-front brawl that could have required Qualcomm to pay billions. Vestager, the EU’s competition czar, has received specific criticism by US Donald Trump for her series of cases against US tech giants that also include Apple, Google and Amazon.

The Commission imposed three major fines on Google totaling 8,255 billion euros in cases involving its Android operating system, Google Shopping and its advertising network AdSense, — AFP

US labor market strong; factory activity rebounds

WASHINGTON: The number of Americans filling applications for unemployment benefits increased moderately last week, pointing to still strong labor market conditions despite signs that economic activity was slowing. Other data yesterday showed factory activity in the mid-Atlantic region rebounded sharply in July, offering hope for a struggling manufacturing sector. Initial claims for state unemployment benefits rose 8,000 to a seasonally adjusted 216,000 for the week ended July 13, the Labor Department said, putting them in the middle of their 193,000-230,000 range for this year.

Data for the prior week was revised to show 1,000 fewer applications received than previously reported. Last week’s increase in claims was in line with economists’ expectations. The four-week moving average of initial claims, considered a better measure of labor market trends as it irons out week-to-week volatility, dipped 250 to 218,750 last week. The Labor Department said no claims were estimated last week.

The claims data tends to be volatile around this time of the year because of summer factory closures, especially in the automobile industry, which occur at different periods.

This can throw off the model the government uses to strip out seasonal fluctuations from the data. Layoffs remain low despite a bitter trade war between the United States and China, which has contributed to a dimming of the economy’s outlook and led the Federal Reserve to signal it would cut interest rates at its July 30-31 meeting for the first time in a decade. Last week’s claims data covered the survey period for the nonfarm payrolls component of July’s employment report. The four-week moving average of claims was little changed between the June and July survey periods, suggesting steady job growth this month. The economy created 224,000 jobs in June.

The dollar held losses against a basket of currencies after the data, while US Treasury yields edged higher.

Worker shortages

While the labor market remains strong, there are concerns that a shortage of workers and the Trump administration’s tougher stance on immigration could impede job growth. The Fed’s Beige Book report of anecdotal information on business activity collected from contacts nationwide published on Wednesday showed some manufacturing and information technology firms in the Northeast reduced their number of workers from mid-May through early July.

It said “a few reports highlighted concerns about securing and renawning work visas, flagging this as a source of uncertainty for continued employment growth.” Solid job growth is helping to underpin the economy, which is slowing as last year’s massive stimulus from tax cuts and more government spending fades. Manufacturing is struggling, the trade deficit is widening again and the housing market remains weak, partially offsetting strong consumer spending. — Reuters
**Business**

**G7 ministers reach consensus on digital tax but more work ahead**

France hails agreement but US remains skeptical

**CHANTILLY:** Ministers from G7 top economies yesterday reached consensus on steps towards an accord on taxing digital giants, an issue that has divided the United States and its allies Britain and France. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire, who hosted the two-day meeting in Chantilly outside Paris, hailed the consensus as unprecedented, although US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin insisted there was more work to be done.

The French parliament this month passed a law that would tax digital giants for income amassed inside a country even if their headquarters are elsewhere, a move the United States complained discriminated against US firms like Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon.

Britain has announced plans for a similar tax and the G7 meeting in the tranquil French town—usually famed for its horses rather than horse-trading—was dominated by tough talks to find some common ground. Le Maire said finance ministers and central bankers had reached an agreement “to tax activities without physical presence, in particular digital activities.” “This is the first time that G7 members agree in principle on this,” he told reporters.

**Minimum tax**

France issued a statement saying the G7 had agreed a two-pronged solution—confirming the principle of companies being able to accrue revenues outside their legal base but also on a minimum tax to be agreed internationally for their activities.

Le Maire said finance ministers and central bankers had reached an agreement “to tax activities without physical presence, in particular digital activities.” “This is the first time that G7 members agree in principle on this,” he told reporters.

**Step forward**

The French minister’s move infuriated President Donald Trump and the US had announced an unprecedented probe against France which could trigger the imposition of tariffs. Mnuchin struck a slightly more cautious tone than his French counterpart Le Maire while making clear he was well satisfied with the talks. “We made some significant progress at this meeting, there is more work to be done,” Mnuchin told reporters, adding that ministers had made a “big step in the right direction”.

He said the United States has “significant concerns” with the French law and planned British legislation and was pleased that both Paris and London would dump the domestic laws if an international agreement was forged. “We made some significant progress at this meeting, there is more work to be done,” Mnuchin told reporters, adding that ministers had made a “big step in the right direction”.

The G7 ministers had far less trouble agreeing on a position on new cryptocurrencies such as Facebook’s Libra, saying such new and untested digital money risked destabilizing the international monetary system and were not ready to be implemented. “They agreed that projects such as Libra may affect monetary sovereignty and the functioning of the international monetary system,” the French statement said.

**In Zimbabwe, risk perception trumps orthodoxy as inflation soars**

JOHANNESBURG: Zimbabwe’s Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube seems to be doing everything by the book as he pursues orthodox economic policy often prescribed by the global “Bretton Woods” lending institutions to try and turn around a sickly economy.

The government is running a budget surplus for the first time in years and has stopped runaway money-printing, which led to hyperinflation of 500 billion percent in 2008. Last month, the central bank raised its overnight lending rate to 60 percent to protect the local currency after ending a decade of dollarization.

Ncube, a former chief economist at the African Development Bank, also agreed to a staff monitoring program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in May, under which Harare promised not to borrow offshore and to cut reliance on the central bank to finance deficits.

All that points to a government willing to break with the ruinous policies of the past under Robert Mugabe, economic analysts say. And yet Zimbabwe’s inflation has soared to its highest level in a decade, hitting an annual 175 percent in June.

For a start, government reforms to set fiscal discipline, which could earn future funding, include gradually ending fuel subsidies and increasing electricity tariffs to reflect costs—steps that will in the short term lead to more price increases. Also, analysts note, more than 80 percent of Zimbabweans earn a living in the informal sector, from hawking fruits on city sidewalks to selling used clothes on dusty open spaces.

That sector is typically unresponsive to the kinds of fiscal and monetary policy tools used by finance ministers and central banks to lower prices and stimulate the economy.

Meanwhile, a severe drought has left a third of the 15 million population needing food aid, further pressuring prices. But arguably the biggest driver of inflation expectations in the economy is the lack of confidence many Zimbabweans have in the country’s economic policies and its national currency, said Jee-A van der Linde, an economist at XKC African Economics. “The Zimbabwean consumer is highly skeptical over government policy, and for good reason, and trying to hammer in confidence through regulation and restrictions has historically not proven very successful,” he said.

Although former president Mugabe was ousted after a de facto coup in 2017, many doubt that Zimbabwe’s new rulers can deliver the economic change they seek because they are the same people who propped up the former strongman for decades. Hope that the economy would quickly rebound under President Emmerson Mnangagwa quickly turned to despair as shortages of foreign currency, fuel, medicines and bread persisted. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, which put the printing press into overdrive just over a decade ago and whose hundred trillion notes marked the zenith of hyperinflation, says it will not recklessly print money. — Reuters
MIA-MI: Padres rookie right-hander Chris Paddack had a no-hitter through seven innings before giving up a home run in San Diego's 3-2 win over the host Miami Marlins on Wednesday. Starlin Castro homered to lead off the eighth for Miami's first hit. Paddack (6-4) allowed the one hit over 7 2/3 innings. He issued one walk and had eight strikeouts while throwing 94 pitches in his 10th major league start. San Diego closer Kirby Yates allowed an unearned run in the ninth but still recorded his 31st save. The Padres scored all of their runs with two outs in the fourth inning, Manuel Margot started the rally with a two-out double to right, and he scored on Greg Garcia's single. Austin Hedges followed with a two-run homer.

DODGERS 7, PHILLIES 2
David Freese and Justin Turner homered to lead visiting Los Angeles past Philadelphia in a game that featured a 2-hour, 37-minute rain delay. Pedro Baez (4-2) pitched 2 2/3 shutout innings and earned the victory for the Dodgers, who have won two of three in this series. The finale will be played Thursday afternoon, less than 12 hours after the prior game ended. The Dodgers' latest victory featured 16 walks, 10 issued by Phillies pitchers. Los Angeles' Max Muncy walked three times. The Phillies managed just two hits, singles by Scott Kingery in the sixth inning and Adam Haseley in the ninth. Kingery also walked twice.

ASTROS 11, ANGELS 2
Michael Brantley hit the 100th home run of his career, and Gerrit Cole pitched seven strong innings as Houston defeated Los Angeles in Anaheim, Calif. George Springer added a three-run homer for the Astros. Dustin Garneau homered for the Angels, who have won two of the first six games since the All-Star break. Los Angeles was without All-Star Mike Trout for the third consecutive game because of a right calf strain. Cole (10-5) allowed one run on seven hits with one walk and 11 strikeouts. The right-hander fanned the last five batters he faced.

INDIANS 7, TIGERS 2
Mike Clevinger matched a career high with 12 strikeouts, and rookie Oscar Mercado and Greg Allen each drove in a pair of runs as host Cleveland defeated Detroit, Francisco Lindor belted a home run for the Tribe, who have won two of the first three contests in the four-game series. Eduardo Rodriguez (11-4) earned the victory, allowing two runs on three hits and three walks with four strikeouts. Teoscar Hernandez homered twice, and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. also homered for the Blue Jays, who have lost 11 of their past 13 contests overall and 11 of 12 against Cleveland this season.

RED SOX 5, BLUE JAYS 4
Rafael Devers homered twice and tied his team record with 21 hits as it belted five home runs in Arlington, Texas. The 12 runs were the most the Blue Jays have scored in a victory, allowing two runs on three hits and three walks with four strikeouts. Teoscar Hernandez homered twice, and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. also homed for the Blue Jays, who were out-hit 14-5.

ROYALS 7, WHITE SOX 5
Danny Duffy continued Kansas City's recent pitching dominance as the Royals defeated visiting Chicago to win the first three games of the four-game series. Whit Merrifield, Jorge Soler, Nicky Lopez and Alex Gordon combined to go 9-for-14 for Kansas City. Soler had three, Duffy (4-5), who entered the game with a string of 14 2/3 scoreless innings against the White Sox, didn't allow a run until Ryan Goins launched a no-out, two-run home run in the sixth. He wound up yielding two runs on six hits in six innings. Duffy struck out five and didn't walk a batter.

ORIOLES 9, NATIONALS 2
Trey Mancini homered twice, and Chris Davis hit a tiebreaking single in a three-run, seventh-inning rally as Baltimore defeated visiting Washington. The Orioles broke the game open with five runs in the eighth. Mancini had a two-run homer in that frame, and he finished with three RBIs. Anthony Santander got a sacrifice fly while Stevie Wilkerson had an RBI double and then scored on a Rio Ruiz single. The game was delayed 1 hour, 32 minutes by rain at the start.

DIAMONDBACKS 19, RANGERS 4
Arizona scored 12 runs in the first two innings and tied its team record with 21 hits as it belted five home runs in Arlington, Texas. The 12 runs were the most the Rangers have scored in a victory, allowing two runs on three hits and three walks with four strikeouts. Teoscar Hernandez homered twice, and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. also homed for the Blue Jays, who were out-hit 14-5.

ATHLETICS 10, MARINERS 2
Mark Canha and Jurickson Profar each hit two home runs, and Homer Bailey pitched six solid innings in his A's debut as host Oakland defeated Seattle, Chad Pinder and Ramon Laureano also homered for the A's, who scored all of their runs via the long ball. Oakland swept the two-game series and has won six in a row overall, outscoring its opponents 47-13. Bailey (8-6) allowed two runs on seven hits with no walks and six strikeouts.

GIANTS 11, ROCKIES 8
Donovan Solano led off the sixth inning with a go-ahead home run as San Francisco completed its first four-game sweep of Colorado in Denver since 2001. The win was the Giants' fifth straight and sixth in seven games on a just-completed road trip that began at Milwaukee, San Francisco passed the Rockies in the standings, having won eight of nine and 12 of 14 overall. Derek Holland (2-4), the second Giants pitcher, was credited with the win after throwing 1 2/3 innings of hitless, scoreless ball.

BREWERS 5, BRAVES 4
Christian Yelich homered for the third time in four days, one of two struck by Milwaukee batters, to help the Brewers defeat visiting Atlanta. The win gave the Brewers their first series win over a team other than Pittsburgh since mid-May; Yelich hit a solo homer in the sixth inning against Dallas Keuchel (3-3) to ignite a three-run outburst that allowed Milwaukee to put the game away and ensure a series victory. It was the 34th homer for Yelich, two shy of his career high total from 2018, when he was the NL Most Valuable Player. Chase Anderson (5-2) pitched 5 2/3 scoreless innings and allowed one hit and three walks, striking out three. It was Anderson's fifth straight start in which he has allowed two or fewer runs. He improved to 3-0 with a 3.37 ERA in six career starts against Atlanta.

METS 14, TWINS 4
Pinch hitter Dominic Smith belted a three-run homer, Amed Rosario had four hits, and New York routed Minnesota in Minneapolis. With the Mets down 3-2 in the seventh, Smith swatted an 0-2 curveball for his ninth homer. He finished 2-for-3 off the bench, adding a run-scoring single in the eighth to give him a career-high four RBIs. Rosario went 4-for-4 with a homer, triple, four runs and three RBIs. Adeiny Hechavarria had three hits, including two doubles, and scored twice. —Reuters
**Sports**

**US swim stars aim to lay down marker for Tokyo 2020 at worlds**

LOS ANGELES: Caeleb Dressel and Katie Ledecky will spearhead a powerful US assault when the swimming world championships begin Sunday, with the Americans looking to make a big statement before next year’s Tokyo Olympics. The event in Gwangju is the biggest meet on the 2019-20 calendar, but for team USA it represents a stepping stone on the road to Tokyo — and one they expect to negotiate in characteristically confident fashion.

“While we understand that the world is an important competition, the most important competition for us is the Olympic Games,” said national team managing director Lindsay Mintenko. There have been no cut-throat trials to produce the US squad, which was selected based on performances in the 2018 national championships and 2018 Pan Pacific Championships. That allows top swimmers to keep their training geared toward Tokyo and, as a result, few Americans feature at the top of the 2019 rankings.

Those that do include superstar Ledecky, who boasts leading times this year in the 100m, 200m and 500m freestyle and 100m butterfly and都有 relay titles. “I think I’m just in kind of a weird spot right now. I have to stay focused. We’ve got to get better. We’ll go home, make adjustments, so we’ll be ready.”

Olympic champion Ledecky’s gold medal haul from the last worlds in Hungary included the 400m, 800m and 1,500m freestyle and two relays. Other returning champions from 2017 when the US topped the medal table with 18 golds and 38 in total — include Chase Kalisz, who won both men’s medleys in Budapest, and Simone Manuel, who stormed to the women’s 100m freestyle title.

“I do believe that I’m set up well for worlds,” said Manuel after clocking 53.65sec in June. “I’ve been faster in-season in my events than I was last year and training’s been going really well, so I’m pretty confident with how I’ll swim at worlds,” added the two-time Olympic champion. “But also just looking forward to swimming well in 2020 at Olympic trials and Tokyo. "Obviously I want to swim really well at the world championships, but it’s kind of also a stepping stone to see where I need to be in 2020.”

**Facing Olympic hotel shortage, Tokyo looks offshore**

YOKOHAMA: Tokyo is facing a shortage of accommodation when Olympic fans pour into the Japanese capital for next year’s Games so officials are looking offshore — to moored cruise ships operating as floating hotels. Despite a construction boom, Tokyo could be short as many as 14,000 rooms given an expected surge of Olympics-related tourism, according to local sources.

Local officials think one solution could be to put people up in giant ships temporarily docked off Tokyo and nearby Yokohama during the Games. Among those on board with the idea is Japan’s largest travel agency JTB, which has chartered the 1,011-cabin Sun Princess for the Olympic period, complete with everything from chartered the 1,011-cabin Sun Princess for the Olympic period, complete with everything from meals to Hong Kong and Shanghai during 2019, and a special cruise ship terminal days before the Games began.

Ofﬁcials and industry experts hope using docked ships for extra hotel space will become a novel accommodation solution, and are also planning to open a new cruise ship terminal days before the Games began.

**Japan look to give ailing Ikee a lift at world swim**

GWANGJU: Japan’s swimmers have promised to lift their game at next week’s world championships to lift the spirits of ailing teammate Rikako Ikee in her battle with leukemia. The 19-year-old poster girl for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was diagnosed with the illness earlier this year and is continuing treatment back in Japan.

The 15-year-old poster girl for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was diagnosed with the illness earlier this year and is continuing treatment back in Japan.

**‘WEIRD SPOT’**

“It’s just really showing where we’re at,” said the 22-year-old, whose seven golds in Budapest included individual titles in the 50m and 100m freestyle and 100m butterfly along with four relay titles. “I think I’m just in kind of a weird spot right now. I have to stay focused. We’ve got to get better. We’ll go home, make adjustments, so we’ll be ready.”

**ALARMING DIP**

In the absence of Ikee and Olympic champion Kosuke Hagino, who has suffered an alarming dip in form since his Rio gold in the men’s 400m individual medley, Japan’s swimmers could struggle in Gwangju after finishing 14th in the medals table at Budapest in 2017 with four silver and three bronze. “I don’t want to predict medal tallies,” said Hirai. “I don’t want to add pressure. But they’re relaxed, they’re enjoying the Korean food and they’re in good spirits.”

While Hungary’s triple Olympic champion Katinka Hosszu has lost a major final in the women’s 200m medley since 2012, Ohashi has medal chances in both the 200m and 400m. “I’ll need to be at 100 percent,” said Ohashi, who recently completed a spell of high altitude training in Arizona. “I’m trying not to overcomplicate things. I have to be aggressive — if I don’t go out strong, I’ll struggle over the second half of races.”

Another potential hope for Japan is Ikee, who holds the world record in the men’s 200m breaststroke, “I want to leave everything out there,” he said. “I want to come back with the gold medal, a new world record and a big smile on my face.”

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**About the author:**

**AFP**

**Friday, July 19, 2019**
TOULOUSE: Australian Caleb Ewan picked up his first Tour de France stage win in a mass sprint at Toulouse on Wednesday as Frenchman Julian Alaphilippe kept the overall lead. Ewan said at the winning post that victory “almost” made up for leaving his country, his wife and his baby daughter behind to race his first Tour de France.

With defending champion Geraint Thomas and his Ineos teammate Égan Bernal also finishing in the pack on Wednesday, there was no change in the overall top three after a 167km run from Abi to Toulouse. Ewan timed his explosive burst to perfection, catching and overtaking Dutch sprinter Dylan Groenewegen right on the line after a long home straight. Elia Viviani was third on a finish designed for the pure sprinters.

“It took me half the Tour de France to get my win, but I got it in the end,” said Ewan. “I left him go, caught his wheel and just had him on the line,” explained, the stocky 25-year-old, who owes his win to racing in the Tour de France, and winning the opening stage before Jumbo won four of the first 11 stages on this year’s Tour de France.

Thomas favorite for yellow

Ewan has won stages on all three Grand Tours, and is now one on the Valetta. It was a narrow win with the photo-finish, which takes thousands of shots a second from both sides of the finish line, showing a tiny margin of victory. There are two major mountains on the menu on stage 12 on Thursday with yellow jersey Alaphilippe vowing to defend his lead.

“Geraint Thomas is favourite to win this Tour. He looks so confident, so strong,” insisted Alaphilippe when asked if he could keep the overall lead all the way to Paris. The 27-year-old former soldier is looking forward to the first day in the Pyrenees after checking out what awaits the riders yesterday. “It won’t be easy tomorrow, there will be attacks, and it will be a big day on the Tour, but I’m up for it,” he said.

“I’m awaiting the Pyrenees with impatience. I know what’s in store for me. I went to scout out the stage.” The defending champion and the current leader both enjoyed a great deal of support on the stage with dozens of Welsh flags almost outnumbering the roadside signs supporting ‘Juju’ Alaphilippe. Thomas said he was lucky to win yesterday as the stage left Albi after the rest day. “I’m on good form thanks, and gaining 1min 40sec on rival riders in the last stage was like a gift,” he said.

Ketones: The stamina booster sparking the Tour debate

PARIS: The Tour de France is again embroiled in a debate over what cyclists put in their bodies after Dutch team Jumbo acknowledged they were using a dietary aid believed to boost stamina. The team responded to questions from Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf by saying they were using drinks based on a substance called ketones, which occur naturally in the body. Jumbo team manager Richard Plugge says the use of ketones is nothing unusual and is widespread among Tour de France riders.

“When I started cycling at 10-years-old, I used to pretend that I was racing in the Tour de France, and winning it,” he said. “Winning this stage almost makes it worthwhile leaving Australia with my wife and our newborn baby daughter, Lee, back home.” My wife is so strong and I could never have done this without her. She’s the one I really have to thank for realizing my dream.

“I’m awaiting the Pyrenees with impatience. I know what’s in store for me. I went to scout out the stage.” The defending champion and the current leader both enjoyed a great deal of support on the stage with dozens of Welsh flags almost outnumbering the roadside signs supporting ‘Juju’ Alaphilippe. Thomas said he was lucky to win yesterday as the stage left Albi after the rest day. “I’m on good form thanks, and gaining 1min 40sec on rival riders in the last stage was like a gift,” he said of the crosswind-hit run to Albi on Monday which saw a split in the peloton.

“I don’t think I ever did that even on a mountain stage,” said the 33-year-old. Sprint points leader Peter Sagan of Slovakia kept his green jersey after finishing fourth behind Ewan. “I congratulate him, he’s too fast for me to hold on at that kind of course, said the 30-year-old Sagan. Colombian Bernal kept hold of the under-25’s white jersey and said Ineos would remain calm in their quest for the yellow jersey.

“We won’t be attacking just yet, but I feel good going into the mountains” said Bernal, who is on his second Tour.

Lowry overcomes nerves to seize British Open lead

PORTRUSH: Ireland’s Shane Lowry said he felt “uneasy” on the first tee before going on to take the early lead yesterday as the British Open returned to Northern Ireland for the first time since 1951. The 32-year-old carded a four-under-par first round of 67 at Royal Portrush to move one clear of a group of five players. But Lowry admitted that he felt the pressure early on.

“I felt uncomfortable on the first tee, I was glad it was downhill so it was only a three iron,” he said. “It’s the British Open, it’s in Ireland. I feel like I’m hitting it well. Of course I feel uneasy. Nerves are a good thing... I hope I’m nervous on Sunday afternoon, that’s where you want to be. You have to ask yourself if you’d rather be there or sat at home watching on TV.” Organizers expect the second-biggest attendance in Open history this week, with 237,780 fans estimated, and the locals lent strong support to all six players in the field from either the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. Lowry paid them back in style, making five birdies in the slightly easier morning conditions before the predicted heavy rain in the afternoon. “I thoroughly enjoyed today, the crowds were unbelievable, I was cheered on at every tee box,” he said.

“I stand on tees and scan the crowds and see a few familiar faces. It’s going to be an exciting few days ahead and I hope I can give them something to cheer for on Sunday afternoon.” Lowry has contended at majors before, finishing runner-up to Dustin Johnson at the 2016 US Open. He slipped to 29th in the world rankings last year, though, before a string of strong results — including victory in January’s Abu Dhabi Championship — saw him climb back to his current mark of 33rd.

“If I feel like I hit a bad shot I can get myself out of trouble. That’s a good place to be,” Lowry added. “It would be great to contend this week but it wouldn’t be the end of the world if it doesn’t happen. I’m a bit more under the radar than the other guys... But obviously not here.” One home hope who did not manage his nerves on the opening hole was pre-tournament favorite Rory McIlroy, as the four-time major winner made a quadruple-bogey eight. “I did hear about that. I don’t have much to say about that, I feel for him,” said Lowry. “Obviously he’s one of the best golfers in the world.”

TOULOUSE: Australia’s Caleb Ewan (front L), past Netherlands’ Dylan Groenewegen, wins on the finish line of the eleventh stage of the 106th edition of the Tour de France cycling race between Abi and Toulouse. —AFP

周五世界新闻
**Sports**

**Curran says World Cup victory will inspire England Ashes team**

LONDON: Sam Curran believes England's historic World Cup triumph will inspire the Ashes team as attention turns towards their attempt to regain the urn. Sunday's dramatic end to the 50-over tournament has overshadowed the build-up to the five-Test showdown against Australia, which gets under way on August 1 at Edgbaston.

Curran feels the Ashes remains the pinnacle of the cricketing calendar but said the Test team would be galvanized by the World Cup, irrespective of whether they featured or not in the one-day triumph. "I don't think I'm alone in saying that it's probably the greatest cricket match ever and for that to be the World Cup final was incredible," said the 21-year-old all-rounder. "That will provide a buzz for everyone across English cricket going into the Ashes. "Days like Sunday get everyone, whether they were involved or not, more excited and desperate to do well so I'm sure it will rub off as we head into the Test part of the summer. "The Ashes are the biggest thing you can play in as an England cricketer, that's what I've always felt. Hopefully we can be lifting the urn at the Oval in September." —AFP

**Mayweather has ‘zero interest’ in Pacquiao rematch**

LOS ANGELES: Floyd Mayweather has “zero interest” in coming out of retirement for a rematch with Manny Pacquiao after their money-spinning 2015 super-fight, close confidante Leonard Ellerbe said Wednesday. Ellerbe, the chief executive of Mayweather Promotions, told the boxingscene.com website that not even the prospect of another lucrative payday would tempt Mayweather back into the ring.

Mayweather is believed to have earned an estimated $300 million from the points victory over Pacquiao, which remains the most lucrative fight in history and generated more than $600 million revenue. Pacquiao's long-time trainer Freddie Roach said last week he would be keen for the Filipino icon to set up a rematch with Mayweather after a frustrating defeat in the first meeting. However while Mayweather will be at ringside for Pacquiao's world title fight against Keith Thurman in Las Vegas on Saturday, Ellerbe says there is no chance of a rematch.

"Floyd has no interest," Ellerbe told boxingscene.com. "He has zero interest. He’s been doing all this all his life. And after a while, you get burned out. He’s given the sport everything. "Ellerbe said Mayweather was instead happy in his retirement. "It’s very content," Ellerbe said. "It’s living his best life. I just talked to him earlier today. We went over some business stuff. He’s travelling, spending time with his kids, spending time with his family. "He’s doing all the things that he never got a chance to do because boxing has consumed his life ever since he was 5 years old." Speaking to reporters last week, Roach said he was still bothered by Pacquiao's loss to Mayweather, when the Filipino's challenge was hampered by a shoulder problem. "Hopefully we can get Mayweather to come to the table," Roach said. "I would like us to have one more crack at him. "We didn’t fight a great fight that night. Manny’s shoulder didn’t help at all. He’s had surgery since then, he’s 100 percent now. I would like us to fight Mayweather again because I didn’t like the way we performed." —AFP

**Cheika rings changes as Wallabies enter post-Folau era**

JOHANNESBURG: Australia coach Michael Cheika has boldly gone back to the future for the Rugby Championship opener against South Africa, as Australia seek to put the Israel Folau saga behind them. Cheika named Tom Banks as Folau's replacement at fullback in a vote of confidence for the attack-minded Brumbies flyer, who only has three Test caps. He also handed a debut to powerhouse number eight Isi Naisarani and gave prop prop Harry Johnson-Holmes the chance to win his maiden Test cap off the bench.

But Cheika has also looked to the past in naming a run-on team that has 10 changes from the Wallabies’ last outing, a 37-18 loss to England at Twickenham in November. Prop James Slipper plays his first international since 2016 and scrum-half Nic White has featured once since 2015, while the centres pairing of Tevita Kuridrani and Samu Kerevi have not worked together at Test level since 2017.

Cheika resisted the temptation to pitch James O’Connor back into the fray just days after the former bad boy re-signed with Australian rugby after six years in the Test wilderness. However the 44-Test back is sure to feature during the campaign as Cheika seeks to get the misfiring Wallabies humming again. The Twickenham loss capped their worst season in decades and raised alarm bells ahead of the World Cup.

Cheika survived a review but had his wings clipped when he was forced to report to newly appointed director of rugby Scott Johnson and join a three-man selection panel. The off-season was then dominated by Folau's sacking over homophobic social media posts, which generated reports of divisions within the team over the issue. Cheika said his players just wanted to get back on the park.

"We really want to begin building momentum to take us towards our goals in 2019," he said. "The players are impatient to play at Ellis Park where our Wallabies haven’t had an opportunity to play for quite a while." The Wallabies last won at Ellis Park in 1963 and have since lost six times at the venue, with their most appearance a 53-8 drubbing in 2008. Their last win in South Africa was in Durban in 2011, although Cheika’s men managed a 27-27 draw in Bloemfontein in 2017. “We know we go into the game as heavy underdogs but most of the players have had a touch over three great weeks of training to prepare,” he said. “So really they just can’t wait to get out and get into the battle.” —AFP
Juventus makes Matthijs de Ligt world's most expensive defender

ROME: Dutch central defender Matthijs de Ligt, one of the most coveted young players in world football, signed yesterday for Juventus from Ajax for a fee of 75 million euros ($84.2 million) plus add-ons. The 19-year-old agreed a five-year contract with the Italian champions. Juventus said in a statement the fee would be paid over five financial years, with “additional costs” of 10.5 million euros.

The combined fee makes De Ligt the world’s most expensive defender, surpassing the 84 million euros Liverpool paid to sign his Netherlands teammate Virgil Van Dijk from Southampton in 2018. De Ligt is Juventus’ third most expensive signing after the 105 million euros they paid to buy Cristiano Ronaldo from Real Madrid in 2018 and the 90-million-euro transfer of Gonzalo Higuain from Napoli in 2016.

De Ligt had also been linked with Manchester United, Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain after his impressive performances for a young Ajax side that reached the Champions League semi-finals last season. His Ajax teammate, 22-year-old midfielder Frenkie de Jong, has already joined Barcelona. In a deal hammered out by his powerful Italian-born Dutch agent Mino Raiola, De Ligt will earn a basic annual salary of 7.5 million euros that could reach 12 million euros with bonuses, according to reports in Italy. “The sporting project proved decisive” in De Ligt’s decision to choose Juventus. “For a defender, Italy is always an ideal place.”

Ageing defense

The Turin-based club, now coached by former Chelsea mentor Maurizio Sarri, were keen to bring new blood into an ageing defense that features 34-year-old Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci. De Ligt played 117 games for Ajax in all competitions, scoring 13 goals. He scored the winner in Turin as Ajax eliminated Juventus in the Champions League quarter-finals. De Ligt has played 17 times for the Netherlands, forming a formidable central defensive partnership with Van Dijk. He took over the captain’s armband at Ajax in March 2018, making him the club’s youngest ever captain. De Ligt said Ronaldo had urged him to join Juventus after the two faced each other for their countries in the Nations League final in June won by Portugal. Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman says De Ligt “will become one of the best defenders in the world in a short time”.

De Ligt is the latest big-money summer transfer following the 120-million-euro deal that took France striker Antoine Griezmann from Atletico Madrid to Barcelona and the 126 million euros that Atletico splashed out on 19-year-old forward Joao Felix from Benfica. After a disappointing 2018-2019 season, Real Madrid have strengthened with the acquisition of Belgian playmaker Eden Hazard from Chelsea for an initial 100 million euros, with another 34 million euros in potential add-ons. Premier League champions Manchester City bought Spanish international Rodri for a record 70 million euros ($83 million). — AFP

Captain Lascelles tells Newcastle to back Bruce

NANJING: Captain Jamaal Lascelles said that Newcastle United must move on from the Rafael Benitez era and warned the players need to adapt swiftly to new coach Steve Bruce. Bruce was named successor to the popular Benitez on Wednesday but the appointment has gone down badly with Newcastle fans and some are threatening a boycott.

Bruce, a former manager of fierce rivals Sunderland, has just over three weeks before the season begins to get his message across and bring in badly needed signings. The 58-year-old is expected to take charge of Saturday’s friendly against West Ham United in Shanghai in the Premier League Asia Trophy. Newcastle fans are furious that hated owner Mike Ashley failed to persuade Benitez to remain at the club, but Lascelles said: “That happened and people got upset. “But that’s gone now, you can’t control that, you need to look forward, we’ve got a great manager coming in and we need to remain positive.”

Speaking after Newcastle were thumped 4-0 by Wolves on Wednesday in Nanjing, and hours after Bruce was made head coach, Lascelles admitted it had been a difficult summer with the club making headlines for the wrong reasons.

As well as losing Benitez, who has moved to Chinese football with Dalian Yifang, success-starved Newcastle supporters have seen the club lose key forwards Ayoze Perez and Salomon Rondon. The club remains in limbo with Ashley apparently wishing to sell but failing to do so, thus triggering threats from supporters to stage a boycott at St James’ Park. “It’s frustrating because it’s always ‘Newcastle this’, ‘Newcastle that’, it’s never positive,” said defender Lascelles, 25. “We are always highlighted for something or we’re not doing something right.”

“Players we try to ignore all that and try to work hard and do the right things, that is all we can do, we can’t control anything else.”

Newcastle, who have yet to make a major signing this summer and are particularly light in attack, are among the relegation favorites this season.

They begin their Premier League campaign home to Arsenal on August 11, heralding what promises to be another turbulent year on and off the pitch. Bruce’s unremarkable managerial record in the Premier League and his time as Sunderland boss in 2009-2011 are the major reasons for fans’ antipathy towards him. — AFP

Sturridge banned for breaching betting rules

LONDON: Former Liverpool striker Daniel Sturridge has been fined and suspended for six weeks for breaching betting rules, the Football Association announced yesterday.

An independent regulatory commission found that 29-year-old Sturridge, capped 26 times by England, had instructed his brother to bet on a possible move to Sevilla during the January 2018 transfer window.

The commission suspended Sturridge from participating in any domestic football for six weeks, with a further four weeks suspended, and fined him £75,000 ($94,000). Nine of the 11 charges against the striker were dismissed and Sturridge is free to resume his career on July 31, just before the English season starts.

The FA said it believed the punishment should have been stiffer and that it would appeal.

The England international left European champions Liverpool when his contract expired at the end of June and is without a club. A statement from the FA said: “The regulatory commission found proved charges three and four, which alleged that, in that same transfer window, Mr Sturridge had instructed his brother, Leon, to bet on a possible move by him (Daniel Sturridge) to Sevilla FC. “In issuing that instruction, the regulatory commission found that, as a matter of fact, Mr Sturridge had provided his brother with inside information for that purpose.”

It added: “The FA respectfully disagrees with the regulatory commission’s findings and will be appealing against the charges which were dismissed and the sanction which was imposed.”

Sturridge ended up switching to West Brom for the second half of the 2017/18 campaign after a move to La Liga side Sevilla broke down. — AFP

Ighalo boosts Golden Boot hopes as Nigeria finish third

CAIRO: Odion Ighalo boosted his chances of winning the Golden Boot at the Africa Cup of Nations on Wednesday after he netted Nigeria’s winner to ensure his side third place in the tournament with a 1-0 victory over Tunisia. The 30-year-old Shahgas Shenhua forward struck the only goal of the match just 30 seconds after the kick-off before a small crowd at the Al Salam Stadium in Cairo.

Ighalo pounced from close range when Jamilu Collins’ cross fed to a mix-up between Tunisia goalkeeper Moez Ben Cherifa and defender Yassine Meriah. It was his fifth goal at the tournament and puts him two ahead of closest rivals Riyad Mahrez, Adam Ounas, Cedric Bakambu and Sadio Mane, who have three goals each.

Algerians Mahrez and Ounas and Senegal’s Mane have a chance to increase their totals when the two countries face off in Friday’s final at the Cairo International Stadium. Ighalo, who was the leading scorer in the 2019 qualifying competition with seven goals, left the field just before half-time with a pulled hamstring. Tunisia had little to offer in attack and it took 57 minutes before they had a goal attempt on target.

Nigeria maintained their perfect record in third place playoffs at the Cup of Nations having won six other matches between the beaten semi-finalists. The first of those successes came in 1978 against Tunisia in a match abandoned just before half-time when the north Africans stormed off to protest a disputed Nigerian equalizer. Nigeria were awarded a 2-0 victory in Ghana and have now won six other playoffs, including three in a row between 2002 and 2006. — AFP
**Sports**

**Mahrez, Mane duel in rematch for Africa Cup of Nations glory**

CAIRO: Riyad Mahrez and Sadio Mane will renew their Premier League rivalry for a second time in Egypt, where Africa Cup of Nations immortality awaits the victor of today’s final between Algeria and Senegal. Algerian star Mahrez was part of the Manchester City team that edged out Mane’s Liverpool for the English title last season, grabbing a pivotal goal on the final day of the campaign.

Liverpool standout Mane, however, is attempting to fulfil his “wildest dream” as one of just a handful of Africans to win both the UEFA Champions League and Cup of Nations. For the marquee name in a Senegalese side ranked top of the continent, and surprising 46 places above Algeria, the ride to the final for Mane and the Teranga Lions has encountered its share of roadbumps.

Two missed Mane spot-kicks, a group stage loss to Algeria, and the loss of goalkeeping Edouard Mendy to a broken finger have tested Senegal’s resolve in their quest for the Holy Grail of African football. Coach Aliou Cisse is on a mission for redemption. He was the skipper of the side beaten on penalties in the 2002 final, with his missed kick handing the title to Cameroon.

“Having lost that final, I still have it on my mind,” said former Paris Saint-Germain and Birmingham City midfielder Cisse. “What motivated me to become a coach was to be able to take Senegal to the final. My players told me they would do better than my generation.”

Algerian fans will remember a 1-0 victory in the group stage, set-up by the victory of Substitute Keita Balde and finishing off the final. “We are very good in this competition. The (Nigeria) match has given us more confidence for the final and we’re capable of winning it.” Their hopes will be boosted by the absence of Senegal’s defensive rock Kalidou Koulibaly, whose yellow card in the semi-final victory over Tunisia cruelly ruled the Napoli star out of the final. “It hurts to not be able to play. But I will be beside my brothers to write history,” tweeted Koulibaly, the cornerstone of a defence breached just once so far. —AFP

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**Friends collide as Cisse and Belmadi target African crown**

CAIRO: They were born a day apart, raised in the same city and enjoyed prosperous playing careers, while both Aliou Cisse and Djamel Belmadi are now experiencing similar success as coaches, only one can lift the Africa Cup of Nations in Cairo today. Cisse was born March 24, 1976 in Senegal, with his Algerian counterpart arriving in the world the following day, in Champaign-sur-Marne. It was in this Parisian suburb where Cisse moved to at the age of nine, that the pair’s destiny would be shaped.

“He’s an old acquaintance, I say that with great fondness,” said Belmadi, who broke through into the professional ranks at Paris Saint-Germain while Cisse started out with Lille. Despite never playing on the same team, they graced the same pitches in France for nearly a decade. The duo made close to 180 Ligue 1 appearances between them across spells at different clubs, but it’s in Africa where their legacy has assumed a greater dimension.

Cisse, captain of the Senegal team beaten in the 2017 Cup of Nations final by the better of Belmadi’s Algeria in qualifying for that year’s World Cup, but the latter gained revenge in the flagship, claiming a 1-0 victory in the group stage, setting up Friday’s decider. The occasion will pit local coaches against each other in a Cup of Nations final for the first time in 21 years since Egypt, under the tutelage of Mahmoud El Golany, defeated Jomo Sono’s South Africa 2-0 in Ongakgolong. “It’s much more complicated when you’re local than when you’re an expat. It’s up to us (Africans) to have confidence in ourselves, in our boys, in our coaches. Bit by bit the order is changing,” said Cisse.

**GREAT MESSAGE FOR AFRICA**

“To play this final against my friend, it’s amazing. I think it’s a great message we’re sending to football officials in Africa,” added Belmadi. Cisse has carefully constructed his Senegal team since taking over in 2015, making steady progress that included an appearance at the 2018 World Cup following a 16-year absence, and reaching just the country’s second Cup of Nations final. As for Belmadi, appointed last year, his system has proven to be a turning point for his country, with the Senegal side adapting to its new style of play. “We are very happy to be in the final of the Africa Cup of Nations because it is something very special,” said Belmadi.

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**Algerian fans switch their Friday focus from politics to football**

CAIRO: Algeria’s African Cup of Nations final against Senegal will mark the climax not only of the Desert Foxes’ campaign on the field, but of their fans’ recent political campaign in the stands. In April, long-standing president Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned after weekly Friday protests against his expected candidacy for elections, and football fans have been heavily involved in demonstrations.

When Algeria won their opening game against Kenya on June 23, one fan was arrested, deported from Egypt and then jailed for a year after holding a sign with one of the anti-government movement’s slogans: “So they all go.” Two others were also expelled for setting off smoke bombs during the match at the 30 June Stadium in Cairo.

During the semi-final victory over Nigeria on Sunday, the travelling fans chanted verses from ‘La Casa del Mouradia’ an anthem adapted by the Friday protesters to refer to the Algerian presidential residence. On Tuesday, as Riyad Mahrez and his teammates trained, around a hundred faithful sang a rendition of track ‘La Liberté’ by Algerian rapper Noddlang, which has also been heard on the streets on a weekly basis during the protests. Demonstrations against 82-year-old Bouteflika, who had been in power for 20 years, have been held on 21 straight Fridays since late February and have their roots in the stands and terraces of football grounds across the country. A banner displayed at a club match in 2017 depicting the Saudi Arabia’s King Salman and the US President Donald Trump as “two faces of the same coin” sparked a diplomatic incident.

**CHALLENGE THE ESTABLISHMENT**

Mahfoud Amara, a professor of social sciences and sport management at the University of Qatar, told AFP the political demonstrations at games trace their history further back. “Since the 1970s-1980s, fans have been a place for political expression in Algeria, may be more so than other countries where there are more checks and censorship,” Amara said. “It’s where you can challenge the establishment, deconstruct the taboos of Algeria.”

The fans, Amara said, “contributed, a little bit, to the voice of the people at a time when there was a weariness with the political system”. The political activism of fans has made football metaphors such as “It’s not a match, no to additional time,” and “People 3, Power 0” common on the streets of Algerian cities. An additional 4,800 Algerians will arrive in Cairo for the final on military planes organized by Prime Minister Noureddine Bedoui, who has also been a target of the demonstrations. —AFP

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