Animal lovers protest stray dogs’ poisoning in Kuwait

Iran leader rejects Trump talks despite Japan PM Abe’s mission

Blues dump Bruins to win Stanley Cup after agonizing 52-year wait

Oil tankers ‘attacked’ in Gulf
Local

The heat is on

It is well known that Kuwait is one of the hottest coun-
states of the world. Yet, the heat this year is so intense - and summer has just begun - that the weather is the talk of the town these days. Even when the fasting month of Ramadan fell in the hottest months of the year - July, August and September - the past decade, the temperature was not trending outside of the way it is this year. Luckily, the holy month ended this year just before the blast furnace kicked in.

The past four years have had the hottest record, and this year seems to be no different. This week, Mitribah in the north of Kuwait recorded the highest temperature worldwide of around 52 degrees Celsius. The rest of Kuwait didn’t fare any better, with the mercury hitting more than 50 degrees Celsius in many areas. Mitribah has consistently figured as the hottest place on earth for years, even hotter than Death Valley in California that holds the all-time record for the highest temperature ever recorded (56.7°C) in 1913, but which is viewed as suspect by weather historians. An earlier 90-year record held by El Azizia in Libya of 58 degrees Celsius in 1922 was ruled as inaccurate a few years ago.

While some people bicker and sneer that the “hottest” temperature is taken in the shade, it seems this is the only way to measure actual air temperature. According to weather experts, the temperature is the same in the sun or shade - it’s the solar radiation that makes the air feel 10-15 degrees warmer than it actually is, and makes our bodies feel hotter. Moreover, if the thermometer is placed in direct sunlight, it will heat up and record the wrong air temperature.

Meanwhile on social media, everyone is posting images of temperatures of 50°C+ as shown by their vehicles’ thermometers. Photoshopped images of the weather display on the meteorological building on the Fifth Ring Road showing a reading of 62 degrees Celsius have been doing the rounds too. And can the memes and jokes be far behind?

9 tips to beat summer blues in Kuwait

The start of the summer holidays is a magical time for children and families who are heading off for a break from Kuwait’s scorching summer heat. Whether they are leaving for good or only a few months vacation abroad, the delight and joy is evident.

For those of us left behind, it can be hard not to feel a bit abandoned. If you are on social media, it can seem like everyone you know is heading to the airport while you are heading to work. This can be depressing and further compounded by the summer weather which forces most of us to stay indoors.

To combat Kuwait’s summer blues, here are some tips for turning your boring summer into a productive and fun one:

1. Do some professional development. Summers are slow periods in Kuwait for business and this is the perfect time for staff to brush up on soft skills like customer service, management practices, working with particular software programs. Leverage the down time in the office to build your resume.

2. Learn a new art or craft. There are many skills and crafts individuals can learn through online courses, local workshops or a combination of the two. Teach yourself food photography or learn to paint. Learn coding or how to draw zentangles. There are literally thousands of things that can be learned if you have time, dedication and patience. Go for a 30-day challenge to improve one skill set like drawing and sketching or black and white photography.

3. Volunteer somewhere. If you have the free time, why not help out a local community group, charity or other organization that contributes to making Kuwait better for us all? Check the list of volunteer groups in the box.

4. Set yourself a goal and start going to the gym. Decide to run a 5k and begin training or set up a workout plan with a personal trainer. Having a goal and a deadline can be a great way to combat the summer blues and also working out boost endorphins and promotes a greater sense of well being.

5. Read. One of the best things you can do for yourself and your children, if you have them, is to read. Globally recognized business leaders like Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Oprah, etc read a book a week in order to continue learning and growing. There are several amazing new and used books shops around Kuwait and a wide range of fiction and nonfiction available.

6. Put down the play station and pick up an instrument. Slow periods like summertime are perfect for learning new musical instruments. Work on the 20 hour rule: 1. Deconstruct the skill. 2. Learn enough to self-correct. 3. Remove practice barriers. 4. Practice at least 20 hours. (Watch Josh Kaufman’s Ted Talk: The first 20 hours — how to learn anything)

7. Get some outdoor time, even in the night. Going for walks can help lift your mood and also improve your health. Get a step tracker and log 10,000-15,000 steps a day.

8. Join a sports team, go fishing, join a chess club or start a group to play/practice your favorite hobby.

9. Learn to cook or if you already know how to cook, learn to cook a new cuisine or a new dish. Create your own dishes mixing and combining your favorite flavors, textures and foods.

There is really an endless supply of ways you can boost your mood and lift your spirits and if all else fails, start planning your holiday for next summer.

Volunteer opportunities in Kuwait


AbdulHadi53 - Local human rights and women’s right activist group advocating for women’s equality before the law.

AlKout Youth Group - A youth volunteer group that believes in doing good and serving society and the country.

AlRaa’ - Bayt Abdullah Children’s Hospice provides care and support to children with life limiting or life threatening illnesses.

Basta Kuwait - A local and sustainable non-profit organization that focuses on buying, selling and donating clothing, home goods and books. @basta_kw or email: bastakw@gmail.com

Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah - Local cultural organization and museum that provides educational opportunities for children, cultural programs and viewing of the Al-Sabah collection. http://dmuseum.org.kw/

Injaz-Kuwait - Works with students aged 11-24 years through implementing programs in middle schools, high schools, vocational colleges and universities to prepare them for the future. http://www.injaz-kuwait.org/

KAACh - Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital helps children and their families cope with the stresses of hospitalization. http://www.kaach.org/volunteering.html

Kareq8 - Local animal protection organization that adopts or helps rescue abandoned animals. @kareq8


Kuwait Red Crescent Society - Provides aid and relief for communities in need. Training for volunteers available. krcs.org.kw

Loyac - Organizes a variety of social and community based programs for the enrichment of Kuwait. https://www.loyac.org/Local/Community/Volunteering

MAYAS - Local animal protection organization that adopts or helps rescue abandoned animals. @maya

ReFood - Local food bank that provides food for those in need. http://www.refoodkuwait.org/volunteer

Transhtag Kuwait - Local community group that organizes beach and park cleanups to support Kuwait’s environment. @transhtagkuwait

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The Gulf region and waters have turned into a scene of recurring incidents and attacks, the latest of which was yesterday's explosions that ruptured hulls of two giant oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman. The chain of Sabotage incidents have recently included attacks on Saudi vital and oil installations and four ships including two Saudi tankers off the United Arab Emirates. Earlier this week, a projectile fired by the Houthi militia slammed into the Saudi international airport Abha, wounding a number of people. The incident drew a wave of condemnations behind the May 12 sabotage attacks off Fujairah.

Acts of sabotage mounts in Gulf amid jitters, summer heat

KUWAIT: The Gulf region and waters have turned into a scene of recurring incidents and attacks, the latest of which was yesterday’s explosions that ruptured hulls of two giant oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman. The chain of Sabotage incidents have recently included attacks on Saudi vital and oil instalations and four ships including two Saudi tankers off the United Arab Emirates. Earlier this week, a projectile fired by the Houthi militia slammed into the Saudi international airport Abha, wounding a number of people. The incident drew a wave of condemnations from various corners of the world. The attacks on the ships on May 12 came two days before Saudi oil installations in the province of Al-Duwadmi and Alif were targeted with terrorist attacks by the Houthis, who sent in booby-trapped drones. The aerial attack resulted in damage and a fire.

During yesterday’s events, the US Fifth Fleet, based in Bahrain, affirmed that the two oil tankers were damaged in the Gulf of Oman, adding that seamen were evacuated off the two giant sea vessels. The fleet received distress calls from the two tankers. According to media reports, three explosions were reported on board of the Norwegian-owned tanker Front Altair after it was “attacked” along with the Singapore-owned ship Kokuka Courageous. The Marshall Islands-flagged tanker, a 110,000-tonne vessel, was carrying a cargo of the highly flammable ethylene from Qatar to Taiwan, according to the official Iranian news agency IRNA. The Panama-flagged Kokuka Courageous was headed to Singapore from Saudi Arabia with a cargo of methanol, and 21 of its crew jumped and were rescued, IRNA said. Britain expressed deep concern and Russia called for abstention from speedy conclusions, calling for probing circumstances of the two incidents that happened close to one of the main arteries through which at least half of the world needs of crude oil pass-the Hormuz Strait.

Kuwait denies rumors

In Kuwait, the Government denied buzzing rumors about declaration of a maximum state of emergency in the North Gulf state, the national crude oil carrier, Kuwait Oil Tankers Company, declared that it was proceeding its operations regularly and was prepared to deal with any emergency. Kuwait, with a capacity to produce more than three million barrels of oil a day, is one of the region's exporters of the crude to the world, depending on giant tankers for transporting the vital product. Such recurring incidents have been taking place in the Gulf, amid a fiery US-Iranian war of words, fiery rhetoric and saber-rattling, in addition to swelling summer heat that has hit 50 degrees. — KUNA

Suspected tanker attacks risk sparking conflict: Analysts

UNITED NATIONS: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah described attacks on two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman as a threat to international peace and security. “This is the most recent event in a series of acts of sabotage that are threatening the security of maritime corridors as well as threatening energy security of the world,” he said yesterday. The United States meanwhile called attacks on commercial shipping “unacceptable” and told the UN Security Council that the latest attacks that left one tanker ablaze and both ships adrift “raise very serious concerns.”

Council diplomats told the United States it planned to raise the issue of “safety and freedom of navigation” in the Gulf during a closed-door meeting of the Security Council that was scheduled for yesterday. “It is unacceptable for any party to attack commercial shipping and today's attacks on ships in the Gulf of Oman raise very serious concerns,” acting US Ambassador to the UN Jonathan Cohen told a council meeting on UN and Arab League cooperation yesterday morning. “The US government is providing assistance and will continue to assess the situation,” he said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned at the meeting that the world cannot afford “a major confrontation in the Gulf region.” “I strongly condemn any attack against civilian vessels. Facts must be established and responsibilities clarified,” he said. The attacks were the second in a month near the Strait of Hormuz, a major strategic waterway for world oil supplies. The United States and Saudi Arabia blamed Iran for last month's attacks using limpet mines on four tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, a charge Tehran denies. Arab League Secretary-General Ahmad Aboul Gheit called on the Security Council to act against those responsible to maintain security in the Gulf. “Some parties in the region are trying to instigate fires in the region and we must be aware of that,” he told the 15-member council, without specifically naming anyone.

All-out conflict

The suspected attacks on tankers at the mouth of the oil-rich Gulf threaten to block vital crude supplies to the world and trigger an all-out conflict involving Iran, analysts said. The latest incident left two tankers in flames yesterday in waters near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a narrow channel that is a chokepoint for more than a third of the globe's seaborne oil exports. It comes just a month after another mysterious incident in which four tankers — two Saudi, one Norwegian and one Emirati — were damaged nearby off the Emirati port of Fujairah.

“We are in a dangerous moment in the region with this emerging pattern of attacks,” said Elizabeth Dickinson, senior analyst with the region's conflicts are increasingly polluted by the regional quagmire of tension between Iran on the one hand and the United States and its regional allies on another.”

Yesterday's suspected attacks follow accusations from the United States that Saudi Arabia's regional arch-rival Iran was almost certainly behind the May 12 sabotage attacks off Fujairah.

They also come after Iran-aligned Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed attacks on a Saudi oil pipeline and Abha airport in the southwest of the kingdom. The incidents were harming the efforts of Gulf states to “push back on the image of a dangerous region for investment and trade”, said Karen E. Young, resident scholar of American Enterprise Institute.

Growing risk factor

"Without certainty on who is making these attacks on tankers, and for what purpose, the risk factor continues to increase," Young said. “The Houthi attacks on Saudi territory are the southern flank, making the entire Arabian peninsula near conflict zone status.”

The stakes are high for the Gulf states and Iran and Iraq, which together produce over a quarter of the world's oil output and export about 20 million barrels of oil per day mostly through the Strait of Hormuz.

Yesterday’s attacks were the latest sign that geopolitical tensions were mounting, and mounting was a “significant and increasing risk that events morph into outright conflict,” London-based Capital Economics said in a commentary. “It might only take an error or miscommunication to spark a broader conflict. And the increased regularity of attacks means that the risk of this is growing,” it warned.

The Saudi pipeline attack exposed that even alternative routes to the Strait of Hormuz were vulnerable, Capital Economics said. “If conflict further disrupted shipping routes or resulted in damage to oil facilities, oil prices could spike to well over $100 a barrel, it said.

Iran 'hitting back'?

Oil prices shot up by more than four percent on Thursday soon after the suspected attacks before subsiding slightly, reflecting how volatile the market can be at the time of geopolitical tensions.

“The attack will serve to deepen tensions between Iran and the United States, which have gradually escalated throughout 2019,” industry analyst Dryad Global said. “It is a realist possibility that Iran or a proxy were behind this attack, however the situation remains fluid and there are a number of competing narratives that require examining,” it said.

Iran's oil exports, which hovered around 2.5 million bpd a year ago, have already dropped substantially due to the resumption of US sanctions after President Donald Trump withdrew from a landmark nuclear deal with Tehran.

Analyst Ilan Goldenberg also said Iran was most likely to have carried out yesterday's attack as a result of being squeezed by US sanctions. “This is purely a function of Trump's escalatory ‘maximum pressure' campaign. You can't just keep poking someone and expect them to sit and take it. Eventually they hit back,” he tweeted. “I still do not think we are on the brink of war. But chances of conflict just went up,” said Goldenberg, a Middle East expert at the Center for a New American Security.

— Refinitiv
Corporate CSR initiatives, volunteer organizations and community groups like @trashtagkuwait often organize beach clean ups in a bid to help protect and contribute to Kuwait’s environment.

But the state of Kuwait’s beaches is also often a controversy. During the winter break and again during Eid, videos circulated on social media showing vast amounts of garbage and waste left by crowds gathered at the beaches and seasides.

The litter-strewn beaches are then cleaned by the usually invisible army of street cleaners. So today we are highlighting the role of these hard working men who spend hours daily sweeping Kuwait’s streets and picking up after visitors to the beaches.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat
If we are going to tax people for polluting our beaches, that is noble, but if we are going to tax expats alone, something is inherently misaligned within us. Laws are not exclusive. Fine us all for leaving plastic on our shores, for throwing cigarettes out of car windows. Fine families - local and expat - whose children throw candy wrappers on sidewalks. But when we say tax the expats, we create a divisive society of us vs them and polarize people who leave their homes for a better life only to be demeaned and ostracized.

I will reiterate this again: Anyone who lives in Kuwait regardless of their race or nationality or religion is Kuwaiti. Taiye Selasi, author of Ghana Must Go, was born in England and raised in the United States. Her father was born in the Gold Coast, raised in Ghana and lived in Saudi Arabia for three decades, while her mother, also born in England like her, hailed from Nigeria but lived in Ghana. A critic once claimed that Selasi cannot represent Ghana "when she's never known the indignities of traveling abroad on a Ghanaian passport". And Selasi acknowledged that however a bitter pill that may have been to swallow, it was an accurate criticism.

Another time, when someone introduced her as a multinational, she thought Nike, a globally recognized footwear company, is multinational. But she is a human being. And then, after an enlightening discussion with Colum McCann, who told her that all experience is local, she had her epiphany. In “Don’t Ask Where I’m From, Ask Where I’m A Local”, a Ted Talk, Selasi, in a question obviously inspired by McCann, challenged her audience by saying: “What if we asked, instead, of Where are you from? - Where are you a local?” She insists, “[t]his would tell us so much more about who and how similar we are.”

Imagine that: The next time you meet someone, you ask him or her: Where are you a local? The question “Where are you from?” which holds so many stereotypes and racist implications would disappear as we leave behind notions of nationalism and tribalism and instead come together with locals of various backgrounds according to a communal bond.

If we observed people according to a shared experience within a specified location drawn by man-made borders, we would not have laws catered to the benefit of locals or at the expense of expats. All the people in Kuwait would be considered locals. And this is how we should live - as unified members of shared and relatively similar experiences. Whether we are from this country or that country will not matter when we are sitting on a plane and we meet someone who, like us, lives in Kuwait, but is not necessarily from Kuwait. We will bond with our fellow passenger based on a notion of common ground (literally and figuratively).

Come on Kuwait, let’s wake up and show the world what it means to be a microcosm of our planet. Let’s show the world that racism and arrogance, like borders, are imposed upon us and play no role in the evolution of our consciousness and personal and collective identities. We cannot afford to blame everyone except ourselves for our collective mess. We cannot afford to think we are superior in any way. Because we are not. Life is cyclical and what goes around comes around and what is plenty in one cycle is scarce in another. Isn’t it time we work with expats - I mean fellow locals - to create an inclusive society that flourishes as a community? The beauty of Kuwait’s diverse society will rest on us saying yes to a cosmic invitation to coexist.
Animal lovers protest stray dogs’ poisoning in Kuwait

‘That action must not be seen in a country of humanity’

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Under the slogan ‘Spay Do Not Poison,’ Kuwaitis and animal lovers held a peaceful stand at the Iradah Square in Kuwait City yesterday to call the government to stop poisoning stray dogs. Recent reports and videos have appeared on social media recently showing stray dogs which posters say were dying after ingesting poison left by personnel working for the Public Authority of Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources.

Noura Al-Hadad, animal rights activist and the protest’s organizer, told Kuwait Times that the stand was held for the rights of animals, pointing out the ‘growing problem’ of stray dogs and street cats that are harmed, poisoned and abused. “We are standing today against the poisoning of stray dogs in Kuwait, the state of humanity,” she said. “We gather today to ask authorities who are responsible to stop poisoning the dogs because there are many better ways to reduce the number of stray animals. Also, we wish people to live with these creatures and know their rights.”

Hadad explained that the problem usually starts in newly populated areas, which were inhabited by stray dogs and cats before residential buildings were built there. Due to lack of awareness, people who move to those areas become afraid of stray animals they see on the streets, she explained. “This peaceful stand is attended by dozens of people who are standing at a temperature of 50 C degrees only to propose solutions other than poisoning,” Hadad remarks. “Dogs suffer from poisoning for up to five days before they die. People are here because of a video that spread on social media of helpless puppies, not more than three months old, which were poisoned and left to suffer to death. That action must not be seen in a country of humanity that is ruled by the Amir of humanity.”

About alternative methods to avoid poisoning stray dogs, Hadad said that sterilization, which takes a period of time to be applied, is the best solution for both sides, but it may take from three to five years to see the results. “Awareness campaigns should also be held in schools, media, social media and other channels about animals rights,” she added. “The government must put in place animal protection laws. Our religion is merciful and our country is a country of humanity. This must be taken into account.”
The American United School of Kuwait Celebrates its Graduating Class of 2019

The American United School of Kuwait (AUS) celebrated the graduation of its pioneering class of 2019 on May 30th. All 42 graduates have been accepted at renowned local and international universities.

Held under the patronage of the H.E. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, at the AUS auditorium, the graduation ceremony was attended by the Chairwoman of the United Education Company, Shaikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah; Vice Chair of the United Education Company, Mr. Meshal Ali; AUS Founding Director, Dr. Jennifer Beckwith; Deputy Chief of Mission for the US Embassy, Mr. Larry Memmott; Director of Examinations and Equations at Private Education, Dr. Salman Al Lafi; Supervisor of Foreign Schools at Private Education, Mr. Mansour Al Mansour; and Head of the Department of Early childhood and Elementary at Private Education; Mrs. Mariam Dashti.

The keynote speech was delivered by H.E. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, who emphasized the importance of equipping new generations with soft skills as an integral part of modern education. “As parents, we feel an irrepressible need to prepare you, our children, for this changing world because we want you to be safe and happy. But, how do we prepare you to a future that none of us can really predict? It is partly about traditional education, learning languages, understanding the scientific world, and being able to program a computer and in that regard I am sure that AUS has given you the best possible start...But it is also about the softer skills, creativity, resilience, respect to diversity, the ability to collaborate with others, humility, and integrity...And here too, I am sure AUS has taught you a great deal,” he said.

Graduating Senior Zeina Al-Fulaij delivered the salutatorian address, in which she spoke about the “golden moments” in one’s life, referring to the school years all students spend together before they graduate. Al-Fulaij urged her fellow graduates to fully live and cherish the “golden moments” in their lives as they move on from one milestone to another.

Addressing the guests and his fellow graduates, the school valedictorian, Abdulmuhsen Al-Mishari delivered a bilingual speech in which he commended the school for taking talent and skill development as a pursuit toward establishing the future of Kuwait. Concluding his speech, Al-Mishari called upon his fellow graduates to feel proud and live up to the responsibility of being the first graduating class of AUS.

Established in 2012, The American United School of Kuwait (AUS) is internationally accredited by the Council of International School (CIS) and Middle States Association (MSA).
Kuwait’s FM chairs Security Council session on peacekeeping, mediation

NEW YORK: Kuwait’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah presided over a UN Security Council session on maintenance of international peace and security, conflict prevention and mediation. The session, held as part of Kuwait presidency of the Council for June, opened with briefings by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, former Irish President and Chair of the Elders Mary Robinson, and Deputy Chair of the Elders Ban Ki-moon. The Council was also briefed on a letter, dated May 31, 2019, from the Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the UN Secretary-General, on the basic objectives of the country’s foreign policy. In his address to the Council, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled thanked the Secretary-General for his “invaluable report,” renewing Kuwait’s support to his efforts to enhance the efficacy of the UN working mechanisms, particularly those relating to conflict prevention and mediation. He appreciated the presence of The Elders – a group of independent global leaders founded by Nelson Mandela to promote good governance and ethical leadership, for their long experience in improving the living of millions of people around the globe, and protecting human rights and women rights. He said the group is led by Robinson – a human rights advocate who served as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Ban – a former UN secretary-general and Noble Peace laureate who spearheaded the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris climate agreement.

Dealing with the maintenance of international peace and security, the main topic of the agenda of today’s Council meeting, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled reminded the gathering of the purposes and principles of the UN as set in Article 1 of the UN Charter. Citing the text, he said, “To maintain international peace and security, and to that end, to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other acts of retirement of international peace and security, conflict prevention and mediation.”

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled underscored the importance of prevention of crises settlement as part of the preventive diplomacy and the primary role of the Security Council to settle many issue in African Continent.”

Dealing with the important role of the Secretary-General in this regard, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said: “Article VIII encourages the regional arrangements or agencies to deal with “such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action.”

In this context, let me applaud the important cooperation between the Security Council and the African Union to settle many issue in African Continent.”

Dealing with the important role of the Secretary-General in this regard, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled noted that Article VIII encourages the regional arrangements or agencies to deal with “such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action.”

New York: Kuwait’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Hamad Al-Sabah presided over a UN Security Council session on maintenance of international peace and security, conflict prevention and mediation. — KUNA

Kuwait ‘carefully watching’ efforts to ensure calm: Deputy FM

KUWAIT: Kuwait’s Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah said escalations in the region have “decreased” as a result of continuous diplomatic efforts and communication. Kuwait is carefully watching efforts aimed at ensuring calm in the area, the deputy foreign minister told reporters. He described the regional impact of Iran’s intention to increase uranium enrichment as a “worrying matter,” urging this be resolved within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Jarallah went on to reiterate Kuwait’s condemnation of the “devastating and aggressive” attack, launched by Houthi militia on Abha Airport in southern Saudi Arabia. The attack was dubbed a “dangerous escalation that undermines all efforts aimed at reaching a political solution” and a “blatant breach” of international norms.

Kuwait hopes these attacks, it has condemned and rejected, come to a halt, he said, paving the way for political moves made by the international envoy or other parties aimed at reaching a political solution in Yemen. Speaking at a Russian embassy National Day function, he said Kuwait is proud of being the first country in the region to have launched diplomatic relations with Moscow. These bilateral relations are historic and strategic, he added, mentioning that coordination on regional and global matters remains continuous between both. — KUNA

Kuwaiti Deputy PM, Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah and Ambassador of Russia to Kuwait Nikolay Makarov cut the cake during a Russian embassy National Day function.

— Photo by Joseph Shagra
Lawmakers propose ‘National Committee’ to regulate demography

Reducing expats numbers by 10 percent within 10 years

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: A number of lawmakers yesterday proposed forming a special national committee to regulate and administer Kuwait’s demography, said informed sources. In their proposal, MP’s Mohammad Al-Dallal, Essa Al-Kandari, Osama Al-Shaheen and Khalid Al-Saleh called for setting up the ‘National Committee to Regulate and Administer Kuwait’s Demography’ that would work on preventing Kuwait from having an ‘excessive number of expatriates’ which according to them would ‘threaten the state’s identity.’ The proposed committee would set special policies and plans to adjust the current demographic structure in view of the developmental plan, said the sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Strategic plans

According to the proposal, the committee would be responsible for studying Kuwait’s demography and set strategic plans in accordance to developmental requirements and security, social and economic factors with an ultimate goal of reducing the total number of expats to 60 percent of the population within 10 years effective on passing the bill and publishing the law in the official gazette. Expats currently make up around 70 percent of the population. The committee would also set a new maximum limit for the expatriate population every five years, and set ‘reasonable’ and ‘suitable’ ratio per nationality, taking into consideration that none of the residing communities should exceed 40 percent of the population, the sources explained.

Further, the sources noted that according to the proposal, the committee would be headed by the Minister of State for Economic Affairs, a representative of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development as vice chairman, in addition to members representing the Central Statistical Bureau, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, the Public Authority for Manpower, Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Civil Service Commission, Public Authority of Civil Information, the private sector (to be nominated by Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and two academics with at least 10 years of experience.

Parliamentary calls for cutting the number of expatriates living in Kuwait are not new, and have been increasing lately as the National Assembly readies to go on its long summer break in less than three weeks. Earlier this week, MP Safa Al-Hashem called for expelling around two million expatriates from Kuwait over the next five years in order to make Kuwaitis a majority in their home country. “Reforming the imbalance in the demographic structure is an urgent necessity and a national requirement, because it is illogical that citizens are a minority in their home country,” Hashem said in a statement.

10 expats laid off

In other news, Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel announced laying off 10 expats working for the ministry in the period of 2016-2019 as part of the policy of ‘Kuwaitization’ in order to make Kuwaitis a majority in their home country. “Reforming the imbalance in the demographic structure is an urgent necessity and a national requirement, because it is illogical that citizens are a minority in their home country,” Hashem said in a statement.

Six hospitalized in Saad Al-Abdullah apartment fire

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A fire recently broke out in a second floor apartment in Saad Al-Abdullah, said security sources, noting that firemen from Tahrir, Jahra industrial area brigades rushed to the scene. The sources added that firemen worked as two teams; one to tackle the blaze and another to rescue and evacuate the tenants to the roof, where six of them were rescued using the fire emergency ladder and then were rushed to hospital for further treatment. The fire was controlled and prevented from spreading to adjacent buildings. Separately, the interior ministry said that police managed to identify the owner of a vehicle which appeared in a video that went viral on social media blocking a disabled parking space. Police issued a ticket to the owner and impounded the vehicle, ministry’s relations and security media department said in a statement.
Hounded by war planes, Syrians digging Idlib graves in advance

PARIS: From US military deployments to alleged “threats” from Iran and attacks on oil tankers and installations, here is a timeline of escalating tensions in the Gulf:

‘Credible threat’

On May 5, the United States says it is sending the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier group and a bomber task force to the Middle East. The deployment is “in response to a number of troubling and escalatory indications and warnings” related to Iran, acting defense secretary Patrick Shanahan says a day later. Since then Washington has announced the dispatch to the region of an amphibious assault ship, a Patriot missile battery and an extra 1,500 troops.

Sanctions against Iran

On May 8, Iran says it is preparing to increase enriched uranium and heavy water production as part of its decision to stop certain commitments made under the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. A year after Washington unilaterally withdrew from the deal and later reimposed sanctions on Tehran, US President Donald Trump announces new measures against Iran’s steel and mining sectors. In June, Washington hits Iran’s petrochemical group PGPIC — the country’s largest and most profitable such group, with sanctions.

‘Sabotage’

On May 12, two Saudi oil tankers and two other ships are damaged in mysterious “sabotage attacks” off the coast of Fujairah, part of the United Arab Emirates. Fujairah is the only Emirati terminal located on the Arabian Sea, bypassing the Strait of Hormuz through which most Gulf oil exports pass. Iran, which has repeatedly threatened to close the strait in case of a military confrontation with the United States, calls the incidents “alarming and regrettable”.

Drone attacks near Riyadh

On May 14, Yemen’s pro-Iranian Houthi rebels carry out drone attacks near Riyadh, shutting down a key Saudi oil pipeline. Two days later Saudi-led coalition air strikes hit the rebel-held Yemeni capital Sanaa. On May 15, the US orders all non-emergency diplomats to leave Iraq, due to an “imminent” threat from Iran-linked Iraqi militias.

War of words

Trump warns on May 19 that if Iran attacks American interests “that will be the official end of Iran”. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the “genocidal taunts” of US President Donald Trump “will not end Iran”. On May 27 Trump says the US is “not looking for regime change” in Iran.

New shipping incident

On June 13, two tankers, Norwegian and Japanese, come under “attack” in the Gulf of Oman, according to the Norwegian maritime authority and the Japanese shipowner. The US Fifth Fleet says that it received two separate distress calls from the tankers in a “reported attack”. Iran speaks initially of “accidents” and says it rescued 44 crew. Foreign Minister Zarif says the tanker “attacks” as Abe visits are “suspicious”. — AFP
Saudi warns Iran over rebel airport attack

RIYADH: Riyadh accused its arch-foe Tehran yesterday of ordering a Yemeni rebel missile strike which wounded 26 people at a Saudi airport and warned of “grave consequences”. “The continuation of the Iranian regime’s aggression and reckless escalation, whether directly or through its militias, will result in grave consequences,” deputy defense minister Prince Khaled bin Salman tweeted.

Yemeni Houthis rebels hit the civilian airport in the popular mountain resort of Alhia in the south-west of the kingdom on Wednesday, damaging the arrivals hall and forcing its closure for several hours. “We will confront the Houthi militia’s crimes with unwavering resolve,” said Prince Khaled, a son of King Salman. “Their targeting of a civilian airport exposes to the world the recklessness of Iran’s escalation and the danger it poses to regional security and stability.”

Iran and the Yemeni rebels both follow arms of the Shiite branch of Islam but Tehran has always denied providing more than moral support to the rebels. Riyadh has accused the rebels of being Iranian proxies ever since it led its allies in launching a military offensive in Yemen in March 2015.

“The Iranian regime is the only party in the region that has been pursuing reckless escalation, through the use of ballistic missiles and UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) to directly target civilian installations and innocent civilians,” Prince Khaled said.

“For 40 years, the Iranian regime has been spreading chaos, death and destruction, by sponsoring and financing terrorist organizations including the Houthi,” he added.

There has been a spate of rebel attacks on Saudi targets in recent weeks which have coincided with reports of intensified coalition strikes on rebel strongholds on the other side of the border. The rebels say that missile and drone strikes against Saudi Arabia are one of few ways that they can retaliate against more than four years of bombing by the Saudi-led coalition which has exacted a heavy civilian death toll in Yemen.

Since 2015, the conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, many of them civilians, relief agencies say. It has triggered what the UN describes as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with 24.1 million Yemenis — more than two-thirds of the population — in need of aid. Concern over the civilian toll from the Saudi-led air war has triggered a fierce battle over US arms sales to the kingdom that has pitted President Donald Trump’s administration against both houses of Congress. — AFP

Iran leader rejects Trump talks despite Japan PM Abe’s mission

‘I don’t consider Trump as a person worthy of exchanging messages with’

TEHRAN: Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday categorically ruled out talks with US President Donald Trump, despite an unprecedented Japanese mission aimed at defusing tensions between Washington and the Islamic Republic. Iran “has no trust in America and will not in any way repeat the bitter experience of the previous negotiations with America,” Khamenei said in comments published by his official website.

They came after he met with Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe making an unprecedented visit to Iran — the first by a Japanese premier since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. “We have no doubt in your good will and seriousness, but regarding what you said the US president told you, I don’t consider Trump as a person worthy of exchanging messages with,” Khamenei told Abe during their meeting. The visit coincided with a suspected attack on two oil tankers in the Sea of Oman, off the Iranian coast, with one of the ships owned by a Japanese company, which again sent tensions in the Gulf soaring. Iran has been locked in a bitter standoff with the United States since Trump withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal in May last year.

Washington has since re-imposed crippling unilateral sanctions — which have forced Tokyo to halt its once-substantial purchases of Iranian oil — and launched a military buildup in the Gulf. “President Trump has said he does not wish to see an escalation of tensions,” Abe told reporters after his meeting. “I shared candidly with Ayatollah Khamenei my own views about what intention the president has in mind,” Abe said, emphasizing he had “exchanged views with President Trump several times.” Trump indicated last week in France that he could consider talking to Tehran, saying: “I understand they want to talk and if they want to talk that’s fine.” Abe said he believed his meeting with Khamenei was “a significant step forward” for “securing peace and stability of this region.” During a news conference with Abe on Wednesday, President Hassan Rouhani said he expected a “very positive change” in the Middle East and the world if the United States stopped what he called its “economic war” on Iran through sanctions.

More than suspicious

The reported attacks on the two tankers off the Iranian coast, just as Abe held talks in Tehran, was more than suspicious, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif said. “Reported attacks on Japan-related tankers occurred while PM @AbeShinzo was meeting with Ayatollah Khamenei for extensive and friendly talks. Suspicious doesn’t begin to describe what likely transpired its wording,” Zarif tweeted.

One of the two tankers — Kokuka Courageous — belonging to the Japanese company Kokuka Sangyo Ltd. The ship’s owners confirmed their tanker had been attacked and that all of its 21 crew members had been rescued. Iran’s navy rescued 44 sailors in all from the Kokuka Courageous and the Norwegian-owned Front Altair after fires ignited on both vessels.

Front Altair was reportedly still burning by late yesterday, but the situation aboard Kokuka Courageous was under control with the fire extinguished, according to an Iranian official involved in the rescue operation. According to the US state media, the Front Altair was carrying ethanol from Qatar to Taiwan, while the Kokuka Courageous was carrying methanol from Saudi Arabia to Singapore.

Defusing tensions

Abe began his visit to Iran on Wednesday with the stated aim of defusing tensions between Tehran and Washington. Japan stopped importing Iranian crude oil in May to comply with US sanctions against the Islamic republic. The Asian powerhouse has an interest in keeping the Middle East stable in order to ensure the flow of hydrocarbons to fuel its economy.

Rouhani said Wednesday he saw “Japan’s interest in continuing to buy oil from Iran and fixing financial issues” as a “guarantee” for the ongoing development of bilateral ties. spokesman for Japan’s foreign ministry, Takeshi Osuga, later said that on the questions of Iranian oil sales to Japan, “our understanding is that this was the wish of the Iranian side.” — AFP

Saudi warns Iran over rebel airport attack

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Hounded by war planes, Syrians digging Idlib graves in advance

‘We could be digging one for me, my brother, my father, my friend’

MAARET AL-NUMAN: Sitting inside his bulldozer in embattled northwest Syria, civil defense worker Bassel Al-Rihani quietly maneuvers a giant shovel through red earth to dig a grave for whoever is killed next. The Idlib region of some three million people has suffered increased regime and Russian air strikes in recent weeks, with hundreds of civilians killed since late April.

To keep up, civil defense workers known as the White Helmets are digging graves in advance, to ensure funerals are swift and the few who attend are not killed at the cemetery.

“We’re digging graves, preparing them, we don’t even know for who,” said the grave digger in the town of Maaret Al-Noman, which has been repeatedly hit by bombardment in recent weeks. “We could be digging one for me, my brother, my father, my friend — God only knows,” said the 25-year-old father of five.

Sing a bulldozer allows him to finish a grave in less than ten minutes, he explained, instead of spending up to three hours at risk from jets in the sky. “We get them ready so when there are war planes all over, we can bury people as fast as possible, because often cemeteries are targeted,” Rihani said.

Idlib, one of the last regions in war-torn Syria to resist government control, is supposed to be protected by a September buffer zone deal signed by regime ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey. But a spike in air raids, shelling, and rocket fire by the regime and Russia has since sometimes unrecognizable — burnt, or torn to pieces — and often buried en masse, different generations of the same family together.

Have they no conscience?

Rihani said he was once burying a close friend’s nephew after he was killed in an air strike, when someone ran up urging him to stop. The nephew’s father had died of his wounds and should be buried with him, he was told. “I’d been digging a single grave, but then I had to make it wider to fit both father and son,” Rihani said.

Outside the village of Kafr Aweid last week, a dozen men gathered to bury their loved ones on the edge of a field of tall dry grass. Residents were supposed to mark the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr, but instead air strikes and shelling by regime forces had hit the town, killing 10 civilians. By a deep burial pit, one man comforted another, his face contorted with emotion and his long robe streaked with dried blood.

Under a tree, one family cradled a small, blood-stained cardboard box. Inside lay the scant remains of four-year-old Yamen, including the little boy’s dust-covered head. Yamen’s grandfather knew, “Where is humanity? Have they no conscience?” he cried, gesturing towards the sky. Nearby, men interred bodies wrapped in blankets, each grave sealed off with slim concrete blocks. The large metal blade of a bulldozer then dropped mounds of fresh earth over their tombs, laying them to rest. — AFP

US envoy pushes for ‘peaceful’ Sudan solution

Khartoum: A US special envoy was set to meet Sudan’s top military ruler yesterday to push for a “peaceful” solution to the standoff between protesters and generals following a deadly crackdown on demonstrators.

The diplomatic push comes after protesters demanding civilian rule called off a nationwide civil disobedience campaign and agreed to resume talks with the generals who ousted veteran leader Omar Al-Bashir in April.

Traffic jams returned to downtown Khartoum and some shops in the capital’s famous gold market began to reopen on Thursday, as more residents and office employees ventured out. Fewer troops and members of the feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, who protesters and rights groups accuse of leading the June 3 crackdown on demonstrators, were on the streets, according to an AFP correspondent who toured parts of the capital.

Several parts of the city suffered electricity cuts early yesterday, while internet services remained erratic. “Today is my first day to work after the campaign ended but I’m not in the mood to work,” said Suheir Hassan, an employee at a government office. “Because, on my way I passed by the sit-in area and remembered that all those voices who used to chant revolution- ary slogans have now disappeared.”

Protesters ended their disobedience campaign late on Tuesday and agreed to hold fresh talks with the ruling generals following mediation led by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Demonstrators had launched the strike after men in military fatigues killed protesters in the streets.

Protesters brief US envoy

In a bid to reach a swift solution to the crisis, Washington has consistently pushed for civilian-led rule following Bashir’s ouster, on Wednesday appointed veteran diplomat Donald Booth as special envoy to Sudan. Booth was due to hold talks with General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the ruling military council, to help craft a “peaceful solution” to the crisis that has rocked the northeast African country.

Booth, who previously served as special envoy to Sudan and South Sudan during the administration of former president Barack Obama, arrived in Khartoum on Wednesday along with Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Affairs Tibor Nagy. He and Nagy held a series of meetings with Sudanese officials and protest leaders. The Alliance for Freedom and Change umbrella protest movement said that its leaders briefed the two US officials on the need for a transparent investigation in the June 3 killings.

They also called for the withdrawal of “militias” from the streets in Khartoum and other towns, an end to the internet blockade and establishment of a civilian administration, it said in a statement. Protest leader Madani Abbas Madani told reporters that the US officials told them that Washington “backed the Ethiopian mediation” to arrive at a solution. Booth and Nagy are later expected to travel to Addis Ababa to discuss the Sudan crisis with Ethiopian leaders and the African Union.

Demand for guarantees

Yesterday, the US diplomats are also expected to meet diplomats of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt in Khartoum. Experts say the three regional Arab nations appear to back the generals even as Western countries push for a civilian-led administration in Sudan. Days after Bashir’s overthrow, Saudi Arabia and the UAE offered a three-billion-dollar aid package to Khartoum, including a $500 million cash injection into the central bank to help support the Sudanese pound which has plunged since last year against the dollar. —AFP
Deal or no deal? Britain’s PM hopefuls divided over Brexit

LONDON: The seven contenders left in the race to replace Theresa May as Britain’s prime minister differ on whether the country should leave the EU with a deal or no deal at all.

Open to no-deal in October

Boris Johnson

The former foreign secretary, 54, says he would get Britain out of the EU “deal or no deal” when the October 31 deadline set by EU leaders comes around. But he has also said a no-deal Brexit would be “a last resort, not something that anybody desires”. He has threatened to withhold the country’s Brexit bill if the EU does not offer improved withdrawal terms, and to scrap a controversial provision for the Irish border contained in the current divorce deal — both of which would be unacceptable to Brussels. A figurehead in the 2016 Brexit campaign, he was May’s foreign secretary until he resigned over her Brexit strategy. Charismatic and popular with grassroots Conservatives, he is seen as the favorite in the race, scooping up a growing number of pledges of support from cabinet members and MPs. Johnson picked up 114 votes in the first round of voting by Conservative MPs in the leadership race yesterday.

Dominic Raab

An ardent euro sceptic with a black belt in karate, the 45-year-old former Brexit minister resigned in protest at the deal struck with the EU by May. He says Britain should be ready to walk away from the EU without an agreement while still trying to negotiate a better deal than the one May signed. Raab sparked controversy last week by saying he would be willing to suspend parliament to force through a no-deal departure if necessary. Raab won 27 votes yesterday.

Sajid Javid

A former investment banker and the son of a Pakistani immigrant bus driver, Javid, 49, wants to be the face of a modern, multi-cultural and meritocratic Britain. An economic liberal, Javid voted for Britain to stay in the EU in 2016 but has since become an advocate of Brexit. He wants to leave on October 31, preferably with a deal but would prefer no deal over no Brexit. He has picked up the notable endorsement of Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson. Javid took 23 votes.

No to no-deal in October

Jeremy Hunt

The foreign secretary supported remaining in the EU but has switched since then. The former businessman is a resilient politician, having headed the National Health Service for six years during a funding crisis. The 52-year-old says he will push hard for a new deal with Brussels without taking the possibility of a no-deal outcome off the table. Hunt won 43 votes yesterday.

Michael Gove

The cerebral 51-year-old is among the most ardent eurosceptics left in May’s government but is seen as a possible unifying figure between the two wings of the party. Considered the second favorite, his campaign was thrown into turmoil this weekend after he admitted to using cocaine two decades ago. Gove has signaled he could be open to delaying Brexit again rather than leave without a deal on October 31. Gove picked up 37 votes.

Belgium to bring home six orphans of jihadists

BRUSSELS: Belgium will bring six orphans home from Kurdish-controlled camps in Syria after the deaths of their jihadist parents, Finance Minister Alexander De Croo said yesterday. “These are children who were born in our country and who today no longer have parents,” the minister told VRT public radio after a cabinet decision.

Belgium is one of several European countries wrestling with the dilemma of what to do about citizens trapped in Syria following the defeat of the Islamic State group. Some are reluctant to accept captured extremist fighters, but the cases of children and non-combatant wives have proved more complicated for Western authorities. On Wednesday, Foreign Minister Didier Reynders said Belgium has a signed deal to allow returnees to transit through Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region. The bulk of the Islamic State fighters and family members who were captured when its so-called caliphate collapsed are being held in Syria in Kurdish-run camps. De Croo said that four of the six returnees are older than 10, but that none were suspects.

“These are children who were alone in the camps, who have no support. There’s no question of taking back parents who chose to join terrorist groups,” he said. “These children had no choice,” he added. — AFP

Twitter releases new trove of banned state propaganda

BRUSSELS: Social media giant Twitter yesterday released a new archive of state-backed propaganda from accounts it has banned based in Iran, Russia, Spain and Venezuela. The US platform said it had taken the material off its network, but would make it available to researchers and investigators studying online threats.

Tech firms have been accused of allowing political propagandists to use social media to hijack elections, poison online debate and smear their opponents. But Twitter, in a blog post by head of site integrity Yoel Roth, said “transparency is core to our mission” and vowed to fight “misleading, deceptive, and spammy behavior”.

Yesterday’s release was the firm’s third such archive, representing more than 30 million tweets and a terabyte of media data from just under 5,000 suspected accounts. Twitter has removed 4,779 accounts it believes are associated with — or directly backed by — the Iranian government. Most of these were found to be spreading news stories angled to support Iranian geopolitical interests or to be fake user profiles designed to manipulate online debate.

A smaller subgroup, originating in Iran, exclusively engaged with discussions related to Israel. Twitter has previously targeted alleged Russian bots, and this archive contains four more accounts that the firm believes are associated with the Internet Research Agency (IRA). This St Petersburg-based “troll factory” has been accused of working with Russian intelligence to influence Western elections, notably US President Donald Trump’s election campaign.

“Investigations into the Russian agency also led Twitter’s security team to 33 more accounts linked to a previously unknown group of 7640 Venezuelan fake users,” the firm’s blog post said. “Our further analysis suggests that they were operated by a commercial entity originating in Venezuela,” the post said. And in Spain, Twitter has taken down 130 allegedly fake accounts apparently set up to push the views of Catalan separatists. “We believe the public and research community are better informed by transparency,” Roth said. On Friday, EU justice commissioner Vera Jourová and security commissioner Julian King are to brief reporters on European efforts to fight political disinformation. — AFP
Trump says he would take foreign info on 2020 presidential opponent

‘I think you might want to listen... there’s nothing wrong with listening’

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he would be willing to accept information from a foreign country on his opponent in the 2020 election race, after years of denying Moscow helped him win office. Trump team contacts with Russians during the 2016 presidential race led to special counsel Robert Mueller’s probe into possible collusion and obstruction of justice, as well as several similar and ongoing efforts in Congress.

The Russia issue has consumed the Trump presidency for the past two years, and his new remarks suggested he still sees nothing wrong with a US political candidate accepting help from a foreign power. “I think you might want to listen... there's nothing wrong with listening,” Trump said when asked by ABC News what he would do if a country such as Russia or China offered him such information. He denied the suggestion that that would amount to foreign meddling in a US election.

“I think you might want to listen... there’s nothing wrong with listening,” Trump said. “If I thought there was something wrong, I’d go maybe to the FBI — if I thought there was something wrong.” Trump said. Mueller’s report on his investigation stated that while there was insufficient evidence to charge Trump with criminal conspiracy, he was happy enough to benefit from Russian dirty tricks.

Mexico frees migrant-rights activists jailed

MEXICO CITY: A Mexican court freed two migrant-rights activists Wednesday who were arrested on human-trafficking charges last week amid Mexico’s negotiations to try to avoid US President Donald Trump’s threatened tariffs over migration. A judge in the southern state of Chiapas dismissed all charges against Irineo Mujica and Cristobal Sanchez, activists with the group People Without Borders (Pueblo Sin Fronteras), which has helped organize caravans of Central American migrants trekking toward the United States.

“We remain very worried by the campaign to criminalize migrants and human-rights activists under political pressure from the United States government,” the group said in a statement. After being freed, Sanchez said at a press conference that he and Mujica are “the first political prisoners of the ‘Fourth Transformation,’’ a phrase coined by leftist Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador to refer to his plan to radically transform the government.

“The sector that has been hit the hardest by this transformation has been the migrants,” said the activist. “Anyone who assumes a leadership role within a migrant caravan passing through Mexico is singled out, per-secuted, imprisoned and subsequently deported,” Sanchez added. Mujica added: “If they continue with this corruption, then we don’t really have a Fourth Transformation.” — AFP

Trump Jr grilled by US senators, says unconcerned about perjury

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump Jr wrapped up a return interview Wednesday with US lawmakers who questioned him about his contacts with Russians, with the president’s eldest son dismissing concerns he may have perjured himself in his 2017 testimony. The 41-year-old appeared relaxed as he emerged from a three-hour closed-door session with the Senate Intelligence Committee as part of the Republican-led panel’s two-year investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.

Trump Jr, who belittles the Trump Organization collection of businesses that his real estate billionaire father ran for decades, earlier told reporters there was “nothing to correct” from his previous comments to the committee. After his interview, he maintained he had been consistent. “I don’t think I changed anything of what I said because there was nothing to change,” Trump Jr said. “I’m glad that this is finally over (and) we’re able to put some final clarity on that.”

Asked if he was worried about perjury, Trump Jr responded: “Not at all.” Trump Jr likely faced questioning about his role in arranging a Trump Tower meeting in May 2016 that included his father’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, then-campaign manager Paul Manafort, and a Russian lawyer offering dirt on Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. “If it’s what you say, I love it,” Trump Jr had written in response to a 2016 email offering the information.

Some Democrats suspect Trump Jr may have lied in previous testimony in 2017 about what he and his father knew about the now-infamous meeting, as well as other connections between the Trump campaign and Russia. The Trump team had initially tried to cover up the meeting, providing conflicting stories about its purpose and what happened. Mueller’s report detailed how the president’s former lawyer Michael Cohen recalled that Trump Jr may have told his father about the meeting; the president has denied knowing about it ahead of time.

‘Clarification’

On Wednesday, Trump Jr said he provided “clarification” to the intelligence panel, and pointed out that Cohen himself is currently serving a prison sentence for campaign finance violations and lying to Congress. In an interview with ABC News broadcast Wednesday, Trump Jr said that if a foreign power, say Russia or China, offered him information on his opponent in the 2020 election he would probably accept it.

“It’s not an interference, they have information — I think I’d take it,” Trump said. “If I thought there was something wrong, I’d go maybe to the FBI — if I thought there was something wrong.” Trump Jr likely faced questioning about his role in arranging the meeting; the president has denied knowing about it ahead of time.

Hope Hicks to testify

Democrats in the House and Senate continue to seek testimony and information as they press the president with multiple investigations, mostly related to Russia meddling, obstruction and the 2016 election. Democrats are debating among themselves whether there is enough evidence and political space to pursue an impeachment motion against Trump. — AFP
**International**

**War, depression, suicide: US vets are finally finding help**

The compassion and the caring is getting there

CENTER MORICHES: Roger King was 19 when he enlisted in the US Marine Corps in 2005. He left four years later after two deployments in Iraq, where a sniper’s bullet nearly cost him his life. Once home, he faced a new set of problems in his return to civilian life on New York’s Long Island, including a suffocating sense of anxiety and difficulty being in group situations.

King was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a traumatic brain injury (TBI) — two afflictions sadly common among veterans of modern conflict in the world’s biggest and seemingly endless conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Increasingly depressed by the challenges of his new life, King began drinking. This solidly built 53-year-old man quietly confided that he attempted suicide — twice.

Russell Keyzer — another New Yorker — joined the National Guard shortly after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. Now 42, he suffers from flashbacks, insomnia, panic attacks and other PTSD symptoms following two years with NATO’s multinational force in Kosovo, where periods of relative stability alternated with violent outbursts.

After returning home in 2008, Keyzer sank into a life of drinking and depression. His marriage was crumbling down and he found himself homeless. On no fewer than seven occasions, he says, he attempted to kill himself. Today, King and Keyzer say they are doing much better, thanks in large part to an aid group for veterans, the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Project, a non-profit organization created in 2012 in tribute to an army medic who killed himself in 2008 after returning home from Iraq.

‘More needs to be done’

King and Keyzer spoke about their darker times at a recent “Wellness Day” organized by the association at a park in the coastal village of Center Moriches. Veterans enjoyed a picnic, a salute to the US flag, yoga, meditation and kayaking — all activities intended to foster a sense of security and camaraderie. Some 20 organizations also set up stands to offer assistance.

‘More needs to be done,’ King said. Groups like the Dwyer Project “should have been done in World War I, World War II, Vietnam.” He now leads a group of a dozen veterans for the project. They meet down in New York City, said, referring to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, but “it’s like you never really thought maybe this might help for veterans.” Now, King added, “the compassion and the caring is getting there.” Keyzer agreed.

“If the proper resources were there when we came home, we wouldn’t be in this position... We would not have turned to drugs, we would not have turned to alcoholism,” he said. But he added: “Things are slowly changing for the better every day. There are more and more veterans’ programs out there.”

**Peer support**

Psychological support groups like the Dwyer Project have indeed been multiplying across the United States, as the world’s leading superpower struggles to help its 20 million veterans — nearly 10 percent of the adult population — overcome their challenges and thoughts of suicide. Many recent veterans are at the opposite end of the spectrum from the proud and smiling men and women who assembled in Normandy last week to mark the 75th anniversary of the D-Day invasion during World War II.

More than 6,000 veterans — many of them gun owners — killed themselves each year from 2008 to 2016, according to a report published late last year by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). By comparison, a total of 6,951 American troops died in major war zones between 2001 and 2018, according to an analysis from Brown University. Faced with those sobering statistics, the VA — which administers some 1,200 hospitals and clinics — has made suicide prevention a priority, establishing a hotline for troubled veterans that is among the most heavily used in the world.

**Increasing awareness**

The Veterans Crisis Line was launched in 2007 with a staff of 14; it now has more than 900 employees, with three call centers across the country including one in upstate New York, director Matt Miller told AFP. The number of incoming calls has grown steadily, now totaling some 650,000 a year, he said. “We are all increasing in our awareness” of suicide, he said, not just among veterans but among all civilians, where the rate — while lower than among veterans — has been climbing.

Fifty years after the fall of Vietnam and more than 17 years after US troops first intervened in Afghanistan, “there is a lot more awareness” about veterans’ needs, said Marcelle Leis, who heads the Dwyer Project after 20 years in the Air National Guard. But she quickly adds: “We have a lot of work to do.” Unlike the norm during the Korean and Vietnam wars, she said, troops sent to Iraq or Afghanistan often serve “multiple tours” and struggle while “going back and forth in this constant state of hyper-vigilance.” — AFP

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**UK minister signs US bid to extradite Assange**

LONDON: Britain’s interior minister said yesterday he had certified the US request to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on espionage grounds in a procedural move that opens the way for a court battle. The US Justice Department confirmed on Tuesday that it had submitted a formal extradition request. British Home Secretary Sajid Javid said he signed it on Wednesday.

The final decision on whether Assange can be extradited will rest with the courts. The next hearing in the Australian former computer hacker’s case is on Friday. The 47-year-old had been shielding in Ecuador’s embassy in London for seven years until his arrest on April 11 when Quito finally withdrew his asylum. He is now serving a 50-week sentence in jail for skipping bail when he entered the embassy in 2012. “I’m very pleased that the police were finally able to apprehend him and now he’s rightly behind bars because he broke UK law,” Javid told BBC radio.

There’s an extradition request from the US that is before the courts tomorrow but yesterday, L... certified it, “I want to see justice done at all times and we’ve got a legitimate extradition request, so I’ve signed it, but the... decision is now with the courts.” If basic criteria are met, the home secretary must certify a valid extradition request from the United States before the courts make a decision on whether the person can be extradited. The secretary then decides whether to order an extradition.

Assange, who is being held in the top-security Belmarsh prison in southeast London, is not expected to attend Friday’s hearing in person but could take part via video-link, although it will be largely procedural. The “first real confrontation of arguments” in court will not be for several weeks or months, according to WikiLeaks editor Kristinn Hrafnsson. Washington has accused Assange of violating US Espionage Act by publishing military and diplomatic files in 2010. The US charges reject his claim he was simply a publisher receiving leaked material — which would be protected under press freedom legislation. The case has upset some US and other world media, which argue that Assange’s activities differ very little from their own. They fear his case could set a precedent for limiting free speech and media rights. — AFP

**Putin sacks two senior police over reporter’s drugs arrest**

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin yesterday sacked two senior police officers over the arrest of investigative reporter Ivan Golunov on trumped up drugs charges. The journalist’s arrest last week was widely seen as punishment for his investigative work and sparked an unprecedented campaign of solidarity in Russian society.

On Tuesday, Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsov said he had requested Putin dismiss the officers after lifting the charges against Golunov on the basis of a lack of evidence. Yesterday, Putin signed a decree to dismiss the police chief for western Moscow, Major General Andrei Puchkov, and the head of the Moscow police department for narcotics control, Major General Yuriy Devyatkin. Golunov is a reporter for Meduza news site, which is based in EU member Latvia. He walked free from a Moscow police building on Tuesday evening after his house arrest was lifted.

Moscow police had charged him with attempted drug dealing, saying that officers found him in possession of drugs including cocaine. But as the details of the case attracted public outrage, they later admitted that they had posted photographs of drugs paraphernalia that were not taken in his flat. Golunov’s supporters, including many influential journalists, mounted a public campaign in his defense, holding protests outside Moscow police headquarters.

The case has prompted wide-reaching questions about how Russian police operate, with Golunov’s supporters and lawyers saying that police planted drugs on him. Kolokoltsov said the police who worked on the case have been suspended pending an investigation. On Wednesday, a few thousand protesters took to the streets of Moscow for an unsanctioned march calling for broad reform of the law enforcement and justice systems. Police violently broke up the march and arrested more than 500 people, according to OVD-INFO, a monitor that tracks detentions. — AFP
Second patient dies of Ebola in Uganda, says health official

The first known cross-border spread since an outbreak began

BWERA: A grandmother in Uganda has died from Ebola, health officials said yesterday, the second fatality in the country since a major outbreak in Democratic Republic of Congo crossed the border. Health Minister Jane Ruth Aceng announced Wednesday that Uganda had recorded three cases of Ebola in the first known cross-border spread since an outbreak began in eastern Congo last August.

The patients were from a family of six, including four children, that travelled to Congo to care for a relative and later attended his burial after he died of Ebola. Upon returning to Uganda two brothers — aged five and three — and the 50-year-old grandmother tested positive for the virus, and the family was quarantined in Bwera, a border town in the country’s west. The older boy died Tuesday — the first Ebola fatality in Uganda since the start of the Congo outbreak that has seen more than 2,000 cases recorded, around two-thirds of which have been fatal.

A health ministry official said yesterday the grandmother had also died overnight. “The deceased has been confirmed as the grandmother of the five-year-old boy who died. Both victims had attended the burial of an Ebola patient in Congo, but returned to Uganda,” the official said on condition of anonymity. The official said arrangements were being made to bury the woman in Kasese, the western district bordering Congo where her grandson was laid to rest Wednesday.

About 25,000 people cross the district’s main border crossing of Mpwonde at a daily basis, according to the DRC health ministry. The World Health Organization also confirmed the woman had succumbed to the hemorrhagic virus. WHO said 27 others in contact with the family had been placed under close monitoring, Uganda’s health ministry said frontline health workers were due to be vaccinated Friday with a new drug designed to protect them against the virus.

Porous border

East Africa has been on high alert since the outbreak was declared in the eastern DRC provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, WHO said 12 members of the family that attended the burial in Congo were placed in isolation in the DRC, but six “escaped and crossed over to Uganda” on June 9. But the next day, the five-year-old was checked into hospital in Bwera vomiting blood. Tests confirmed he had Ebola and the family placed in an isolation ward.

Aceng said challenges remained at “unofficial entry points” between Congo and Uganda, which share a porous 875-kilometre border. According to the WHO, Uganda has vaccinated nearly 4,700 health workers in 165 facilities, as the virus remained contained in one part of DRC. According to the teninth in the country since the disease was identified in 1976. Efforts have been hampered both by militia attacks on treatment centers and by the hostility of some local people to the medical teams. Five workers have been killed, according to an AFP tally.

South Sudan has also declared a state of alert and vaccinated health workers. WHO will hold an emergency meeting Friday to determine whether to declare the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern, a major shift in mobilization against the disease. The emergency committee had in October and again in April held off doing this, partly because the virus remained contained in one part of DRC. The DRC has struggled to contain the outbreak, the tenth in the country since the disease was identified in 1976. Efforts have been hampered both by militia attacks on treatment centers and by the hostility of some local people to the medical teams. Five workers have been killed, according to an AFP tally.

Taiwan’s Tsai to seek re-election after defeating challenger

TAIPEI: Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen is set to seek a second term after she successfully saw off a primary challenge yesterday from within her own party to stand as her candidate. The island goes to the polls in January to elect a new president, in a contest set to be dominated by relations with China. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) — which Beijing loathes — announced that Tsai had comfortably beaten former premier William Lai in a primary decided by opinion polls.

“My most important responsibility now is to unite all forces... to protect Taiwan’s democracy, to defend the fruits of reforms and to solidify our national sovereignty,” Tsai told reporters. Tsai was elected in 2016 as the island’s first female leader, defeating the China-friendly Kuomintang (KMT) party which oversaw an unprecedented thaw in cross-strait ties but began to unravel many voters when its policies veered too close to the mainland. Beijing promptly cut communication with her government, ramped up military drills and propped several of Taiwan’s dwindling diplomatic allies because Tsai refuses to acknowledge that the self-ruled island is part of “one China”. Tsai hails from the more moderate wing of her party. Her challenger Lai is an open supporter of Taiwanese independence, something that Beijing has always maintained was a red-line.

Taiwan has been ruled separately since the end of a civil war in 1949 but China still views it as its territory and has vowed to take the island, by force if necessary. The KMT has yet to announce their candidate but it is likely to be either Taiwan’s richest man Terry Gou — the owner of electronics giant Foxconn — or Han Kuo-yu, a populist mayor and party outsider who has had a meteoric rise in recent months.

Both favor much warmer ties with China, a stance that often appeals to older conservative voters but ruffles many younger people who have increasingly embraced a distinctly Taiwanese identity and mistrust the authoritarian mainland. “Both potential KMT candidates are seen as China-friendly,” said Bivalent Benalcazar. “I want to say hello to Javier, who is in Guyaquyl. Honey, I love you,” Sorita told reporters in the capital Quito. He urged other gays to stop hiding and “enjoy the happiness that comes from being equal, like anyone else.”

Ecuador’s current constitution defines marriage as the union between a man and a woman. The charter, ratified in 2008, also bars same-sex couples from adopting children. But the judges that approved same-sex marriage said they based their decision on the idea that all people are equal. They also said they sought to counter any kind of discrimination. In Foch Plaza in downtown Quito, two women who have been fighting since 2013 for the right to marry staged a symbolic wedding right after the court decision was announced. Pamela Troya and Gabriela Correa sat formally in chairs for the ceremony and when Troya was asked the big question, she said: “Today, I say yes. A big yes. A giant yes, I want to be your wife.”

Others in the crowd shouted in approval, hugged and kissed. Troya later told reporters the fight for same sex marriage in Ecuador had been long and hard, and at times she thought it was a lost cause. “Finally, today is an historic day for Ecuador because it is a little more fair and egalitarian,” she said.
AHMEDABAD: High winds and heavy rains pounded western India yesterday as a major cyclone evacuated more than 285,000 people as a precaution. Schools have been closed, with officials fearing major damage to houses, crops, power lines and communications. Five people have been killed by lightning in Gujarat, mostly farmers and laborers working in fields, authorities said. The Air Force, Coastguard and Navy were all on high alert, with 36 teams from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) deployed in coastal areas.

Praying for safety

Yesterday, the eye of the cyclone was some 110 kilometers from Veraval, a major hub of India’s fisheries industry, exporting to Japan, South East Asia, Europe, the Gulf and the United States. The state also houses major ports as well as the Jamnagar oil refinery, the world’s largest. All ports in Gujarat halted the berthing of vessels from Wednesday, while Indian Railways cancelled 77 trains. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who comes from Gujarat, said Wednesday that the central government was closely monitoring the situation.

“Praying for the safety and well-being of all those affected by Cyclone Vayu,” he tweeted.

Cyclones are relatively rare in Gujarat, but they can be destructive and dangerous. The worst was in 1998 when more than 4,000 people died. Vayu is India’s second major storm this year. In May, Cyclone Fani — with winds up to 200 kilometers per hour — killed around 80 people in eastern India and Bangladesh, damaging half a million houses and knocking out power, water and communications. But Odisha authorities won praise from the United Nations and others for evacuating more than a million people and averting what could have been a much higher death toll.

Improved forecasting models, public awareness campaigns and well-drilled evacuation plans — backed up by an army of rescuers and volunteers — helped the eastern state prepare well. The latest weather system was also drawing moisture away from much-needed annual monsoon rains, with almost half of India hit by drought and many areas experiencing a heatwave. With temperatures exceeding 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) in the northern states of Rajasthan, water shortages have left huge numbers of people reliant on water trucks. The monsoon arrived in the south-western state of Kerala late last week but was several days behind schedule.

India questions men after raids on IS supporters

NEW DELHI: Indian anti-terrorism police questioned six men yesterday after conducting raids against alleged Islamic State group supporters in the country’s south. India has been concerned about Islamist extremists on its soil for some time, and the Sri Lanka bombings in April left authorities alarmed that the Hindu-majority country might be at risk of an attack by jihadists.

The raids on Wednesday in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu state, came after the arrest in April of an Indian national who allegedly followed Zahran Hashim, the ringleader of the Sri Lanka Easter suicide attacks that killed 258 people. India’s National Investigation Agency (NIA) said in a statement that the “prime accused” in the Coimbatore case, Mohammed Azarudeen, 32, “has been a Facebook friend” of Hashim. “During initial questioning, Azarudeen told us that he had plans to carry out a big attack in Tamil Nadu and Kerala (another southern state) but first wanted to hire more youths who will be ready to take up jihad,” the Economic Times daily quoted an unnamed official as saying.

The NIA named five others aside from Azarudeen who, it alleged, were also spreading Islamic State propaganda on social media with the aim of attracting new recruits willing to carry out terrorist attacks in South India — especially in Kerala and Tamil Nadu”. The NIA said Azarudeen maintained a Facebook page through which he propagated IS ideology, while other members of his group “have also been sharing radical contents attributed to Hashim.” — AFP

Police drop case that triggered India’s #MeToo movement

MUMBAI: Indian police said yesterday they had no evidence to support the allegations of sexual harassment made by an actress against a Bollywood star last year that sparked the country’s #MeToo movement — one of the few #MeToo cases in India to have been investigated by police. — was now closed, they said. “There was no evidence that we could find against the accused,” Mumbai police senior inspector Shashikant Deshpande told AFP.

Former Miss Universe contestant Tanushree Dutta first alleged in 2008 that Patkar had touched her inappropriately during the making of a romantic comedy the same year. She made no formal complaint at the time, and no action was taken against Patkar, who has repeatedly denied the accusations. But, emboldened by the global #MeToo campaign, Dutta repeated the allegations in an interview last summer and in October went to police in Mumbai to report the claim.

It triggered a belated #MeToo movement in India, which saw women share accounts of alleged harassment by several powerful men in the worlds of Bollywood, business, journalism, politics and even cricket. Dozens of men lost their jobs — including India’s former junior minister MJ Akbar after at least 20 women accused him of sexual harassment during his time as a newspaper editor. Very few cases ended up being probed by police, however, and several accused tried to turn the tables on their accusers by suing them for defamation.

Akbar, who denies the allegations against him — has taken one of the complainants, Priya Ramani, to court. Dutta said last year that she received legal notices from Patkar after repeating her claims against him. — AFP

No survivors in Indian military plane crash

NEW DELHI: Indian authorities said there were no survivors from a military plane crash last week in a remote mountainous region close to China. The Soviet-built AN-32 plane, carrying eight crew and five passengers, disappeared from radars on June 3 in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, prompting a week-long search by the Indian Air Force (IAF).

“Eight members of the rescue team have reached the crash site today (Thursday) morning,” the IAF said on Twitter. “IAF is sad to inform that there are no survivors.”

Helicopters and planes scouring hundreds of square miles of the mountainous region before emergency workers Tuesday spotted the wreckage on a mountainside at an elevation of some 12,000 feet (3,650 meters).

A mountaineering team trekked to the crash spot after being air lifted at a nearby location after two failed attempts. Authorities had earlier urged locals to organize search in the rugged mountains and announced a cash reward of 550,000 rupees ($8,000) for any information. The twin-engine plane lost contact with ground control 35 minutes after takeoff.
Surveillance-savvy Hong Kong protesters going digitally dark

Aware of the dangers of surveillance and leaving online footprints

HONG KONG: Hong Kong’s tech-savvy protesters are going digitally dark as they try to avoid surveillance and potential future prosecutions, disabling location tracking on their phones, buying train tickets with cash and purging their social media conversations. Police used rubber bullets and tear gas to break up crowds opposed to a China extradition law on Wednesday, in the worst unrest the city has witnessed in decades.

Many of those on the streets are predominantly young and have grown up in a digital world, but they are all too aware of the dangers of surveillance and leaving online footprints. Ben, a masked office worker at the protests, said he feared the extradition law would have a devastasting impact on freedoms. “Even if we’re not doing anything drastic — as simple as saying something online about China — because of such surveillance they might catch us,” the 25-year-old said.

This week groups of demonstrators donned masks, goggles, helmets and caps — both to protect themselves against tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets, and also to make it harder for them to be identified. Many said they turned off their location tracking on their phones and heeded up their digital privacy settings before joining protests, or deleted conversations and photos on social media and messaging apps after they left the demonstrations.

There were unusually long lines at ticket machines in the city underground metro stations as protesters used cash to buy tickets rather than tap-in with the city’s ubiquitous Octopus cards — whose movement can be more easily tracked. In a city where WhatsApp is usually king, protesters have embraced the encrypted messaging app Telegram in recent days, believing it offers better cyber protection and also because it allows larger groups to co-ordinate.

Yesterday Telegram announced it had been the target of a major cyber attack, with most junk requests coming from China. The company’s CEO linked the attack to the city’s ongoing political unrest. Anxieties have been symbolised in a profile picture that was being used by many opponents of the bill: a wilting baunhia flower. But protesters have become increasingly nervous that using the picture online could attract attention from authorities, and have taken it down. “This reflects the terror Hong Kong citizens feel towards this government,” said a woman surnamed Yau, 29, who works in education. A protester surnamed Heung told AFP that many people immediately deleted “evidence showing you were present.” The demonstrators who spoke with AFP only provided their first or last names due to the subject’s sensitivity, and all wore at least masks.

Heung, 27, had returned to the area where the protests had taken place to join the clean-up, and she put a post on Facebook calling for helpers. But she was afraid even a call for volunteers would link her to the protests. “Maybe I’ll delete the post tonight,” she said. “I don’t want to become one of their suspects.”

It would become like Xinjiang

While Hong Kongers have free speech and do not encounter the surveillance saturation on the mainland, standing freedoms and a resurgent Beijing is fuelling anxieties and fears. Recent prosecutions of protest leaders have also used video and digital data to help win convictions.

Bruce Lui, a senior journalism lecturer at Hong Kong Baptist University, said awareness around security has increased, particularly with China’s “all-pervasive” surveillance technology and wide use of facial recognition and other tracking methods.

In recent years national security has become an urgent issue for Hong Kong relating to China. Hong Kong laws may have limitations, but China only needs to use national security to surpass (them),” he said. —AFP

Carrie Lam: Hong Kong’s divisive, pro-Beijing leader

HONG KONG: Carrie Lam vowed to heal divisions and listen to the city’s youth when she became Hong Kong’s leader, promising that he in tatters after tear gas and pepper spray sent them running for cover when they dared raise their voice. The 62-year-old devout Catholic took over in March 2017 as a committee stacked with Beijing loyalists voted her into office — the first time a woman had been elevated to the international finance hub’s top job.

In her acceptance speech she vowed to be more responsive to the city’s youngest, a restless demographic at the forefront of recent calls for greater democratic freedoms and measures to combat rising inequality, “Hong Kong, our home, is suffering from quite a serious divisiveness and has accumulated a lot of frustrations,” she said in her acceptance speech. “My priority will be to heal the divide.” Two years on and Hong Kong has been convulsed by its largest mass rally followed by the worst political violence in decades.

The spark that lit these flames was a push by Lam’s government to fast track a bill allowing extraditions to mainland China. But the protests are also the latest explosion of an anger building for years over how the city is run by its pro-Beijing administrators. When she took office, Lam was already loaded by the city’s pro-democracy camp because she had been deputy to her deeply unpopular predecessor, CY Leung, during the failed 2014 Umbrella Movement protests. She was widely tipped as Beijing’s preferred candidate to replace him and easily saw off her rivals.

Low ratings

The rhetoric of Hong Kong’s political scene is often unforgiving — and Lam has long faced unflattering — and often misogynistic — insults. One of her nicknames — a pun on her family name — was “lai-ma” or wet nurse, a jibe over what her opponents said was a fawning loyalty towards her former boss Leung. After her appointment, she was quickly dubbed “777” by detractors. That nickname is a reference to the number of votes her preferred candidate to replace him and easily saw off her rivals.

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Personal sacrifices

Born into a low-income family, Lam stood out at her Catholic school and later attended the Cambridge University on government funding. She began her career in the colonial civil service and rose up the ranks in the post-handover period, earning herself a reputation for being a fighter and a committed Beijing loyalist. —AFP

Captain of Rohingya boat charged with smuggling

BANGKOK: A Thai boat captain has been charged with smuggling 65 Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, police said yesterday, after their vessel was shipwrecked off Thailand’s southern coast. The same area was the hub of multi-million-dollar trafficking route, which unraveled in 2015 after the discovery of mass graves of Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants along the border with Malaysia.

Police said the boat, which was carrying the stateless Rohingya minority and was found on Tuesday on an island off the coast of Satun province, was captained by Sangkhom Paphan, a Thai from nearby Ranong province. Police said he was hired to transport the Rohingya to Malaysia and has been “charged with smuggling in illegal immigrants”, according to police general Suchart Theerasawat of the National Police Office. “He was paid 100,000 baht (about US$3,200) by a Myanmar man,” Suchart told AFP, adding that authorities were still interrogating him.

Junta chief-turned-prime minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha has instructed agencies “to speed up” investigation on whether the Rohingyas found were refugees or illegal laborers, said government spokesman Narong Chuchonthaiatsak. The 65 people, including women and children, are currently being detained in a police camp in Satun province. The persecuted Rohingya minority is denied citizenship in Myanmar and face severe restrictions on movement as well as lack of access to work, healthcare and schools. —AFP
Makkah Clock turns into tourist draw

See Page 21
High spirits: Study finds cannabis first used in C Asian funerals

A high burial site high in the Pamir Mountains, music from an ancient harp and the smell of burning cannabis and juniper incense fill the air, part of an elaborate ceremony to commune with the divine-and the dead. These rituals took place 2,500 years ago and represent the oldest known use of marijuana for its psychoactive properties, according to scientists who analyzed archeological remains in China’s western Xinjiang province using forensic technology.

Their findings were published in the journal Science Advances on Wednesday and place cannabis among the growing number of crops, practices and artifacts that were spread among the cultural traditions that spread along the early Silk Road. These included jade, horses, copper and, as the study’s lead archeobotanist, Robert Spengler, explains, cannabis.

“Our study implies that knowledge of cannabis smoking and specific high-chemical-producing varieties of the cannabis plant were among the cultural traditions that spread along these exchange routes.”

Intriguingly, Yang said that some of the people at this site were domesticated. The ancient cemetery is located more than 3,000 meters above sea level and has several notable characteristics.

Its surface is covered with black and white stones arranged into long strips, and dotted with numerous circular burial mounds with rings of stones underneath. The mounds find parallels in contemporaneous burial sites throughout Central Asia, suggesting shared culture and beliefs, but the purpose of the burners was not immediately clear.

Human sacrifice

The scientists analyzed the wooden burners and the burnt stones using gas chromatography - mass spectrometry (GCMS), a technique that is often applied in forensic analyses but has only recently been used to investigate ancient remains. They work by separating chemical mixtures and then identifying the components at the molecular level.

“Thus, to our excitement, we identified the biomarkers of cannabis notably the chemicals related to the psychoactive properties,” said Yang, the lead analyst for the study at the University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The cannabinoids detected on the wooden burners were mainly cannabinoil (CBN), which is what the main psychoactive component of cannabis, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), decomposes into when exposed to air.

This evidence-along with the recovery of other artifacts such as angel harps, an important musical instrument in ancient funerals, and burners made from juniper wood which release a potent pine fragrance-point to elaborate rituals carried out in a thick cloud of hallucinogenic smoke guiding people into an altered state of mind. Intriguingly, Yang said that some of the people at this site were domesticated.

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Makkah Clock turns into tourist draw

Like millions of other Muslims, Cory Ireza from Indonesia travelled to Makkah to pray in the Grand Mosque. But she also found a new attraction just a stone's throw away from Islam's holiest shrine. After performing the pilgrimage, Ireza, her husband Dodi and their two children were among the first visitors to a museum built inside the world's largest clock at the top of the globe's third tallest building. Overlooking the Kaaba, a black structure inside the Grand Mosque towards which Muslims around the world turn to pray, the four-storey Clock Tower Museum opened a month ago.

It is filled with models and structures on astronomy and galaxies, as Saudi authorities aim to lure more Muslim tourists to the country. "This museum allows us to bring the family not only for prayers but also for some extra activity... and recreation," Ireza said. Looking down from a height of around 600 meters (almost 2,000 feet) as thousands of worshippers walked around the Kaaba, Dodi said he felt "very emotional". Dozens of other visitors also took in the panoramic views of the mosque, the sprawling holy city and surrounding black mountains.

Clock hands

The four-faced Makkah Clock, as the museum is also known, with each face measuring 43 by 43 meters (47 yards), is the largest in the world and weighs some 36,000 tons. It is 35 times the size of the clock at Westminster in London, known colloquially as Big Ben. Equipped with protection against rain, sandstorms and winds, the clock is covered by a 100-million-piece glass mosaic adorned with 24-carat gold leaf. The Clock Tower is the main high-rise building in a complex of seven towers, comprising 3,000 hotel rooms and apartments.

The Abraj Al-Bait hotel complex is a multi-billion-dollar project built after the demolition of the historical Ottoman Ajyad fortress in 2002 that sparked a diplomatic rift with Turkey. The clock has a 128-metre-tall (420-foot) spire with a 23-metre golden crescent on top. By night over two million LEDs illuminate the clock, making it legible from distances of eight kilometres (five miles).

Among dozens of visitors to the museum, Amro Mohammed Masadi from southern Saudi Arabia, was busy reading information printed on glass boards. "Initially, I thought it was just a clock with normal minute hands, but I found a massive project... I've learnt new information about the age of the universe, the galaxies and other things," said Masadi, a Yemeni. In the first floor of the museum, visitors are introduced to the universe, the sky and galaxies with audio illustrations. The second floor is devoted to the sun and how the moon and the earth revolve around it.

Visitors to the third floor learn of instruments and methods used to determine time, and the balcony overlooking the Grand Mosque is on the top floor. When the call for prayers sounded, Masadi and others stood in line behind the fence for the midday prayers.

New vision

The museum is run by MISK, a non-profit organization headed by Saudi Arabia's powerful crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. Museum supervisor Yaseen Al-Mleaky said the Makkah Clock has received 1,200 visitors a day, with entrance costing $40, since it opened in the second week of May.

It will also be used to observe crescent moons and for lunar research, he said. In Prince Mohammed's Vision 2030 reform program to diversify the kingdom's economy away from oil, the kingdom aims to attract 30 million visitors to Makkah in 2030, up from the current 20 million. — AFP
Brides and grooms pose for a photo outside the Lisbon's cathedral following their wedding ceremony in Lisbon. — AFP photos

LISBON FETES ‘SAINT OF LOVE’ WITH FREE DELUXE WEDDINGS

It is Lisbon’s wedding of the year. Crowds gather at the cathedral, hoping to catch a glimpse of the newlyweds as cameras lie in wait. Suddenly, the organ music grows louder and photographers get into position in front of the imposing entrance. Then not one, but 11 couples walk out, fresh from tying the knot Wednesday in an all-expenses-paid ceremony, the beneficiaries of a decades-long annual tradition that fetes the Portuguese capital’s beloved patron Saint Anthony, matchmaker extraordinaire. Financed by sponsors and TV rights, broadcast live on television, couples who would not otherwise have the means are gifted a deluxe wedding worth 400,000 euros ($450,000).

Interviews, selfies

For Tania and her sister brides, the day begins early at city hall. For hours, they sit in front of identical mirrors in a room normally used for town hall meetings, Lisbon’s trademark trams passing in the street outside. Hairdressers and makeup artists who competed nationwide for the honor of styling them busy themselves around the brides, a television presenter diving in for the odd interview, an anxious parent taking a quick selfie. Tania’s slightly nervous. “I’m trying to keep calm but it’s difficult,” she says, laughing, as her hairdresser fixes her blond locks into an updo. In the room next door hang the white wedding dresses, all donated by different designers.

“Breathe,” jokes one bride as a helper tightens her lacy corset. All in all, 16 couples are getting married, five of them in a civil ceremony. They go first, appearing on the balcony of city hall after the event, waving down to a cheering crowd as a band from Lisbon University plays a serenade and a television drone films the moment. The 11 other couples are destined for the cathedral, some 650
Brides and grooms kiss after celebrating multiple wedding ceremonies at the city hall and the cathedral during Saint Anthony's day.

Brides and grooms parade along the streets of downtown Lisbon following their wedding ceremony at Lisbon's cathedral.

Brides and grooms kiss as they pose for a photo outside Lisbon's Cathedral following their wedding ceremony in Lisbon.

Brides and grooms pose for a photo following their civil ceremony at the Lisbon's city hall.

Brides get ready for their marriages before celebrating a multiple wedding ceremony in Lisbon.

Brides get ready for their marriages before celebrating a multiple wedding ceremony in Lisbon.

Brides and grooms kiss after celebrating multiple wedding ceremonies at the city hall and the cathedral during Saint Anthony's day.

Brides and grooms parade along the streets of downtown Lisbon following their wedding ceremony at Lisbon's cathedral.

Brides and grooms kiss as they pose for a photo outside Lisbon's Cathedral following their wedding ceremony in Lisbon.

Brides and grooms pose for a photo following their civil ceremony at the Lisbon's city hall.

Brides get ready for their marriages before celebrating a multiple wedding ceremony in Lisbon.

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meters (2,100 feet) away up a steep hill at the entrance of Lisbon's famed Alfama old quarter. The brides are driven up the cobbled street in convertible vintage cars, getting out one by one and forming an orderly line as they wait to enter. Two hours later, the couples walk out, married, smiling. There is still more to come. Group photos, the first dance, interviews, and another public appearance in a giant parade in the evening.

Single people too

The wedding tradition was created in 1958 by the now defunct Diario Popular newspaper. Dropped after the 1974 Carnation Revolution that overthrew the dictatorship, it was re-introduced by authorities in Lisbon in 1997. Its origins, though, are far older. Saint Anthony of Padua was a Portuguese Catholic priest born in the 12th century and widely believed to have potent matchmaking skills. To this day, single people are gifted statuettes representing him. At home, they are supposed to turn his face to the wall as a form of punishment until they find their soul mate. Only then can Saint Anthony face the room again.

Over the years, the wedding tradition has evolved, with civil ceremonies now included, says artistic director Luis Moreira, while numbers have dwindled from a peak of around 60 to Wednesday's 16 couples. “It's no longer called 'Saint Anthony's brides' like in the old regime when it was focused more on women and was used to help young women find a husband,” he adds. “With the equality of men and women's rights, it's become ‘the Weddings of Saint Anthony.’” One of the requirements for the 40 to 60 couples who apply every year is that at least one of the pair lives in Lisbon. “Lisbon's population is getting older. The idea is to rejuvenate the city, to attract young couples and give them a hand at the start of their life together,” says chief organizer Maria do Carmo Rosa. It is mostly about gifting “a dream wedding to people who would never have been able to afford it.” — AFP
For the Twelfth Year in a Row

NBK Sponsors Ceremony Honoring Outstanding High School Graduates

The National Bank of Kuwait sponsored for the twelfth year in a row the annual ceremony held by the Ministry of Education to honor high school graduates that have demonstrated an outstanding performance in the academic year 2018/2019 in the fields of sciences, arts and religious studies, as well as the best performing high school students from the private schools.

The ceremony was attended by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education (MOE), Dr. Saud Al-Harbi.

Speaking of the occasion, the Group Chief Executive Officer of the National Bank of Kuwait, Mr. Isam Al-Sager congratulated students that have graduated with leading results and expressed pride of their achievements and endeavors in achieving such exceptional results.

Al-Sager said: “NBK is sponsoring this event for the 12th consecutive year as part of its commitment to supporting the youth and their achievements, encouraging them and reminding them that they have a role to play in the future of our country, Kuwait.”

Al-Sager added that the Bank ensures it invests in education as part of its social responsibility framework that aims to support development in the country. He said: “NBK has become associated its name to with social responsibility and is committed towards its community and the country. Our support of such events reaffirms that commitment towards outstanding students and their ambitions and aspirations.”

He added the NBK believes in the capabilities of students and has initiated programs to offer them opportunities to be part of the advancement of Kuwait through professional development programs that aim to enhance their knowledge and skills.

Al-Sager: “NBK welcomes each year Kuwaiti talents that it guides and trains. The Bank also holds on-site visits for students from various schools and universities to familiarize them with the work processes and give them insights on how banks work and support the overall economy.”

Al-Sager called on students to continue working hard and plan for
their future by enrolling in fields that the country needs and invest their talents in supporting the achievement of Kuwait 2035 Vision.

On his part, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Saud Al-Harbi addresses the students and attendees at the ceremony and said the Ministry has invested all its resources to provide the tools for students to succeed and excel.

He reaffirmed that the Ministry is focused on nurturing positive values to help them be part of the development of their country.

Dr. Saud Al-Harbi said: “Every part of the society plays an important role in creating an environment that fosters excellence and advancement, starting from the family, which plants in its children the love of learning, to schools where children are enlightened and learn in collaborative environments thanks to teachers whom ensure their students reach the level of excellence we see today.”

He pointed out the private sector and the civil organizations have a role in building respectable and responsible citizens, and this is what the National Bank of Kuwait is doing annually by sponsoring this event.

During the ceremony, Dr. Saud Al-Harbi and Mr. Isam Al-Sager honored around 150 top performing students (Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis) in the disciplines of sciences, arts and religion as well as high school graduates from private schools. The ceremony also recognized students who have won in the scientific excellence competitions in which the Ministry of Education has participated at the level of Kuwait and the Gulf.

Dr. Saud Al-Harbi also recognized the National Bank of Kuwait for its contributions to education and its support to students at different educational levels, and presented Mr. Isam Al-Sager with an honorary plaque.

NBK is committed to supporting the Kuwaiti youth and educational programs that aim at developing their skill sets and equipping them with the knowledge they need for the future.

The Bank provides various forms of support to students through educational and training initiatives, including specialized training courses specifically designed for graduates.

NBK also provides training courses for school students during the summer that aim at familiarizing them with the banking sector and the workforce.

Other programs have also been developed to cater to university graduates such as the NBK Academy, the Youth Program, the Human Resources Programs and others.
Traditional tandoori chicken is marinated in yogurt and spices and roasted in a superhot tandoor oven to produce tender, flavorful meat and a beautiful char. To make it at home, we built a fragrant paste, blooming ginger and garlic in oil before adding garam masala, cumin and chili powder.

We used this paste twice, applying some directly to the meat, which we slashed so the flavors penetrated, and stirring the rest into yogurt for our marinade. Arranged on a wire rack set in a baking sheet, our chicken roasted gently and evenly in a moderate oven; a few minutes under the broiler delivered char. A quick raita cooled things down. If you are using large chicken breasts (about 1 pound each), cut each breast into three pieces. We prefer to use our homemade Garam Masala (recipe follows) and Everyday Chili Powder (recipe follows), but you can substitute store-bought spices. Serve with rice.

### How to make a traditional tandoori chicken - at home

**Ingredients**

**For the raita:**
- 1 cup plain whole-milk yogurt
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Salt
- Cayenne pepper
- Chicken:
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tablespoons grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1 cup plain whole-milk yogurt
- 1/4 cup lime juice (2 limes), plus lime wedges for serving
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 3 pounds bone-in chicken pieces (split breasts cut in half, drumsticks, and/or thighs), skin removed, trimmed

**Preparation**

For the raita: Combine yogurt, cilantro, and garlic in bowl and season with salt and cayenne to taste. Refrigerate until ready to serve. (Raita can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours).

For the chicken: Heat oil in 10 inch skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add garlic and ginger and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in garam masala, cumin, and chili powder and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Transfer half of garlic mixture to bowl and stir in yogurt and 2 tablespoons lime juice; set marinade aside. Combine remaining garlic mixture, remaining 2 tablespoons lime juice, and salt in large bowl. Using sharp knife, make 2 or 3 short slashes in each piece of chicken. Transfer chicken to large bowl and gently rub with garlic-lime juice mixture until all pieces are evenly coated. Let sit at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 325 F. Set wire rack in aluminum foil-lined rimmed baking sheet. Pour yogurt marinade over chicken and toss until chicken is evenly and thickly coated. Return chicken to wire rack in pan, scored sides down, on prepared rack; discard excess marinade. Roast chicken until breasts register 125 F and drumsticks/thighs register 130 F, 15 to 25 minutes. (Smaller pieces may cook faster than larger pieces. Remove pieces from oven as they reach correct temperature.)

Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Return chicken to wire rack in pan, scored sides up, and broil until chicken is lightly charred in spots and breasts register 160 F and drumsticks/thighs register 175 F, 8 to 15 minutes. Transfer chicken to serving platter, tent with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Serve with raita and lime wedges.
Beef usually hogs the spotlight when it comes to stews, but there are plenty of other meats that can star in this quintessential, cold-weather comfort food. This rich meat also takes well to many flavor combos, and in this recipe, some accessible, Mediterranean-inspired supporting ingredients turn the lamb into a truly delicious stew. If you are a chickpea lover, feel free to add a second can.

These instructions use an Instant Pot, the appliance of the decade. The Instant Pot is a plug-in pot that performs as a slow cooker, pressure cooker, rice cooker, yogurt maker and a few other impressive cooking tools. In this case, you will first be using the saute function and then the pressure cooker function to cook a tender stew in much less time than it would take otherwise.

Don’t have an Instant Pot? You can also make this stew in a slow cooker, just brown the meat in the slow cooker if it has a saute function and then the pressure cooker function to cook a tender stew in much less time than it would take otherwise.

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COOKING ON DEADLINE:
Instant Pot Mediterranean Lamb Stew

Ingredients

| Serving: 6 |
| Start to finish: 2 hours in the Instant Pot, 3 hours in a slow cooker, or 4 hours on the stovetop or in the oven |
| 1/4 cup flour |
| 1 teaspoon salt |
| 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper |
| 2 pounds 1-inch cubes lamb shoulder or lamb stew meat |
| 2 tablespoons olive oil, or as needed, divided |
| 1/2 cup sliced leeks |
| 1/2 cup chopped carrots |
| 1/2 cup chopped celery |
| 1/2 cup diced fennel |
| 1 teaspoon crushed dried rosemary |
| 1 (28-ounce) can diced or crushed tomatoes |
| 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed |
| 2 cups beef broth |
| 1 bay leaf |
| Chopped fresh parsley to serve |

Preparation

In a large shallow bowl combine the flour, salt and pepper. Add the lamb meat and toss to coat it. Place the inner pot into your Instant Pot. Press the Saute button, and then use the Saute or Adjust buttons (depending on your model) to select the “Normal” or middle temperature. Add 1 tablespoon of the olive oil to the pot, and let it heat for 1 minute. Add the lamb in two batches and brown on at least a few sides of the cubes, about 2 minutes per side (if you want to brown all of the sides, go ahead, but it’s not necessary, and often the pieces of meat aren’t really six-sided “cubes”). Remove the meat with a slotted spoon to a plate, add the remaining tablespoon olive oil if there is not oil in the pan, and repeat with the other half of the lamb.

Add the leeks, carrots, celery and fennel to the pot and saute without the lid on for 5 minutes, until everything is slightly tender. Stir in the rosemary for 1 minute. Add the tomatoes, chickpeas, broth, bay leaf and lamb, and stir to combine. Close and lock the lid.

Press Cancel, then press Manual or Pressure Cook and use the Pressure Level Button to select high pressure. Set the timer for 45 minutes. Note that the timer will not start to count down until the correct pressure has been achieved. When the Instant Pot beeps, press Cancel. Let the pressure come down slowly for 30 minutes. Release the sealing valve, remove the lid and serve hot in bowls, with parsley sprinkled over the stew.
For in-the-know travelers, the Azores have long represented a beckoning blip on the radar of possible destinations. Recognition from UNESCO and other organizations has helped that blip to pulse more brightly over the years.

But most people still know little, if anything, about this far-flung archipelago in the middle of the Atlantic. And yet it is hard to imagine a place better suited to nature lovers, fans of adventure sports, or anyone looking for a beacon of sustainability. As if that wasn’t tantalizing enough, there is a new reason to visit this autonomous region of Portugal: for the past few years there have steadily been more carriers, more choice and cheaper fares for travelers trying to reach this other Eden.

**About the Azores**

The exposed tips of vast underwater mountains, the Azores lie on the nexus of the European, American and African tectonic plates, and they bear witness to the forces forever shaping our planet. This is a world of fumaroles, mudpots and scalding springs; of caverns, columns and grottoes formed from once molten rock; of blue lakes ringed by forests of laurel and cedar, and green pastures patterning the slopes of calderas.

UNESCO designated three of them (Graciosa, Flores and Corvo) as biospheres, and the archipelago also contains 13 Ramsar sites (important wetlands) and over 30 Blue Flag beaches. Combine mineral-laden soil with a subtropical climate surrounded by Gulf Stream-warmed waters, and the result is a crucible for life.

Thankfully, Azoreans seem intent on preserving their treasures - the developed environment covers just five per
Up to a third of the world's cetaceans can be found in the waters around the Azores, including bottlenose dolphins.

Blue sharks and many other large pelagic species of fish are regular visitors in the mid-Atlantic.

The eruption of Capelinhos off the coast of Faial in 1957 gave geologists a ringside seat to observe the development of a submerged volcano.

The mild weather, warm water and variety of the coastline also make the Azores a year-round destination for watersports. The attractions for sailors are obvious and Azorean harbours host a calendar of regattas and events. Horta, the main town of Faial, is the cosmopolitan centre of this transatlantic traffic, and its marina has become an open-air gallery of murals painted by superstitious crews before they depart on their voyages.

Over the last decade, word of the Azores’ consistent, crowd-free surf has spread; Santa Maria and Sao Miguel have reliable beach and point breaks; aficionados, meanwhile, head to the fajas (flat land at the foot of cliffs) of Sao Jorge, where the Atlantic crashes upon reefs to create longer, tube-shaped waves. The conditions also make for great windsurfing, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, and other water-based activities, while those seeking something more restful can always take a dip in one of the swimming holes formed by lava as it cooled flowing into the sea.

ADVENTURES ON LAND

Geotourism

Anyone remotely interested in geology will be in their element. The islands’ topography speaks of their volcanic origin in dramatic fashion, but there is more to see than just craters and cones: cave systems, rock formations, hot
springs, and further ‘misterios’ (mysteries, the name given to lava-covered patches of land) await investigation.

The Capelinhos volcano that surged up from the seabed off Faial in 1957 is one of the best documented sites in the world; the interpretation centre beneath its now abandoned lighthouse does a superb job of explaining the Earth’s occasional convulsions.

On Pico, you can descend into one of the world’s longest lava tubes, the Gruta das Torres, to inspect rare stalagmites of lava, as well as bizarre forms resembling benches, balls and lengths of rope. Aside from a beautiful lake, the parish of Furnas on Sao Miguel has crowd-pleasing volcanic activity, including fumaroles and mudpots; Azoreans use the thermal heat to slow-cook their traditional cozido, a stew of meat and vegetables, under the ground. Try it, pig’s ear and all, at the art deco Terra Nostra Hotel, then slip into the thermal pool in the adjacent botanical gardens.

**Hiking**

At 7,713ft, Mt Pico is Portugal’s highest mountain. If conditions are right, the three-hour climb to catch sunrise or sunset is the Azores’ premier hiking experience; however, it faces stiff competition with about 60 marked trails crisscrossing the islands. A brochure shot par excellence, the twin crater lakes of Sao Miguel’s Setes Cidades are the focus of several routes. The two-hour trip from the Vista da Rei viewpoint to the caldera’s floor is a good primer to Azorean walking, but a hike down to the shore of mist-obscured Lagoa do Fogo has the edge. Composed of a sheer-sided ridge, Sao Jorge is a hiker’s daydream, but those whose eyes are forever drawn to the edges of a map should probably look to far-flung Flores, the westernmost point of Europe, a real-life Jurassic Park praised for its beauty even among Azoreans. And they should know.

**Other adventure sports**

Fans of adventure sports might find themselves paralyzed by indecision, such is the choice on offer. The many waterfalls cascading into ravines make for world-class canyoning. Between them, Sao Miguel, Santa Maria, Sao Jorge and Flores have more than 50 equipped routes, from small drops for beginners to hair-raising descents for pros.

Horse riders and mountain bikers are well catered for, and both forms of transport fit the islands’ eco-friendly ethos. Sao Miguel, Terceira and Faial have stables, and you can hire bikes on Sao Miguel, Santa Maria, Terceira, Sao Jorge, Pico and Faial, with trails ranging from ultra-technical tracks to gentle lakeside circuits. The Azores have also hosted a paragliding festival for the past 20 years. The rims of Sao Miguel’s craters make for ideal take-off points, and there can be no better way of appreciating this fantastical landscape than from above.
Comic

Word Search

ACROSS
1. European cave-dwelling aquatic salamander with permanent external gills.
2. A pointed instrument used to prod into motion.
3. A unit of length of thread or yarn.
4. Decreasing in amount or intensity.
5. A complex of concurrent things.
6. A member of the Semitic speaking people of the Old World.
7. A heavy brittle metallic element of the platinum group.
8. A member of the Algonquian people of Maine and southern Quebec.
9. (prefix) Indicating difference or variation.
10. A ridge of sand created by the wind.

DOWN
1. A formal expression of praise.
2. Jordan’s port.
3. A material effigy that is worshipped as a god.
5. A rare chronic progressive encephalitis caused by the measles virus and occurring primarily in children and young adults.
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12:20   Crimes That Shook Britain
07:20   The First 48
06:00   Homicide: Hours To Kill
03:45   Live PD: Police Patrol
02:50   It Takes A Killer
23:35   Doctors
21:55   Agatha Raisin
20:10   Press
17:25   Animal Cops Houston
16:30   Everest: Beyond The Limit
11:55   Wild Appalachia
07:00   Meet The Penguins
03:25   Lone Star Law
02:00   True Conviction
23:40   The Next Great Magician
22:50   Xtreme Waterparks
22:00   How It's Made
21:10   Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
20:20   The Carbonar Effect
20:00   Storm Chasers
19:50   The Next Great Magician
19:00   Kids Do The Craziest Things
18:20   The Mystery Museum
17:50   Bad Dog
17:40   Breaking Magic
17:35   Billy And The Ghost
17:25   Xtreem Waterpark
17:20   The Carbonar Effect
16:50   Storm Chasers
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13:30   Homicide: Hours To Kill
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You have a great desire for change. Your career or something concerning your profession seems to be preventing it. You have a deep desire for self-growth and change now. It seems if you continue on the same career path this will be a huge interference for you. You may find that your sensitivity is stilted by your job requirements. Too much work and no play is never a good thing. Find your balance.

Wisdom rather than knowledge is what counts most in your life to you now. You have been down troubled roads and turned each stumbling block into a stepping stone. You have lived and learned and may have an opportunity to share this wisdom with a troubled friend. Don't get discouraged if your advice is overlooked. Remember, no one could have changed your mind about some of the mistakes you made. Realize others too, may have to experience trouble to learn the lessons that are to be learned in their lives. You are a good friend and a good person. You may find today you are shown appreciation and gratitude for who you are to others.

You may encounter an unusual amount of stress today. Counter it by taking time for yourself to do what you enjoy most. Paint, write, or escape with a good book. Yoga or meditation may even be something you should consider making a part of your daily routine. Be careful not to let yourself off too easy from those who care about you. If you have support is important. Do not try to conquer every problem on your own.

Aries (March 21-April 19)

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

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Health
I, Melissa Jessica, Mangaf, Block 4, Street 25, Floor 5, Kuwait, holder of Indian Passport No. J5549911, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare, the name change as Surname Rodrigues and given name Melissa Jessica. (C 5550) 14-6-2019

Hussain Shabbir Gubbuji H. 9 Sacrea heart town, Wanwadi Pune, 411040, India. Holder of Indian Passport No. MR390452, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare, the name change as surname Gubbuji and given name Hussain Shabbir. (C 5549) 13-6-2019

I, Abdul Khadar Sheeja Beegum, Vilakampurayidom, near T.I., Pathanamthitta P.O, Pathanamthitta, Pin-689645, Kerala, India, holder of Indian Passport No. T4012709, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare, the name change as given name Sheeja Beegum and Surname Abdul Khadar. (C 5547)

I, Pakkir Mohamed Arver Ali, holder of Indian Passport No. RS4568998 wish to correct my name as given name Pakkir Mohamed Sumame Arver Ali, hereinafter in all my documents my name will appear as Arver Ali Pakkir Mohamed. (C 5546)

I, CHADERVATI, holder of Indian Passport No. S3691440, 967 Street 31 Pushpa Bhawan, Dr. Ambedkar Nagar, New Delhi, 110062, would like to change my name to CHADERVATI, Passport No. A6554388, 967 Street 31 Pushpa Bhawan, Dr. Ambedkar Nagar, New Delhi, 110062. (C 5548) 11-6-2019
Oil surges after Gulf tanker attacks, stocks claw higher

Hong Kong shares drop after street protests

LONDON: Suspected attacks on two tankers off the coast of Iran saw oil markets erupt out of their recent slump yesterday and kept traders gobbling up ultra-safe government bonds, gold and the Japanese yen. Brent surged as much 4 percent after reports of the attacks added to the already-heightened tensions between Iran and the United States.

The area is near the Strait of Hormuz through which a fifth of global oil consumption passes from Middle East producers. Europe’s oil producers moved higher in the region’s stock markets. Shares were also lifted by some stellar gains in the telecoms sector as Germany dished out licenses for its new 5G mobile network to some new entrants. “Whenever you have an incident in the Arabian Gulf a little bit of nervousness always starts to kick in about that particular artery getting clogged up,” CMC Markets senior analyst Michael Hewson said.

Given that oil was at 5-month lows yesterday, people are taking precautions that it might escalate into something further. “But personally I think it will be much like in the past where you get a spike higher but ultimately it doesn’t change the underlying supply and demand dynamics,” Hewson said. Asia had been a different story. Hong Kong’s Hang Seng had dropped sharply for a second day as public tensions continued there about a bill which would allow extradition to China. Doubts were growing too about any improvement in what U.S. President Donald Trump called ‘testy’ trade relations with China before this month’s G20 summit and some market anxiety emerged that Federal Reserve rate cut speculation may have been overdone. Investors will be looking to what Fed policymakers will say after their next policy meeting on June 18-19, with Fed Funds rate futures pricing in a 25-basis-point rate cut for the subsequent policy review on July 30-31.

Rate expectations

That is completely at odds with the Fed’s projection three months ago, when policy makers saw gradual rate hikes in coming years. “The US real economy has not worsened that much. But given market expectations, the Fed will have no choice but to cut rates,” said Koiti Koide, chief economist at Asset Management One.

The 10-year US Treasuries yield dopped to 2.03 percent, near Friday’s 2.083 percent, its lowest level since September 2017, while Germany borrowing costs sank back towards all-time lows in Europe. Bond yields also fell in Asia. Long-dated Japanese government bond yields hit their lowest levels since August 2016, with 20-year yield down 2.5 basis points at 0.220 percent, before they rose back on a weak 30-year bond auction.

In Australia, long known for its high-yield currency, rates fell to record lows, with three-year yield now slipping below 1 percent after jobs data pointed to another interest rate cut in July to follow one last week. In the currency market, the yen gained 0.2% to 108.32 to the dollar as risk sentiment soured while the Australian dollar dropped 0.25% to $0.6910.

The euro stood little changed at $1.1293, having taken a hit on Wednesday after Trump said he was considering sanctions over Russia’s Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline project and warned Germany against being dependent on Russia for energy. The pound stayed subdued after British lawmakers defeated an attempt led by the opposition Labor Party to try to block a no-deal Brexit by seizing control of the parliamentary agenda from the government, Sterling fetched $1.2670, not far from this week’s low of $1.2653. “The risk aversion and falling stock markets are supporting the yen as usual,” said Bart Wakabayashi, Tokyo branch manager for State Street Bank and Trust. “The Australian dollar’s underperformance is also a booster for the yen.” —Reuters
FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Fear of trade conflicts, sanctions and challenges to the multi-lateral order contributed to a rebound in worldwide use of the euro in 2018 from historic lows, the European Central Bank said yesterday. “It’s primarily the diversification out of the dollar which benefits the euro, because it is the second-most used currency and second-most liquid for investors,” ECB board member Benoit Coeure told reporters in Frankfurt.

Aside from commercial tensions, internal reforms within the eurozone to deepen the economic and monetary union between the members also helped, the ECB found in its annual report on the euro’s global role. Euros made up some 20.7 percent of global foreign currency reserves in 2018, measured at constant exchange rates up 1.2 percentage points year-on-year. Meanwhile, the dollar remained top dog, but fell to its lowest share since the euro’s launch 20 years ago, at 61.7 percent.

“Some central banks might have started to consider reducing their positions in financial assets exposed to the risks of unilateral actions,” the ECB said. Russia—one of the world’s biggest holders of reserves-sold $100 billion in 2018 after a new round of American sanctions, instead buying up $90 billion worth of euros and Chinese yuan. The central bank also found that the proportion of new foreign currency banknotes and coins in circulation issued grew 2.5 percentage points last year, to 22.7 percent, while the dollar’s share shrunk by eight points to below 61 percent.

And the proportion of international payments for goods and services in euros held steady. Looking ahead, “the international role of the euro should be decided by market forces,” Coeure said, although the ECB is able to support it “in the technical field.” “For instance by supporting the integration of European payments, that can make it easier, faster and cheaper for international investors to use euro denominated assets.”

Meanwhile, strengthening the economic and monetary union between euro member countries should also provide the foundation for use of the currency to grow internationally, the European Commission prodded member states Wednesday to complete reforms to the single currency bloc, including an embryonic joint budget for the 19 member states–on the agenda at a “Eurogroup” finance ministers’ meeting yesterday. —AFP

Renault, French govt trade blame over failed Fiat deal

PARIS: French officials rejected yesterday any blame for the abandoned tie-up of Renault and the US-Italian automaker Fiat Chrysler, a day after Renault’s chairman said the government had blocked a vote on a deal that would have upended the global automotive industry.

“We did not derail the wedding between Re- nault and Fiat,” French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told France Info radio ahead of a meeting with Renault chairman Jean-Do minique Senard.

Senard told shareholders at Renault’s AGM on Wednesday that board directors represent- ing the French state, which owns 15 percent of the carmaker, had demanded more time to study the tie-up. In particular the government wanted to clarify the future role of Renault’s Japanese partners Nissan and Mitsubishi, which had been informed only at the last minute of the potential mega-merger with Fiat.

“Rarely have I seen a merger project able to produce such significant synergies, and with- out having negative consequences in terms of jobs and livelihoods,” Senard told shareholders. He also revealed that it was Le Maire himself who suggested he reach out to Fiat executives on a possible deal. But just over a week after proposing a merger that got a warm welcome from Renault and its investors, Fiat’s president John Elkann said trying to push ahead with the deal would be “unreasonable”. The deal’s sudden collapse was a stunning blow to Senard, who was brought in just months ago to help get the carmaker back on track after the shock ar rest of former Renault and Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn last November in Tokyo. Renault officials later had to deny claims he was considering resigning over the matter.

But Le Maire said Thursday that the French state, which owns 15 percent of Renault’s stock, “didn’t veto the project.” “We simply asked, after seeing that Nissan was not going to give its backing, for five more days to study the operation,” he said. Le Maire defended his re quest for more time as “reasonable,” saying the scope of the merger “required that the Japanese partner be associated with it and in the end in favor of it.”

“Our strategy has always been... the rein forcement of the Renault-Nissan alliance. It’s at the heart of Renault’s as well as Nissan’s profitability. We’re not going to change our strategy every five minutes,” he said. He later met with Senard at the finance ministry to dis cuss the automaker’s strategy going forward. “They had an excellent discussion regarding the future of both Renault and the alliance” with Nissan and Mitsubishi, an official in Le Maire’s cabinet told AFP.

“Le Maire renewed his confidence in Senard and reiterated that the goal is to consolidate the alliance with Nissan,” he said. Renault de clined to comment on the meeting, acknowl edging only that the two men had spoken regularly, including before Wednesday’s AGM.

Senard did not rule out trying again to reach a deal with Fiat or another, telling share holders that “to my mind, this project remains a remarkable and exceptional proposal”. “As to what the future holds, I can’t say,” he added. The merger would have created the world’s third-largest automaker, surpassing both Volkswa gen and Toyota in annual vehicle sales. But including Renault’s alliance partners Nissan and Mitsubishi, it would have been an industry behemoth selling some 15 million cars and trucks a year.

A combination would also have allowed them to pool investments into costly electric motor and autonomous driving technologies, an area where Renault has spent aggressively while Fiat has lagged behind. It’s a key chal lenge for the industry as governments world wide tackle carbon emissions and the mobility challenges stemming from rapid urbanization. A merger would also have bulked up their positions in Europe, while giving Re nault access to the crucial North American market and Fiat a foothold in Latin America, Russia and Asia.—AFP
Netflix gets its game on at E3 with Stranger Things’

LOS ANGELES: Netflix on Wednesday made its first formal appearance at the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo, showcasing plans for video games based on hit original shows such as ‘Stranger Things.’ The streaming television powerhouse is looking to expand its original shows into other media, and the idea for a ‘Stranger Things’ video game sprang up after its successful first season, Netflix director of interactive gaming Chris Lee said during a panel discussion at the premier industry gathering known as E3.

“It was like music to my ears,” Lee said. “We are actually hoping to bring people into our franchises through games.” A free ‘Stranger Things’ mobile game was released in late 2017 before the second season of the supernatural thriller series. ‘A Stranger Things 3’ video game tailored for play on PlayStation, Switch, and Xbox consoles as well as personal computers is set for release on July 4 as a download priced at $19.99.

Netflix this year will also release an eponymous turn-based strategy game spanning an original ‘The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance’ television series based on a dark puppet animated film from 1982 directed by Jim Henson and Frank Oz. Netflix partnered with video game developer BonuxP and the Henson Company on the project. The ‘Dark Crystal’ is one of my favorite fantasy films of all time, so it was a bucket-list item for me to be part of this game,” said BonuxP president Dave Pottinger.

“The challenge with Dark Crystal is living up to 30 years of fandom and the expectation that comes with that.” Stranger Things writers are gamers, as are the show’s characters and many of its fans, so a full-blown title building on adventures in the series was a natural fit, according to show writer Paul Dichter. The game aims to stay true to the original horror fiction series while adding extra content to the storyline.

“One of the fun parts of taking something so serious as ‘Stranger Things’ and turning it into a game is we get to latch onto levity and make the most of those moments,” Pottinger said, noting that one of the game character’s fighting skills features hair spray. Lee revealed that a new ‘Stranger Things’ role-playing puzzle game for mobile devices will be released next year, and that Netflix is working with Ubisoft, Roblox and Behavior Interactive on games extending characters and worlds from original shows.

He joked that as much as Netflix loves its popular ‘Black Mirror’ series portraying disturbingly dark outcomes of technology, it has no plans in the works for anything based on the new episode ‘Striking Vipers’—the story of which revolves around two friends who have sexual encounters in a virtual game world. Lee did reveal, though, that ‘Stranger Things’ will be popping up in ‘Fortnite’ on the heels of an ‘easter egg’ recently spotted in the battle royale video game sensation. Netflix has been interested in making videos more interactive for some time, and recently released a Black Mirror episode called ‘Bandersnatch’ that lets viewers make choices that influence the story. Executives promised there will be more interactive shows at the service. “This one has storytellers salivating,” Netflix chief content officer Ted Sarandos said of the interactive Black Mirror episode during an earnings presentation.—AFP

EU ministers collide over mini eurozone budget

LUXEMBOURG: EU finance ministers will consider a set of watered-down eurozone reforms yesterday but may yet struggle to sign off on them, in a setback to France, which championed an ambitious overhaul to the eurozone budget remains under the auspices of the EU budget.

The skeleton of Macron’s original plan comes after months of negotiating the broad elements of the budget, including its spending priorities, source of revenues, and who should ultimately wield control over its decisions. A European source said it was the last element that would keep ministers talking into the night in Luxembourg, with the Netherlands and others insisting the budget remains under the auspices of the EU budget.

As such, the budget’s firepower would remain at a modest 17 billion euros over seven years with no chance of expansion and under the authority of the EU’s 27 member states (after the exit of Britain). But France’s vision is far more ambitious: Paris contends that the today’s modest budget will grow over time and sows the seeds for a more unified eurozone in the future.

Long night

“It’s true that the night will be long. These budget questions take time,” said a French finance ministry source, with ministers expected to clear the way for formal decisions at an EU summit on June 21 in Brussels. Ignored for now is a Europe-wide deposit insurance scheme, which is supposed to be the last pillar of an EU banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis. “Regrettably, the impasse on banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis.

Peripheral bonds sell at record levels

LONDON: A firesale of peripheral debt from Italy, Spain and Portugal has drawn strong investor demand despite the record low yields on offer, and some expectation that the EU will discipline Italy over its excessive debt. With euro zone bond yields offering ultra-low or negative returns, the carry trade is on, analysts say, meaning that each of the three peripheral bond issuers were met with strong demand in Wednesday’s sales.

The term “carry” refers to a trade where investors take advantage of low short-dated borrowing costs to pick up some yield by buying longer-dated debt. Worries about economic growth as well as trade disputes are seeing core euro zone bond yields hit multi-year or all-time lows, but spreads are also tightening, suggesting there is a hunt for yield which is benefiting the periphery.

“ Usually you would expect spreads to widen but carry is so low in the core, which is why the periphery is doing so well,” said Daniel Lenz, rates strategist at DZ Bank. Italy is expected to be a key focus at this month’s Eurogroup meeting on Thursday, analysts said, amid concerns over its heavy public debt load. European Economics Commissioner Pierre Moscovici said on Wednesday Italy should present a credible fiscal path for this year and next if it still wants to avoid European Union disciplinary action over its debt.

Also on Wednesday, Italy’s Economy Minister Giovanni Tria said the country must reduce its “enormous” public debt to shore up market confidence. However, investors were undeterred by such concerns, placing orders of more than 23.5 billion euros for a 20-year syndicated bond. A further test will come later yesterday as the sovereign looks to sell up to 6.5 billion euros of government bonds or BTPs at auction.

Spain raised 6 billion euros of 10-year debt via syndication at a yield of 0.6229%, or 33 basis points over mid-swaps. Portugal sold 1.25 billion euros of 10- and 15-year bonds in an auction on Wednesday at a record low yield. State debt agency IGCP said the allotment yield on the benchmark June 2029 maturity fell to 0.639%, way below 1.059% at the previous auction in May, and the first time Portugal has sold 10 year debt below 1%.—Reuters
WASHINGTON: Uber Technologies Inc unveiled its newest Volvo self-driving car in Washington on Wednesday as it works to eventually deploy vehicles without drivers under some limited conditions. Uber said the new production XC90 SUVs will be assembled by Volvo Cars in Sweden and have human controls like steering wheels and brake pedals, but also with factory-installed steering and braking systems designed for computer rather than human control.

Uber Advanced Technologies Group chief scientist Raquel Urtasun showed off the company’s artificial intelligence technology that allows it to drive autonomously for long distances on highways without maps and “on the fly” to plot its course and navigate construction zones. “Our goal is get each one of you to where you want to go much better, much safer, cheaper,” Urtasun said. As the race to push out autonomous cars across the globe heats up, other companies are also working to deploy self-driving vehicles in limited areas.

Ford Motor Co’s majority-owned autonomous vehicle unit, Argo AI, launched its new fleet of self-driving test vehicles - Ford Fusion Hybrid - in Detroit on Wednesday, expanding to five US cities. The No. 2 US automaker also opened a research center in Tel Aviv, joining a growing number of major automakers and suppliers setting up shop in Israel’s tech hub. General Motors Co in January 2018 sought permission from US regulators to deploy a ride-sharing fleet of driverless cars without steering wheels or other human controls before the end of 2019 but is still struggling to win regulatory approval.

Alphabet Inc’s Waymo unit is operating a robotic taxi service in Arizona and said last month it is partnering with Lyft Inc to serve more riders. South Korea’s Hyundai Motor Co and Kia Motors Corp both said they would invest in the self-driving car software startup Aurora and speed up development of their respective autonomous vehicle technologies. Carmakers have struggled to maintain profits margins faced with the rising costs of making electric, connected and autonomous cars. As a result, they are setting up alliances and lining up outside investors to combat spiraling development costs.

Previously, Uber had purchased about 250 Volvo XC90 SUVs and retrofitted them for self-driving use. The new vehicles - known by the internal code number 519G and under development for several years - are safer, more reliable and will replace the older vehicles in Uber’s fleet “soon,” according to Eric Meyhofer, the head of Uber’s Advanced Technologies Group. “This is about going to production,” Meyhofer said in an interview at an Uber conference in Washington on Tuesday. The new vehicle also has several backup systems for both steering and braking functions as well as backup battery power and new cybersecurity systems.

**Human control**

Uber is not ready to deploy vehicles without human controls, Meyhofer said. “We’re still in a real hybrid state,” he said. “We have to get there and we’re not going to get to thousands of cars in a city overnight. It’s going to be a slower introduction.” The new XC90 vehicles have an interior fish-eye camera to scan for lost items, Uber said. They also do not have sunroofs since the self-driving vehicles have large sensors on the roof and are equipped with auto-close doors to prevent an unsafe departure.

Uber, which has taken delivery of about a dozen prototypes of the new vehicle, but has not yet deployed them on public roads, said the car’s “self-driving system will one day allow for safe, reliable autonomous ridesharing without the need” for a safety driver. Asked if Uber will deploy self-driving cars without safety drivers in limited areas in the next few years, Meyhofer said: “Yes - way before that.”

But he added that Uber wants to be in “the good graces of public trust and regulatory trust” before making the business decision to deploy. In December, Uber resumed limited self-driving car testing on public roads in Pittsburgh, nine months after it suspended the program following a deadly accident in Arizona. In March 2018, authorities in Arizona suspended Uber’s ability to test its self-driving cars after one of its XC90 cars hit and killed a woman crossing the street at night in the Phoenix suburb of Tempe, then Uber’s largest testing hub. The crash was the first death attributed to a self-driving vehicle.

In March 2019, prosecutors in Arizona said the company was not criminally liable in the crash and would not pursue charges. —Reuters
Regulated futures boom as investors seek a safer ride

LONDON: When bitcoin was born it was a symbol of counterculture, a rebel currency with near-anonymity and a lack of regulation. A decade later, there are growing signs it’s entering the establishment its creators sought to subvert. As the cryptocurrency has surged in value bigger investors, from trading firms to hedge funds, have increasingly turned to exchanges regulated in traditional financial centers. They are buying bitcoin futures to gain exposure to the asset while avoiding the hacks and heists that plague the industry.

The crypto market, associated by many with concerns over electricity vehicles and automated driving are “close to completion,” the German company’s chief executive Herbert Diess said yesterday. The two manufacturers said in January that they would collaborate on electric vehicles with Cybercars, a London-registered platform, plans to offer bitcoin futures in the coming months through a new crypto-trading platform, Balikt. “It’s logical they (institutional investors) would want to be moving in this direction, especially considering their size and how much more there is at stake,” said Joel Kruger, currency strategist at LMAX Exchange Group.

Futures - financial contracts that lock buyers and sellers into trading an asset at a set date and price - are seen as key components of any major futures market, as they boost market liquidity and allow investors to bet on the direction of prices. “It’s a useful hedging instrument,” said Daniel Matuszewski, head of trading at Goldman Sachs. “Futures make you set a price at a certain time, which is easier to trade, much easier to use for hedging, much easier to get leverage on.” Playing out in the spiking demand is the emergence of a twin-track global bitcoin futures market - on “onshore” exchanges like CME and “offshore” exchanges, which are more lightly regulated and still command the bulk of the multi-billion-dollar daily market.

Offshore exchanges - those regulated in established financial centers - are usually subject to strict checks on governance, technology and client vetting. They demand a high degree of transparency. Offshore platforms, in contrast, are typically registered in jurisdictions with less onerous rules. They tend to accept business from investors who can sign up with few checks on their identity or the provenance of their funds.

Larger investors, bound by strict compliance rules, are heading to regulated platforms in financial hubs like CME, according to industry players. Offshore platforms, in contrast, are typically registered in jurisdictions with less onerous rules. They tend to accept business from investors who can sign up with few checks on their identity or the provenance of their funds.

Onshore exchanges - those regulated in established financial centers - are usually subject to strict checks on governance, technology and client vetting. They demand a high degree of transparency. Offshore platforms, in contrast, are typically registered in jurisdictions with less onerous rules. They tend to accept business from investors who can sign up with few checks on their identity or the provenance of their funds.

Stars have aligned

Offshore exchanges have offered bitcoin futures since as early as 2017. One of the biggest, Seychelles-registered BitMEX, said it now accounts for over 65% of global cryptocurrency derivatives trading. Trading volumes were over $4.3 billion in May, it said. BitMEX CEO Arthur Hayes said, however, that larger investors were being increasingly drawn to onshore exchanges like CME. “It’s the perfect product (for bigger investors) - it’s US-dollar based, they never have to touch actual bitcoin, it’s financially settled,” he said. The launch by CME and rival Cboe Global Markets in December 2017 marked the first time mainstream exchanges offered cryptocurrency derivatives. They initially faced tepid demand. Cboe said in March, when bitcoin sank below $4,000, that it planned to discontinue its futures, with the final contracts expiring this month. For their part, CME’s futures have typically seen thin liquidity and high barriers to entry for smaller investors, said Ricky Li of crypto trader Althonyn in New York.

The growing gap in the market for futures from onshore exchanges is stimulating growing competition and attracting new entrants, such as CME. Rio Court, head of cryptocurrency pricing products at Crypto Facilities, said compliance-wary institutional investors had been assessing the various futures products offered by regulated exchanges for some time, as they awaited a spike in prices to allow them to enter the market. “This is the first time those stars have aligned,” he said.—AFP

VW says cooperation talks with Ford ‘close to completion’

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Car giant Volkswagen’s cooperation with US-based Ford on electric and automated driving are “close to completion”, the German company’s chief executive Herbert Diess said yesterday. The two manufacturers said in January that they would collaborate on electric vehicles and automated driving are “close to completion”, the German company’s chief executive Herbert Diess said yesterday. The two manufacturers said in January that they would collaborate on electric vehicles and automated driving are “close to completion”, the German company’s chief executive Herbert Diess said yesterday. The two manufacturers said in January that they would collaborate on electric vehicles and automated driving are “close to completion”, the German company’s chief executive Herbert Diess said yesterday. The two manufacturers said in January that they would collaborate on electric vehicles and automated driving are “close to completion”, the German company’s chief executive Herbert Diess said yesterday.

“Talks on cooperation with Ford on (electric vehicle platforms and autonomous driving) are going well and are close to completion,” Diess told a meeting of almost 500 Volkswagen managers in Wolfsburg. In March, Diess said Ford could be granted a license to use VW’s Modular Electric Toolkit “MEB” platform - the technical underpinnings of all the future electric cars planned by the German giant.

In exchange, Ford could offer its Argo AI automated driving technology to VW, which this week gave its US self-driving tech startup Aurora. According to press reports, Ford and Volkswagen could announce that the German company is taking a stake in Argo AI in the coming weeks. “The Ford partnership is of paramount geostrategic importance for the company,” Diess said yesterday.

“Without a strong engagement in the USA, we risk finding ourselves cornered in global trade conflicts,” he said. “Today we are a company very strongly linked to China. We added, manufacturerers are increasingly banding together to foot the massive investments required to develop next-generation cars. Mercedes-Benz maker Daimler and BMW, who have been fierce rivals for years, are working together on automated driving, while BMW is developing electric motors with Jaguar Land Rover.”

Trump-bashing exhibit gets booted from China tech show

SHANGHAI: A Shanghai tech fair exhibit that allowed visitors to clobber a bobble-head likeness of Donald Trump has been closed down for encouraging the “violent disrespect” of a public figure, organizers said yesterday. The kiosk at this week’s Consumer Electronics Show Asia (CES Asia) was set up by Japanese tech firm Soliton Systems as a “stress-relief” station. Visitors were given a hammer to smash a life-sized likeness of the US president, who has angered many Chinese by launching a tariff war with China.

The US Consumer Technology Association (CTA) — which stages the show each year — told AFP it issued a “warning” to Soliton Systems on Thursday. A curtain was seen drawn across the display site on Thursday, and the Trump likenesses had been removed. The association told AFP that exhibitors sign contracts making clear that displays cannot be “offensive”. “We will not tolerate violent disrespect of any public figure,” Soliton Systems officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

The three-day trade show opened on Tuesday under the shadow of the escalating trade war. China and the United States have hit each other with steep tariffs on more than $360 billion in bilateral trade, rattling financial markets and business confidence. Technology is a key battleground, with the United States pressing governments across the world to drop Chinese telecom giant Huawei from their 5G networks. Development plans, saying it could be used by Beijing for espionage, Huawei denies the charge.—AFP
Chris Froome’s surgery successful, back racing in six months: Surgeon

Froome was airlifted to hospital in Saint Etienne for emergency surgery

Saint-Etienne: Four-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome has undergone a successful four-hour operation following a devastating crash and could be back racing in six months, his surgeon said yesterday.

Froome was airlifted to hospital in Saint Etienne for emergency surgery after slamming into a wall at high speed during practice on Wednesday ahead of the fourth stage of the Critérium du Dauphiné race in central France.

The force of the impact fractured his pelvis, right femur, and left him with broken ribs and a broken right elbow. “The operation was long, almost four hours, but it went very well,” said Remi Philippot, chief surgeon for sports trauma at Saint-Etienne hospital. He said the good news was that the high-impact crash had caused no neurological or head trauma and he expected Froome would be back in the saddle in six months. “The impact was at around 50 km/h, with very little body protection, causing a high-energy impact,” said Philippot, who spoke to Froome yesterday morning for one hour. “Chris Froome has the morale of a winner and is very rapidly bouncing back. “He started asking immediately when he could get back on his bike. He should be back racing in about six months,” said Philippot. He personally operated on the compound fracture to the femur while Gaetano Gesta, an orthopaedic surgeon and former Italian hockey international, worked on fractures to the right elbow.

Philippot said the 34-year-old Briton would remain in intensive care for 48 hours before being authorised to move to a unit specialising in rehabilitation. Froome’s Ineos team principal Dave Brailsford said his star rider had the mental force needed in the battle for recovery that lay ahead. “One of the things which sets Chris apart is his mental strength and resilience - and we will support him totally in his recovery, help him to recalibrate and assist him in pursuing his future goals and ambitions.” The team will nevertheless be without their key rider for the Tour de France next month after the horror crash which happened on a downhill stretch of road in the Loire region.

Froome was riding with Dutch teammate Wout Poels when he lost control of his bike and slammed into the wall of a house at full speed. “We have had a look at his data, he went from 54km/h to a dead stop,” Brailsford said.

The accident happened in the village of Saint-André d’Apchon. Froome had taken his hands off the handlebars in order to blow his nose “and the wind’s taken his front wheel and he’s hit a wall,” Brailsford added.

Following treatment at the scene Froome was airlifted to intensive care at Saint-Etienne hospital. Froome’s wife Michelle Coupland tweeted that she was on her way to join him there and asked fans to keep the rider “in your thoughts.” Brailsford said Froome had worked “incredibly hard to get in fantastic shape and had been on track for the Tour” which starts on July 6 from Brussels. The Critérium du Dauphiné represents a full dress rehearsal and Froome was doing well, in eighth spot before the crash.

Tour de France director Christian Prudhomme said Froome’s absence was a blow to the 2019 edition of cycling’s biggest stage race. “The Tour de France won’t be the same without him. Chris Froome has been the central character at the Tour since 2013,” he said.

Froome had started the year in low-key form. He trailed in 91st in the Tour of Colombia, 94th at the Tour of Catalonia, 11th in the Tour of the Alps and 13th at the Tour de Yorkshire.

The Kenyan-born Froome, who at his best combines top level time-trialling skills with a fearsome prowess for climbing, first won the Tour in 2013 with Team Sky. He went on to win the Tour de France again in 2015, 2016 and 2017. He also won the 2017 Vuelta a España and the 2018 Giro d’Italia, making him the greatest Grand Tour rider of his generation. — AFP

Tanak looking to keep pressure on Ogier in Sardinia

ALGHERO: Estonia’s Ott Tanak returns to the scene of his first podium and world championship win at the Rally of Italy on Sardinia this weekend with the Toyota driver looking to notch up a third straight win this season to keep the pressure on world champion Sébastien Ogier. The 31-year-old Tanak claimed his first podium on the Mediterranean island back in 2012 and his first world rally championship win in Sardinia five years later. After a complicated start to the season Tanak, third overall in the past two seasons, has gotten “back in the fight” with wins in the last two rallies in Chile and Portugal.

Three wins from seven races have made up for his disappointing sixth place in Corsica after a puncture and eighth in Argentina following mechanical problems. But the Estonian has now moved to within two points of six-time world champion Ogier.

At mid-season, it’s a tight battle between the top three with Citroen’s Ogier leading with 142 points, two ahead of Tanak with Belgian Thierry Neuville third ten points adrift of the leader. — AFP

Tonga offer sacked Folau WCup lifeline

SYDNEY: Tonga coach Toutai Kefu wants sacked Wallabies Israel Folau to play for the Pacific island nation at the 2023 World Cup and has been in touch about switching allegiances, a report said yesterday. The devoutly Christian fullback was given the ax last month after a string of controversial posts on social media.

Folau, who is of Tongan heritage, has launched legal action through Australia’s employment watchdog the Fair Work Commission.

Given he has already represented Australia, Folau cannot switch immediately and play for another country. But under a loophole in World Rugby regulations, he could apply to play for Tonga’s national side if he sits out three years of international rugby and then represents Tonga at Sevens in an Olympic qualifying event.

Kefu, a former Wallabies No.8, is keen to have Folau on board and while yet to speak personally with the 30-year-old, suggested contact had been made with his team.”We’d love to have him... the next World Cup he’d be available for us hopefully,” he told the newspaper.

“It’s a long time away, so we’ll let the dust settle a bit after his most recent issues. We don’t even know if he’s going to play again. “He hasn’t indicated where he is going, so we’ll wait until the dust settles and then look at those options.”

Another enticement is that Folau’s brother John, who was on the books of Super Rugby club NS Wide Bay but quit in solidarity with his sibling, is expected to be named in the Tonga squad for the upcoming Pacific Nations Cup (PNC).

This could open the door to him playing for the Pacific nation at the Japan World Cup and beyond. “We’re going to look at him and even may take him to the PNC because we’ve got some holes in our squad, especially out wide in the backs. There’s a good chance he will be part of that squad,” Kefu said. He added that “then we can see whether he is good enough to be part of that Rugby World Cup squad.” — AFP
England’s Wood a doubt for West Indies World Cup clash

SOUTHBAMPTON: England fast bowler Mark Wood could miss the World Cup match against the West Indies in Southampton today following a recurrence of his longstanding ankle problems. Wood suffered discomfort in his left ankle after England’s win over Bangladesh in Cardiff on Saturday, when the Durham quick recorded the fastest delivery of the tournament so far at 95.6 mph (153.9 km/h).

The 29-year-old, who revived his England career with some fiery spells during this year’s tour of the West Indies, has undergone three major operations on his ankle. He experienced further problems on the eve of the World Cup, pulling out of a warm-up game against Australia.

England captain Eoin Morgan said Wood’s latest injury problem did not mean he was facing the end of his World Cup career.

“It’s nothing too serious, he just pulled up a little bit sore from the game in Cardiff—he’s the only concern at the moment,” Morgan said yesterday. “Mark is going to have a fitness test in the morning. If it is still sore, we probably won’t take a risk.”

Morgan said all teams at the World Cup would need to look after their quicks in particular, “It’s part of the plan, because they are fast bowlers. It will happen to other bowlers throughout the tournament,” he said.

“We’re well aware of that. We will have to manage them as we would normally, as we do with Chris Woakes if there’s back-to-back games,” Morgan added. “It’s not a problem, it’s just what happens.”

Wood’s place could go to Moonee Ali, who did not play against Bangladesh, should England again decide to play a second specialist spinner alongside leg-break bowler Adil Rashid.

Morgan also revealed Chris Woakes could miss the World Cup match against Australia with some worrying moments before a late collapse saw the final three wickets fall for just two runs.

“We gave them a bit too much width and suddenly they were on the front foot,” said Morgan. “It’s a good lesson to learn.” New South Wales quick Cummins struck early against Pakistan, facing just 111 balls in total. — AFP

Rain washes out India-New Zealand World Cup match

NOTTINGHAM: India and New Zealand were awarded a point each after persistent rain in Nottingham forced the abandonment of their match on Thursday—the fourth no result of this World Cup so far.

After several inspections the umpires finally called the game at Trent Bridge off at 3:00 pm (1400 GMT). The tournament in England and Wales started in dry conditions but three of the past four matches have been no results.

New Zealand top the table with seven points after three wins and a no result while India are third on five points, with two wins and one point from Thursday’s washout.

“Obviously you turn up hoping to compete for two points but we’ve been here for four days and not seen any sun so it’s no surprise,” said New Zealand captain Kane Williamson.

“They will get some sun at some point but not on our trip here. With training indoors you just try and get what you need out of it. It’s not ideal but having a bit of time off is also important in these competitions.”

He added: “We have a break now, which is interesting at this point in the tournament but it’s a good chance for guys to freshen up and look forward to our next challenge.”

Meanwhile India captain Virat Kohli said: “The outfield was not suitable for play, especially as it’s so early in the tournament you don’t want an injury at this stage. “It’s unfortunate, you cannot control the weather but a point isn’t bad at this stage given we already have two wins,” the star batsman insisted.

The International Cricket Council has faced criticism over the lack of reserve days in the group stage but said having them for every match would be “extremely complex.” — AFP

Cup fightback from Pakistan World Cup to learn lessons’

Australia ‘need to learn lessons’, from Pakistan World Cup fightback

SOUTHAMPTON: Australia fast bowler Pat Cummins said Pakistan’s late fluent best against Pakistan, facing just 111 balls in total. — AFP

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The International Cricket Council has faced criticism over the lack of reserve days in the group stage but said having them for every match would be “extremely complex.” — AFP
Brewers whiff 24 times, still beat Astros in 14th

Marlins slam Cardinals, end six-game skid

HOUStOn: Mike MountaIkas slapped the Brew-
er's fourth home run of the night with one out in
the 14th inning, a two-run shot that led Milwau-
kee to a 6-3 win over the host Houston Astros on
Wednesday. Milwaukee earned a split of the two-
game interleague series by overcoming a
dominant effort from the Astros’ pitchers, who
recorded a club-record 24 strikeouts.

The Brewers’ Christian Yelich singled to right
to lead off the 14th, and Mountaikas went deep
off Cori Perez (1-1) for his 21st homer to snap
a 3-3 tie. Yasmani Grandal then doubled and
scored on Jesus Aguilar’s single. Before Jake
Marinick struck out one-out aside in the bot-
tom of the 13th, the Astros went eight innings
without recording a hit. Adam Houser (2-1), the
Brewers’ sixth pitcher, earned the win with two
shutout innings.

BradESe, PilRAtESe 7 (11 Innings)
Ozzie Albies drove in the winning run on an
11th-inning double, giving host Atlanta a victory
over Pittsburgh. Austin Riley, who was hit by a
pitch to lead off the inning, came all the way
around to score from first base on Albies’ dou-
s. Michael Perez (2-3) took the loss, giving up
the one run in one-plus inning. Jacob Webb (4-
0) pitched two innings of scoreless relief to earn
the win. The victory was the sixth straight for At-
lanta. Pittsburgh has lost six in a row.

MarinerS 9, TwInS 6 (10 Innings)
Daniel Vogelbach went 4-for-5 with a homer, and
Seattle took advantage of three 10th-inning
Minnesota errors to score three unearned runs and
pull out a victory in Minneapolis. Seattle’s
Shed Long hit his first major league home run, a
doubles). Joventino Contreras stranded the two
times in their past 32 games. Anthony Bass (1-
whiffed nine, also singled twice and drove in two
runs. Cionel Perez (1-1) faced four men with the
bases loaded after Tampa Bay scored twice in
Monday. Liam Hendriks (3-0), who stranded the
batter to third in the sixth inning, recorded two
scoreless innings.

GIants 4, padres 2
San Francisco took advantage of three errors
by the Padres to score three runs and, Kevin Pillar added a
home run in a victory over visiting San Diego
that completed a two-game sweep. Shaun An-
derson (2-1) won for the second time in his past
three starts, limiting the Padres to two runs and
four hits in six innings.

Anderson got the better of Joey Lucchesi (5-
4), who pitched well in the second San Francisco
Bay Area homecoming of his career but was vic-
timized by a shaky defense. He gave up three
runs (two earned) in six innings — The

Fury, Schwarz all smiles ahead of Vegas showdown

Fury (27-0-1, 19 KOs) is fighting for the first
time since inking a lucrative deal with US
broadcaster ESPN, worth a reported $103
million for five bouts.

The deal is expected to encompass a re-
match with Wilder, who has already stated he
plans to face Fury again in early 2020. Fury
meanwhile, bared on a muscle strain, told
reporters Wednesday he was revel-
ing in the spotlight ahead of his Las Vegas
debut. “I’m very chilled,” Fury said. “The
crowd has warmed to me, it’s been welcoming,
and all different types of people from all over
the world are in Vegas. I’ve been surprised re-
ally and it’s been humbling.

“It’s a great experience to be in the MGM
Grand, Las Vegas, where all the big fights hap-
pen, seeing your face up on all the movie
screens and posters. “It’s what I was born to
do. I believe the fight with Wilder only helped
with my profile in the US.”

Schwarz meanwhile took a back seat,
happy to joke along as Fury, the self-styled
“Gypsy King”, held court. — AFP
Blues dump Bruins to win Stanley Cup after agonizing 52-year wait

BOSTON: The St Louis Blues completed a most improbable journey and wiped out decades of misery by beating the Boston Bruins on Wednesday to capture their first Stanley Cup and set off a celebration that was 52 years in the making.

The Blues defeated host Bruins 4-1 to clinch the best-of-seven series 4-3 and end the longest wait in National Hockey League history for a team to win their first championship. The victory capped a remarkable turnaround for the Blues considering they were sitting dead last in early January.

"What an unbelievable year," said Blues captain Alex Pietrangelo. "I don't even know what to say. Where we were to where we are now... I tell you what, I've never been more proud to wear this jersey with this group of guys. It's unbelievable." The championship was a long-awaited one for the Blues franchise, which reached the Stanley Cup Final in each of their first three years of existence from 1968-70 but were swept each time, including by the Bruins in 1970.

The 1970 loss tortured the Blues franchise for decades as it produced one of the most iconic photos in hockey history - that of Bobby Orr flying through the air with his arms raised in victory after scoring the Cup-clinching goal in overtime.

Since that defeat, the Blues have made the playoffs in all but nine seasons and despite having some solid teams during that stretch had, until this year, never been able to return to the Stanley Cup Final. But they made the most of their latest chance and in the winner-take-all Game Seven got all the scoring they would need in a late three-minute span of the first period while rookie goalie Jordan Binnington was sensational in the win.

Blues forward Ryan O'Reilly, who set a franchise record with the most points in one playoff year with 23, was awarded the Conn Smythe Trophy as the most valuable player of the playoffs. "I stopped trying to worry about the outcome and just give it everything I had," said O'Reilly, who scored his team's opening goal in the last four games of the Stanley Cup Final.

I was getting bounces. It was amazing, my linemates played great, I thought we created every night. It was just amazing."

The Bruins, who had never before hosted a Game Seven of a Stanley Cup Final, made a solid start and created all sorts of pressure but it was the Blues who jumped out to an early 2-0 lead despite being outshot 12-4 in the opening frame.

O'Reilly opened the scoring with about three minutes left in the period when he cleverly redirected a shot from the point that went right through Boston goalie Tuukka Rask's legs. Pietrangelo added another with eight seconds left in the period when he skated in and used a nifty backhand deke to beat Rask and silence the stunned home crowd. St. Louis nearly added a third midway through the second period but Zdeno Chara managed to swat the puck away from the goal line after a shot from Brayden Schenn went off the crossbar and Rask's shoulder before dropping in the crease.

Schenn did find the net in the third period when he fired a puck off the post and past Rask with under nine minutes to play before Coach Craig Sanford put the game out of reach with his first of the playoffs with under five minutes to play. Boston broke Binnington's shutout bid when Matt Grzelcyk found the net with just over two minutes to play but it was too little, too late as the Blues goalie went on to set a rookie record with his 47th playoff win. "It's an empty feeling," said Bruins head coach Bruce Cassidy. "It's a long year. Someone had to win and someone had to lose and we came out on the wrong side of it."

"It's not the way you picture it, it's as simple as that." — Reuters

Warriors set for emotional NBA Finals showdown with Raptors

OAKLAND: Playing for injured star Kevin Durant in a farewell to the arena when they became a dynasty, the Golden State Warriors are set for an emotional NBA Finals showdown against Toronto. The Raptors own a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven championship series despite a 104-105 loss Monday in which Durant ruptured his right Achilles tendon in his first game back after missing a month with a right calf injury.

The Warriors, seeking their third consecutive NBA crown and fourth in five seasons, take inspiration from Durant, Most Valuable Player of the past two NBA Finals, underwent surgery Wednesday before the Warriors conducted their final arena practice. "It's going to be an epic night for sure," Warriors center DeMarcus Cousins said. "Going to be a lot of emotions, a lot of fans, a lot of history on the line."

"We just got to find a way to grind through it and make something happen. No matter what type of adversity hits this team we find a way to fight through." The Warriors would force a seventh game in Toronto on Sunday if they can win one for Durant.

"That definitely comes into play," Warriors forward Draymond Green said. "We've all seen his love for the game. Those 11 minutes he played were enough to give us the spark we needed. So now we want to continue to try to build on that."

History still favors the Raptors as only 13 attempts to win Game Seven have come through in the NBA but the Warriors have taken two earlier at Golden State.

"Our guys competed like crazy. That's the main thing," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "Toronto is tough to guard because they have got a lot of passers and a lot of shooters and they put you in some difficult spots. "But everybody who came in was prepared to play and they were flying around and rotating. We were able to pull it out. So we know that's what it's going to take here as well." — AFP

Tears as badminton star Lee quits after cancer battle

PUTRAJAYA: Cancer-hit badminton star Lee Chong Wei announced his retirement yesterday, ending a brilliant career in which he collected a swathe of honours but never won a world or Olympic title. Lee, who spent a total of 348 weeks as world number one but lost six world and Olympic finals, wept as he called it quits months after fighting off nose cancer.

"My decision to retire is a heavy one. I really love this sport. But it is a demanding sport. I thank all Malaysians for the past 19 years," Lee, 36, told a news conference. Lee, a father of two, was diagnosed with early-stage nose cancer last year and after intensive treatment in Taiwan he said he was keen to play again.

But he hasn't trained since April and after missing a series of self-imposed deadlines to return to competition, his hopes of being eligible for next year's Olympic title were remote. The three-time Olympic silver medallist said he now wanted to rest and spend time with his family, and even take his wife on a "honey-moon", a trip that has been delayed since their marriage in 2012. He finishes his career with 705 wins and 69 titles, including five Commonwealth Games gold medals, four All England victories and a record 47 Superseries triumphs. Lee's unsuccessful attempts to capture Malaysia's first ever Olympic gold medal, reaching three consecutive finals, were followed avidly by his fans, as was his long-running rivalry with Chinese superstar Lin Dan. His last shot at the Olympic title at Rio 2016 ended in crushing disappointment when the Malaysian lost out to China's Chen Long in a nail-hitting final. Lin posted to his four million followers on China's Twitter-like Weibo: "I will be alone on the (badminton) court and no one will accompany me."

He also posted a link to a Chinese ballad called "Friends Don't Cry." "Lin Dan and myself are rivals in the court but outside the court, we are close friends," Lee said when asked about their rivalry. "I hope Lin Dan will play in the Tokyo Olympics. But he faces challenges from younger players." Cancer proved the career-ending blow but it wasn't the only low for Lee, who was banned after testing positive for a banned anti-inflammatory at the 2014 world championships. The long-time former world number one returned to the sport in 2015 after authorities accepted he took the drug inadvertently. — AFP
Hosts Egypt favoured to win Africa Cup of Nations

JOHANNESBURG: Hosts Egypt are favoured not only to win Group A at the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations this June, but to go on and lift the trophy a record-extending eighth time.

They possess in serial Liverpool scorer Mohamed Salah an African superstar and can expect passionate support as they seek a first title since edging Ghana in the 2010 final.

Egypt have faced all their group rivals, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Zimbabwe, before at the Cup of Nations, winning seven matches and losing only one.

While the hosts are poised to top the standings, there is little to choose between the other three teams with the top two finishers guaranteed round-of-16 places. Here, AFP Sport assesses the prospects of the Group A sides ahead of the June 21 tournament opener between Egypt and Zimbabwe in Cairo.

DR CONGO

The two-time champions struggled to qualify with a nervous 1-0 last-match win over modest Liberia in Kinshasa squeezing them through as runners-up behind Zimbabwe.

An experienced squad, the Congolese are extremely unpredictable when it comes to the Cup of Nations as their last two appearances demonstrated. Outsiders in 2015, they finished third behind the Ivory Coast and Ghana in Equatorial Guinea, then made a timid last-eight exit two years ago in Gabon when more was expected of them.

Lippi eyes Brazilian strikeforce as China pursue quick fix

SHANGHAI: Marcello Lippi's China side could soon boast an all-Brazilian attack as the ambitious country ramps up efforts to reach the World Cup for just a second time. Lippi last week gave a debut to former England youth international Nico Yennaris, the London-born midfielder making a piece of history as China's first naturalised footballer.

But China, who under football-fan President Xi Jinping have grand designs of hosting and co-hosting the World Cup for just a second time, have failed to make anything like those appearances in the Cup of Nations. They had a comfortable qualifying passage under French coach Sebastien Desabre, but failing to concede in five matches before a dead-rubber defeat in Tanzania. Untested in Gabon two years ago, the Eagles are banking on veteran South Africa-based goalkeeper Denis Onyango to inspire a better showing this time.

"Denis is utterly dependable and his experience will hopefully rub off on the other players," says Desabre. "Our target is decent results, especially in our opener against DR Congo." Verdict: Will do well to reach knockout phase

FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 2019

ROIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil should have been gearing up for another major home sporting spectacle with renewed optimism that star forward Neymar would help bring to an end a 12-year trophy drought.

But instead, the Selecao’s golden boy is dominating the build-up to a tournament he will miss due to an ankle injury for all the wrong reasons. Neymar is embroiled in a rape scandal in which he has been accused of forcing himself on a model he met through social media in a hotel room in the French capital, where he plies his club trade for Paris Saint-Germain, revealing that he had first been in contact with Trindade, revealing that he had first been in contact with.

But the reliance of coach and former national team captain Sunday Chidzambwa on those options appears to be fading. "We have cast our net wider and found places for the players we’re missing," said Tite last week. But he added: "Inside the squad we’re much more focused on having a good team." Verdict: Will do well to reach knockout phase

"It’s a shame to not have one of the three best players in the world," said Tite last week. But he admitted Neymar would be missed, saying: "I’m a leader and I have to have one of the best players in the world. But instead, the Selecao’s golden boy is dominating the build-up to a tournament he will miss due to an ankle injury for all the wrong reasons. Neymar is embroiled in a rape scandal in which he has been accused of forcing himself on a model he met through social media in a hotel room in the French capital, where he plies his club trade for Paris Saint-Germain, revealing that he had first been in contact with.

The Selecao’s last warm-up match was a 7-0 thrashing of 10-man Honduras in which Neymar’s absence certainly wasn’t felt, with his substitute David Neres scoring in the rout. Verdict: Will do well to reach knockout phase

Neymar rape accusations overshadow Copa America

MADRID: File photo shows Liverpool’s Egyptian forward Mohamed Salah raises the European Championship Clubs’ Cup after winning the UEFA Champions League final football match between Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur at the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium in Madrid on June 1, 2019. — AFP

ZIMBABWE

The lowest ranked of the four teams will rely heavily on stars based in South Africa as they aim to progress beyond the group stage for the first time in four attempts.

But the reliance of the coach and former national team captain Sunday Chidzambwa on those operating in their neighbouring country has drawn criticism from a former star. “The coach should have cast his net wider and found places for the best local talent,” said ex-national team defender David Kutyaarupi of a squad lacking any home-based stars. Coaches emphasise the importance of not losing their first match in a tournament, but it is the probable back luck of Zimbabwe that they must face Egypt and Salah on opening night. Verdict: Capable of making second round for first time. — AFP

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Big hitters France and Germany grind towards WCup knockouts

VALENCIENNES: Eugenie Le Sommer fired France's midfielder Aminata Diallo into her own net after tapping in a cross from Les Bleues with a perfectly-timed header, while France are three points clear of Spain and are strong favourites to top the group by securing a draw in their final match against Nigeria on Monday. — AFP

GERMANY DOWN SPAIN

Earlier Germany brushed off the absence of injured star player Dzsenifer Marozsan as Sara Daebritz's 46th-minute opener for 'Les Bleues' was scored from a free-kick with 18 minutes left after referee Bibiana Steinhaus had awarded Germany a penalty for a foul on Kim Do-yeon and a superb burst and finish from Sandrine Chatouni's 73rd-minute winner, while Germany are three points ahead of both Nigeria and Spain, who were wasteful despite dominating possession and will see 2-0 to Nchikari Garcia some-what slicing wide when clean through in the 14th minute, should still quality but face a trickier test against China on Monday. — AFP

City begin title defence at West Ham

LONDON: Champions Manchester City begin the defence of their Premier League title at West Ham this weekend, while Manchester United will host Chelsea in a blockbuster meet- ing to start the campaign after next season’s fixtures were revealed yesterday.

City will be confident of a fruitful start after scoring four times in each of their last three visits to the London Stadium, but face a tougher challenge when Champions League finalists Tottenham Hotspur visit the Etihad on the second weekend of the season.

Runners-up and Champions League winners Liverpool begin with a home game to newly-promoted Norwich. Last season’s top two meet at Anfield on November 9 with the return at the Etihad sched- uled for April 4, subject to TV con- firmation. Chelsea will begin life without the influential Eden Hazard at Old Trafford with United in need of a fast start after a dismal end to last season under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. On their return to the top-flight Aston Villa host Spurs, whilst Sheffield United are away at Bournemouth.

City only edged Liverpool by a point in last season’s thrilling duel but would appear to have the easier run-in this time round should the title go down to the wire more. Pep Guardiola’s men do not face any teams who finished in the top half last season in their first six matches, following the visit of Liverpool.

In contrast, the European champions travel to Arsenal and host Chelsea before a visit to Newcastle before their final three games of the campaign. For the first time in Premier League history, the clubs will get a short mid-season break in February.

Over a two-week period, there will be only five matches on one weekend, with the other five games taking place the following weekend, ensuring that each team gets one week off. — AFP

Koepka, Woods chase history at Pebble Beach

PEBBLE BEACH: Brooks Koepka launches his bid for an historic US Open treble at Pebble Beach, where Tiger Woods could only win his third US Open in 2000 with a breathtaking 12-under par total and a crushing 15-stroke margin, is a vastly different player now at 43 and with spinal fusion surgery behind him. He is probably the best player to return to golf’s elite with his 15th major win at the US Masters in April. He has risen to fifth in the world rankings led by Koepka, who has won four majors in less than two years: back-to-back US Opens in 2017 and 2018 and back-to-back PGA Championships in 2018 and last month at Bethpage Black.

With his win at Shinnecock Hills last year Koepka became the first player since Curtis Strange in 1988-89 to win consecutive US Opens. While Anderson, from 1903-05, is the only player to have won three straight, I’m not thinking about it,” Koepka said of his treble chance. “I know the odds are stacked up probably even more against me now. It’s hard to win the same event three times in a row.”

But he likes the idea of pursuing history at Pebble, where prior editions have produced champions such as Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson and, of course, Woods. The beauty of Pebble Beach’s coastal views can distract from the challenge it presents, especially with the pinched fairways and deep rough of a US Open.

“The rough is definitely going to be a factor this week,” Koepka said. “Very juicy. You need to put the ball in the fair- ways. These greens are so small, you can almost put it in the center of every green and have 20 feet, no matter where the flag stick is. It really comes down to who’s going to putts.”

Woods said the 7,075-yard par-71 course is playing similarly to the last time it hosted the US Open in 2010, while Northern Ireland’s Graeme McDowell won: “We’re all going to be playing from virtually the same spots, and especially it if it dries out,” Woods said.

“How you put the ball in the correct position is key... We don’t have greens like this, this small and steep, so it puts a premium on iron play.” Koepka is scheduled to tee of at 1:47 pm (2047 GMT) alongside British Open champion Francesco Molinari of Italy and US Amateur champion Viktor Hovland of Norway. Woods tees off at 2:09 pm alongside former US Open champion Rory McIlroy, Dustin Johnson and Phil Mickelson, who goes off the 10th tee with Spain’s Jon Rahm and Australian Marc Leishman at 7:51 am, is seeking to add to his tally of four majors for the first time since 2014.

The Northern Ireland star is riding high after a seven-shot victory romp at the Canadian Open on Sunday, with his 2nd win of the season after the Players Championship. Johnson, who was leading at Pebble in 2010 when he bal- looned to a final-round 82, tees it up alongside that year’s winner McDowell and Mickelson—a five-time major winner still seeking to complete the career grand slam with a first US Open title. — AFP
Blues dump Bruins to win Stanley Cup