Iran shoots down US drone as tensions soar
Kim, Xi hold talks as both face standoffs with Trump
Messi rescues Argentina as Paraguay pay penalty

Kuwait upgraded in US human trafficking report
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Think green

By Muna Al-Fuzai

There is no doubt that the heat is intense these days, perhaps in most parts of the world. But the heat in Kuwait seems harsher and drier as well. We shouldn’t wonder why Kuwait is hotter than other places - it’s due to its desert location! Why don’t we use this heat as an opportunity to cultivate greenery in homes and streets? Why not create green thinking to reduce the heat and cope with desertification and climate change?

I think we need to reshape the way we deal with the environmental situation and climate change, with a new green approach. I recently reviewed the UN Environment website for more information on climate change and desertification. I found important information and I quote: “Climate change is expected to have implications on where people can settle, grow food, build cities, and rely on functioning ecosystems for the services they provide. In many places, temperature changes and sea-level rise are already putting ecosystems under stress and affecting human well-being.”

Therefore, the demand for serious action in order to face the truth of this matter should not be disputed or ignored. There are also many recommendations concerning the concept of green economy, reduction of chemical pollution, and handling and utilization of waste. We need to have a new approach that understands the seriousness of this subject. We are watching pollutants surrounding us, especially noise and rising temperatures. There should be practical solutions and stringent legal legislation against those who contribute to polluting the environment. The concept of green buildings, using environment-friendly materials and reducing energy consumption should be activated.

In 2014, an official statement was issued by the Environment Public Authority to translate the country’s desertification control strategy into integrated projects, including conservation and improvement of soil characteristics, improved pastures, dune stabilization, seed production and protection and rehabilitation of biodiversity. The statement mentioned that there are several cooperation programs between the government agency and environmental bodies, which is good, but today we are on the threshold of 2020 and I wonder about the role of environmental awareness and public participation in this important subject.

I also support moves to increase our greening efforts and encouraging citizens and expats to form new agricultural areas to boost green thinking and reflect the positive results on the environment. I believe that it is a wonderful call to maintain facilities and spread environmental awareness in the community, especially when we see public beaches after the weekend filled with dirt and trash. This is everyone’s mistake.

Every year in October, the country holds a “green week”, but one week is not enough in a country like Kuwait where we need to raise awareness among people about the importance of green thinking, protecting the environment, contributing to increasing green areas and maintaining public utilities and the aesthetic environment. There should be a reduction in acts of sabotage and supporting young children to participate in volunteer teams for the greening of Kuwait. We need to continue activities throughout the year and not be limited to one week.

In Kuwait there are public facilities for walking and it is necessary to exploit these areas as centers for public awareness of greening and preserving the environment. Efforts by the government alone cannot succeed.

Fire safety at home/car

By Ben Garcia

Temperatures in Kuwait are soaring to more than 50 degrees Celsius in the shade and much higher inside a vehicle or under direct sunlight. This summer, there have been several fires already, gutting vehicles, flats and commercial buildings. A recent blaze took place in a parking lot in Ma’aqdan Hawally, which reportedly started from a cigarette lighter left inside a vehicle, and as a result, three cars were burned. The caretaker of a nearby building said he saw the fire when it started.

“The fire was small, but in a few seconds it became huge and consumed nearby cars. I called the fire department and they come in a few minutes,” Hamoud, a haris (caretaker) of a nearby building told Kuwait Times. The fire fighters were able to extinguish the blaze, but only after three cars were charred.

“My car was near to the one on fire. The firefighters were quick, so thank God my car was spared. If they were delayed a bit, probably my car would have been next,” said Jun, a Filipino resident.

The Kuwait Fire Department has come up with several warnings and guidelines for the public to follow to prevent fires at home or in the car.

IN THE CAR
1) Vehicle maintenance/inspection is number one in preventing vehicle fires. High percentage of vehicle fires are caused by poor maintenance, mechanical or electrical failures or malfunctions. Any cracked or blistered hoses must be replaced. Rubber or plastic wirings and insulations when exposed to metals can melt - they must be checked at all times.
2) Avoid putting flammable materials/liquids in the car such as lighters, sodas, perfumes and any type of lithium batteries or gadget batteries.
3) Park your car in the shade or slightly open the windows to prevent accumulation of excessive heat.
4) Avoid pumping a full tank of gasoline as it could spill out and trigger a fire.
5) Do not put too much air in your tyres.
6) Your car, as directed by law, must have a standby fire extinguisher to easily douse any fire in your car.
7) Avoid throwing cigarette butts.

AT HOME
1) Seal holes that can be used by insects or any animals to penetrate your homes. Not only humans search for a cooler place, animals and insects too, like snakes and scorpions, seek a cooler place.
2) Be hydrated, drink more water and bring along liquids at all time.
3) Don’t turn on the water heater.
4) Don’t put the gas cylinder in direct contact with the sun (whether the spare or full cylinder).
5) Minimize the use of electricity in the house to avoid overloading/tripping.
6) Do not face the sun directly - cover your head and face with towels, especially if walking under the sun from 10 am to 4 pm.
7) People should place water outside their houses for birds and stray dogs/cats to drink.
8) Keep a fire extinguisher in the home in a safe and easily accessible location.
9) Install a smoke detector or fire alarm in the home and make sure the batteries are fresh and working.
10) Don’t leave appliances plugged in while on holiday. Unplug TVs, microwaves, computers, split A/Cs and other devices when not in use or when traveling to avoid electrical fires.

Meanwhile, the Public Authority for Manpower in Kuwait has issued a directive informing all businesses and establishments to suspend outdoor work (of any kind) from June 1 till the end of August from 11 am till 5 pm. Last week, the highest temperature was recorded in Kuwait of 52.2 degrees Celsius, according to member of the Arab Union of Space and Astronomy Dr Khalid Al-Zaqzq of Saudi Arabia.
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Kuwaiti women make pottery at a handicrafts center. Pottery as an art and handicraft is growing in popularity in Kuwait with several studios now offering workshops and classes for beginners.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat
Finding a parcel sent through regular post is a hunter’s game in Kuwait. You might be lucky and end up receiving your package or you may never know where it went after the tracking stops upon arrival in Kuwait. Oftentimes, packages and parcels sent via regular post arrive in Kuwait only to be lost in the system for days, weeks or months. When one finally is able to track it down, the parcel may have been sent to an area entirely different and unconnected with the recipient’s address.

Also, not all post offices have the same procedures for receiving parcels. At the regular post office in the addressee’s area, the receiver will not pay for any stamp or custom duties, while in the two main offices, they may have to. Of course, a courier service is faster and more reliable, but much more expensive.

After investigating the distribution of parcels to see why a parcel may be sent to an area that doesn’t match the receiver’s address, it has been found that the end point is often determined by the way in which the parcel was sent. The accompanying graph shows the letter codes of parcels according to the shipment method and the post office where it will arrive.

For example, if the parcel contains an item bought online, the recipient sometimes has the option to choose the kind of postal service. But in most orders, the buyer is forced to select a certain type of service, which then decides the receiving post office.

Those renting a PO Box at a post office - if they provided this address to the sender - should receive it at this PO Box address. Those who don’t have a box can simply write their home or office address to receive the parcel. If the postman goes to the address and doesn’t find the recipient, he will take the parcel back to the post office in this area and call the receiver to pick it up from there.

In both these cases - whether the parcel arrives at the area post office or the recipient collects it personally from the postman - the receiver will not pay any kind of fees. But if they receive the parcel at the Hiteen or Sideeq post offices, the receiver will have to pay custom and stamp fees of KD 3.500.

The receiver can check the code of the parcel by the tracking number. The first letters will show at which post office the parcel will arrive. So if the sender used the EMS post service, it will arrive in Hiteen. Parcels with the letter C will arrive in Sideeq, while registered parcels with the letter R and ordinary mail with the letters U/L will arrive in the post office of the addressee’s area. The receiver can also track the parcel by entering the tracking number on the postal shipment tracking section of the official website of the ministry of information (www.moc.gov.kw).
Kuwaitis among first to ride automobiles in Gulf region

KUWAIT: Kuwait took precedence in many fields within the region, including the introduction and usage of automobiles. Kuwait introduced cars over a century ago, when camels, horses and donkeys were still used as means of transportation. In this context, Bassem Abdulaziz Al-Loughani mentions in his book “Cars in Kuwait’s history” that the first car appeared in Kuwait in 1911 and Bahrain followed two years later when Sheikh Isa Al-Khalifa brought one in 1913.

The first vehicle to enter the Najd region (modern Saudi Arabia) was a gift from the Ottoman Empire to the Amir of Hael Saud bin Abidulaziz Al-Hashid in 1915. Loughani emphasized that first car used in Kuwait was a Belgian Minerva model imported by Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, but it did not last long because of breakdowns. According to a study conducted by writer Yaqoub Al-Ibrahim, the Kuwaiti people called that particular car the “elephant”, because it was a giant vehicle. The second car to enter Kuwait was also a Minerva, which tradesman Jassem bin Mohammed Al-Ibrahim gave to Amir Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, Loughani added.

The first to acquire private cars were Kuwaiti citizens Hamad Al-Khaled and Shamlan bin Saif, each acquiring a Ford, Hilal Al-Mutairi acquired Hudson, then Hamad Al-Sager and Mulla Saleh bought Overland vehicles, Sheikha Badriya Saud Al-Sabah was considered as the first Kuwaiti woman to drive a car after her study abroad concluded and she was appointed a supervisor of public health in 1947. British-made Humber cars were well-known in the fifties and sixties - Kuwait Oil Company workers used them to cross the desert in order to reach oil wells. In the late 1920s, Al-Falah Al-Khalid obtained the right to distribute cars under an agreement with Chevrolet, Buick and GMC agents in Iraq. In 1936, Hamed Al-Naqqeb obtained the right to distribute Ford cars.

Loughani mentions the first recorded traffic ticket was handed to Al-Sayed Eisa Yousef Al-Hamaleel on September 22, 1938, while the first death in Kuwait due to a car accident was in 1937. He adds that Mohammed Al-Sayed Omar, Eisa Saleh and Abdullah Al-Saif were the first Kuwaitis to have a driving license, while the youngest Kuwaiti to obtain a driving license was Sulaiman Al-Othman at age of 14. — KUNA

Kuwait to witness year’s longest day

KUWAIT: Kuwait, along with the whole Gulf region, is forecast to witness the longest day of the year tomorrow, when daylight will extend for 14 hours and two minutes and night hours will be nine hours and 58 minutes, Kuwaiti astronomer Khaled Al-Jumaan said on Wednesday. In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Jumaan attributed the predicted lengthy day to Kuwait’s geographic location in the north of the Arabian Gulf, as daylight hours increase in countries located farther north, the remotest region of which, the North Pole, witnesses round-the-clock days for six months in a row. The long day recurs every year due to visible sun movements that also cause extreme heat. — KUNA

Rising temperatures negatively affect productivity, behavior

KUWAIT: A group of academics and physicians agreed that the record rising temperatures in Kuwait have a negative effect on productivity, with the only way out seemingly is to take a leave of absence. On the medical side, health ministry official and spokesman Dr Ahmad Al-Shati told KUNA the increasing temperature this summer has negative effects on employees, especially those under direct sun exposure like construction workers and others.

Those working outside have a high risk of dehydration and increasing body temperature, which leads to horrific incidents of loss of consciousness and other symptoms, said Shati, who warned that if left untreated, it might lead to death. At Shuaiba health clinic, between 400 and 500 cases of heat stroke amongst construction workers and emergency staff arrive at the clinic, which is an indication of how serious the matter is, noted Shati.

He pointed out that Kuwait is carrying out measures to ensure the safety of workers, especially those under direct sun exposure. He mentioned his country recently held the fifth GCC professional safety and healthcare conference as part of Kuwait’s keenness to discuss the matter on a regional level. While heat strokes mainly occur outside, workers within office environments are not safe, considering the record heat wave experienced in Kuwait, commented Shatti, who advised all employees to stay hydrated and avoid direct sun exposure.

Psychologically, most employees in Kuwait have this notion that the summer season equals vacation time, and with the current record temperatures, most Kuwaitis seek havens abroad to avoid the scorching heat, said Dr Nadia Al-Hamdan, professor of psychology at Kuwait University (KU). Heat and exhaustion in general have profound effects on the brain and neurological system, leading to the increase of stress-inducing hormones and other ill effects, Hamdan affirmed.

She added that the increasing heat leads to reactions, which might not be preferable at the workplace: however, the current weather predicament should not dictate one’s behavior. Employees should try to compose themselves regardless of the situation and they should avoid conflicts as much as they can, she said.

Providing further academic input, KU’s social services professor Dr Hadi Ashkanani called for additional and thorough studies to link heat with negative behavior to determine the causes of conflicts and ways to avoid them. He agreed that the current heat wave had a visible effect on productivity and human activity, noting that it was natural for those working in places which lack methods of cooling to prefer rest than continuing with their tasks. — KUNA
KFSD and KIPIC sign a cooperation protocol.

Human remains discovered in Iraq possibly of Kuwaiti POWs

KUWAIT: A joint statement of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)-affiliated tripartite commission announced the recovery of human remains in southern Iraq, offering hope for families of missing people from the 1990-1991 Gulf War, said a statement. According to the commission, more than 28 years after the end of the Gulf War, families of missing people in both Kuwait and Iraq still do not know the fate and whereabouts of their relatives.

The recent recovery of the remains of a number of people in Al-Muthanna in Samawa district in southern Iraq, thought to have gone missing during the conflict, offers hope for some answers. The remains, believed to be of Kuwaiti citizens including civilians and prisoners of war, were found at two burial sites as a result of joint efforts between Iraqi and Kuwaiti authorities, and experts from the ICRC, conducted within the framework of the tripartite commission.

The remains were fully exhumed and transferred to Baghdad’s medico-legal directorate for DNA analysis, said the statement, adding that subsequent comparison with the genetic profiles of families of missing people from this period will be made. Forensic analysis will also reveal the number of individuals recovered and provide information on their nationality.

The discovery of the remains is the result of relentless work by the Kuwaiti and Iraqi authorities, and the ICRC in both Kuwait and Iraq, and the sustained joint efforts in gathering and analyzing information, identifying new witnesses and using satellite imagery to guide field teams. It is hoped that the identification of these human remains will help bring closure to the families and relatives of a number of those who went missing during the war and answer questions about what happened to them. The tripartite commission and its technical sub-committee were set up in 1991 and 1994 respectively to help ascertain the fate of people missing in connection with the 1990-1991 Gulf War. They are chaired by the ICRC, and composed of representatives of the Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and France. — KUNA

Washington: The United States yesterday upgraded Kuwait to Tier 2 in its 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report. According to the annual report issued by the US State Department, “The government of Kuwait does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period, therefore Kuwait was upgraded to Tier 2.

“The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts by deploying its specialized trafficking unit to initiate more criminal investigations of potential trafficking crimes and more prosecutions under the anti-trafficking law. It referred significantly more potential trafficking victims for protective services, operationalized its central recruitment agency in an attempt to hire and better safeguard the rights of hundreds of domestic workers, and increased enforcement of its domestic worker law.

“However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Rather than prosecuting potential criminals for human trafficking, officials continued to routinely use arbitration and administrative penalties to resolve grievances filed by domestic and other migrant workers instead of investigating such cases as human trafficking crimes, and prolonged investigations and subsequent appeals processes led most victims to decline to file court cases.

“By not holding traffickers criminally accountable with stringent sentences, the government perpetuated a climate of impunity that failed to deter future crimes. The government did not regularly use standard procedures for proactively identifying victims and continued to detain, prosecute, and deport trafficking victims, including those fleeing forced labor.”

In the report, the US added Saudi Arabia and Cuba to its blacklist of countries that it says are not doing enough to fight human trafficking, a designation that could bring sanctions. The State Department faulted ally Saudi Arabia for rampant violations against its vast foreign labor force and accused adversary Cuba of trafficking through its program of sending doctors overseas. Other countries that remained on Tier 3, the worst ranking in the report, included China, Myanmar, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela.

A Tier 3 designation means that the United States can restrict assistance or withdraw support for the country at the International Monetary Fund or other global development bodies. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the United States last year took measures against 22 countries due to the human trafficking designation. “That action and the message that goes with it is very clear - if you don’t stand up to trafficking, America will stand up to you,” Pompeo said as he presented the report alongside Ivanka Trump, President Donald Trump’s daughter and adviser.

Pompeo said that North Korea was involved in human trafficking at the state level through its deployment of workers overseas and said Pyongyang “uses the proceeds to fund nefarious activities”. He also renewed criticism of China for its massive incarceration of an estimated one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim members of Turkic-speaking minorities, saying the camps have produced garments, carpets, cleaning supplies and other goods for domestic consumption.

China, facing rising international criticism, describes its camps as vocational training centers aimed at reducing extremism.

Cuba is more frequently in the sights of the Trump administration, which said that the communist authorities threatened or coerced doctors to be part of its medical program, in which Havana sends tens of thousands of low-cost doctors around the world. Cuba ended the program last year in Brazil after Jair Bolsonaro, the country’s incoming right-wing president, described it as human trafficking.

The State Department also upgraded two countries from the Tier 3 designation - Laos and Gabon. It credited Laos with providing restitution and services to victims, while Gabon stepped up investigations and signed agreements with neighboring countries in western Africa to combat cross-border trafficking. — Agencies

Dozens arrested in Jahra raids

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Jahra Security Department launched a campaign in Jahra and Sulaimiya industrial areas as well as the Jahra vegetable market, old Jahra, Kabd Road and Jahra stables under the supervision of Interior Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for General Security Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah. The campaign resulted in arresting 70 persons in violation of residency law and 50 absconders without papers, while 57 citations were issued.

National identity centers ready

The relations and security information department at the interior ministry said the department of nationality and travel documents has completed installing equipment at electronic passport centers (national identity centers). The department said starting from July 1, nationality and passports services will be presented at the national identity service centers instead of citizen service centers.

Oil sector emergency plan

Kuwait Fire Service Directorate Director General Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad held a meeting to coordinate with several oil sector companies in order to implement cooperation procedures with them and activate them in case of emergencies at any oil facility.

KFSD, KIPIC ink deal

KFDS Director General Lt General Khalid Al-Mikrad signed a cooperation protocol with CEO of Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) Hatim Al-Awadhi yesterday morning in the presence of Deputy Director General for Firefighting Maj Gen Jamal Al-Bulaihees and Deputy Director General for Prevention Maj Gen Khalid Fahd.
Fears of wider Mideast war as Washington, Tehran face off

TEHRAN: Iran shot down a US spy drone yesterday near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, with the two sides at odds whether it was in Iranian or international airspace, in the latest incident stoking tensions between the arch-foes. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said the “US-made Global Hawk surveillance drone” was hit with a missile “after violating Iranian air space” over the waters of Hormozgan province.

The Pentagon confirmed a US surveillance drone was shot down by Iranian forces, but it insisted the unmanned aircraft was in international airspace. The incident comes at a time of growing antagonism between Iran and the United States following two waves of still unexplained attacks on Gulf shipping, which Washington has blamed on Tehran.

The incident fanned fears of wider military conflict in the Middle East as US President Donald Trump pursues a campaign of to isolate Iran over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs and role in regional wars. It was the latest in an escalating series of incidents in the Gulf region, a critical artery for global oil supplies, since mid-May including explosive strikes on six oil tankers as Tehran and Washington have slid towards confrontation.

Drone debris

The debris field from a US military drone that was shot down by Iran is in international waters in the Strait of Hormuz, and US naval assets have been dispatched to the area, a US official told Reuters, contradicting Iran's account of the shoot-down. The US military did not immediately comment about the location of the debris from the Navy MQ-4C Triton drone.

But if the location of the debris field is confirmed, it would appear to provide physical evidence casting doubt on Iran's account that it shot down the drone over the southern Iranian province of Hormozgan, which is on the Gulf, with a locally made “3 Khordad” missile.

Iran has denied involvement in any of the attacks, but global jitters about a new Middle East conflagration disrupting oil exports have triggered a jump in crude prices. They surged by more than $3 to above $63 a barrel yesterday. Saudi Arabia, Washington's main Gulf ally, said Iran had created a grave situation with its “aggressive behavior” and the kingdom was consulting other Gulf Arab states on next steps.

“When you interfere with international shipping it has an impact on the supply of energy, it has an impact on the price of oil which has an impact on the world economy. It essentially affects almost every person on the globe,” Adel al-Jubeir, Saudi minister of state for foreign affairs, told reporters in London.

Tensions flared with Trump’s withdrawal last year from world powers' 2015 nuclear accord with Iran and have worsened as Washington imposed fresh sanctions to throttle Tehran's vital oil trade and Iran retaliated earlier this week with a threat to breach limits on its nuclear activities imposed by the deal.

Upping the ante, Washington said on Monday it would deploy about 1,000 more troops, along with Patriot missiles and manned and unmanned surveillance aircraft, to the Middle East on top of a 1,500-troop increase announced after the May tanker attacks. Iranian state media said the “spy” drone was brought down over the southern Iranian province of Hormozgan, which is on the Gulf, with a locally made “3 Khordad” missile.

A US official said the drone was a US Navy MQ-4C Triton and that it had been downed in international air space over the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a third of the world's seaborne oil exits the Gulf. Navy Captain Bill Urban, a spokesman for the US military's Central Command, said Iran's account that the drone had been flying over Iranian territory was false.

“This was an unprompted attack on a US surveillance asset in international airspace,” Urban said. The drone, he added, was downed over the Strait of Hormuz at approximately 2335 GMT - in the early morning hours of local time in the Gulf.

Iran has denied any involvement and hinted the US might have orchestrated them itself to provide a pretext for the use of force against the Islamic republic. Russian President Vladimir Putin said any use of force by the United States against Iran "would be a disaster for the region". The head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard said the downing of the drone was "a clear message" his country will defend its borders. Iran will "respond to all foreign aggression and our reaction is, and will be, categorical and absolute", General Hossein Salami said, quoted by Tasnim news agency.

"We declare that we are not looking for war but we are ready to respond to any declaration of war," he added. The Pentagon said later in a statement that an Iranian surface-to-air missile "provide a pretext for the use of force against the Islamic republic. Russian President Vladimir Putin said any use of force by the United States against Iran "would be a disaster for the region". The head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard said the downing of the drone was "a clear message" his country will defend its borders. Iran will "respond to all foreign aggression and our reaction is, and will be, categorical and absolute", General Hossein Salami said, quoted by Tasnim news agency.

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Macron sends senior diplomat to Iran to defuse US tensions

Putin says use of US force against Iran would be ‘disaster’

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron sent his top diplomatic adviser to Iran this week as part of European efforts to defuse tensions between Tehran and Washington, the French presidency said yesterday. The adviser, Emmanuel Bonne, held “high-level meetings” Wednesday in Tehran, “with the aim of contributing to the deescalation of tensions in the region”, Macron’s office said.

The presidency refused to say whom Bonne met, adding only that he left Tehran on Wednesday evening. The strains between Washington and Tehran increased Thursday with Iran’s announcement that it had shot down a US “spy drone” that violated Iranian airspace near the Strait of Hormuz.

The United States has yet to respond. The incident marks the latest escalation in tensions following last week’s attacks on two oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, which the United States blamed on Iran.

Tehran has denied any involvement. Tensions between the longtime foes, who had no relations since the hostage crisis that followed the 1979 Islamic revolution, have increased sharply since US President Donald Trump last year abandoned a landmark 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran and reimposed sanctions.

Macron, who is travelling to a G20 summit in the Japanese city of Osaka on June 28-29, will “have contact with the main players” in the standoff, his office said. Before that he will pay an official visit to Japan on June 26-27, during which he will hold talks with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who recently travelled to Iran to try mediate in the crisis.

Abe met with Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who categorically refused to hold talks with Trump. The EU is under pressure from Tehran to try salvage the 2015 deal, with Iran threatening to breach its nuclear enrichment limits. On Tuesday, Macron urged Tehran to be “patient and responsible”.

Putin warning

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said any use of force by the US against Iran would lead to disaster as tensions escalate between Washington and Tehran. “The US says it does not rule out the use of force... This would be a disaster for the region,” Putin said during an annual televised phone-in with screened questions posed by Russian viewers.

“It would lead to a surge in violence and an increase in the number of refugees,” he said, adding that the consequences of intervention would be “difficult to calculate”.

Moscow has backed Tehran in its standoff with the United States since Washington pulled out of an international 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran last year. Putin repeated Russia’s insistence that sanctions against Iran are “unreasonable”. The comment comes at a time of growing antagonism between Iran and the US following two waves of still unexplained attacks on Gulf shipping, which Washington has blamed on Tehran.

Iran has denied any involvement and hinted that the US might have orchestrated them itself to provide a pretext for the use of force against the Islamic republic. Yesteryear, tensions also heightened after the Pentagon confirmed that Iranian forces had shot down a US naval surveillance drone. The US has insisted the aircraft was in international air space but Iran has said the drone had violated Iranian airspace.

Iran and the US: Escalating tensions

TEHRAN: Tensions between Tehran and Washington have intensified ever since April when the US added Iran’s Revolutionary Guards to its blacklist of “terrorist” organizations and strengthened sanctions against the Islamic republic.

A recap: Blacklist

On April 8, 2019, Washington declares as a “terrorist” group the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Iranian regime’s ideological army. President Donald Trump says it is the first time it has branded part of a foreign government a terrorist group. The Guards’ prized Quds Force, which operates abroad, is also placed on the blacklist. The next day Iran says US troops serving in the wider Middle East from the Horn of Africa to Afghanistan are “terrorist” organizations.

US deployment

On May 8, White House national security adviser John Bolton announces the Pentagon is sending an aircraft carrier and a bomber task force to the Middle East. “The United States is not seeking war with the Iranian regime, but we are fully prepared to respond to any attack, whether by proxy, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or regular Iranian forces,” he says.

On May 7, the US says it is deploying B-52 bombers, a Patriot missile battery and an amphibious assault ship in the region.

Sanctions

On May 8, Iran says it is preparing to increase enriched uranium and heavy water production as part of its decision to stop some commitments made under the 2015 nuclear deal with major world powers. A year after Washington unilaterally withdrew from the deal, reimposing sanctions on Tehran, Trump announces new measures against Iran’s steel and mining sectors. Washington has since hit Iran’s largest petrochemical group PGPIC with sanctions.

Attacks on ships

On May 12, four ships, including three oil tankers, are damaged in mysterious “sabotage attacks” off the United Arab Emirates. Bolton says on May 30 that Iran is “almost certainly” behind the attacks. The next day Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accuses Iran of trying to raise oil prices through these acts.

On June 6, the UAE says the initial findings of a multinational investigation into the attacks point to the likelihood that a state was behind them, but there is no evidence of such involvement. Two tankers, Norwegian and Japanese, come under “attack” in the Gulf of Oman on June 13, the day Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe meets Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran. Washington, London and Riyadh blame Iran, which denies involvement.

American reinforcements

On June 6, the US military command in the Middle East (Centcom) says an Iranian missile had tried to shoot down an American drone on a surveillance mission. Washington says a US drone was shot down on June 6 with a missile fired from Yemen “that we assessed had Iranian assistance.” The next day, Iran’s atomic energy organization says Iran will surpass the uranium stockpile limit set under the 2015 nuclear deal from June 27. On June 18, the US says it will deploy 1,000 more troops to the region, in addition to the 1,500 it had announced in late May.

US drone shot down: Tehran

On June 18, Iran’s state news agency IRNA says Tehran has dismantled a US spy network. Iran’s Revolutionary Guard says on June 20 it shot down a US “spy drone” which violated Iranian airspace near the Strait of Hormuz, in “a clear message” that Tehran will defend its borders. The Pentagon confirms the downing. — AFP

Yemen’s Houthis launch strike on Saudi utility

RIYADH: Yemen’s Iran-aligned Houthis launched a projectile into southern Saudi Arabia late on Wednesday which the Saudi-led coalition said landed near a desalination plant without causing damage or casualties. The Houthis - who threatened last month to attack 300 vital military targets in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen - announced via their Al-Masirah TV that a cruise missile they fired had struck an electricity station in Qaishaq.

A Saudi-based industry source said the strike targeted a power transformer station near the plant, which led to a small fire that was quickly doused and did not impact operations. US President Donald Trump was briefed on the reported strike and the White House was monitoring the situation, spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said, amid mounting fears that a military confrontation could erupt between Tehran and Washington. Pentagon spokeswoman Navy Commander Rebecca Rebarich said such attacks were “a significant cause for concern and (put) innocent lives at risk.” — Reuters
In rebuff to Trump offer, Palestinian businesses call for freedom, not cash

Palestinians boycott US-led conference in Bahrain

RAMALLAH, Palestinian businessmen boycotting the Trump administration's Bahrain workshop designed to encourage investment in the territories say only a diplomatic path to statehood can end decades of conflict with Israel. The United Nations has billed the June 25-26 gathering in the Gulf kingdom as an economic outcome to its long-drawn Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, widely referred to as President Donald Trump's "deal of the century". But Israeli government officials have not been invited. Palestinian leaders - and the vast majority of its business community - are shunning the conference spearheaded by Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

While details of the Trump peace plan are still sketchy, Palestinians worry it will jettison the two-state solution - the long-standing international formula which envisages an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza co-existing with Israel.

"Our case is political, 100 percent. It's not economic," said Palestinian tech company executive Murad Tahhoub. Tahhoub, managing director of ASAL Technologies, echoes arguments made by other members of the Palestinian business community in the West Bank and Gaza - territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East War and where Palestinians want to build a future state.

"How (can you) build an economy if you don't have sovereignty? If you don't have access to natural resources, like water, like electricity, like borders?" Tahhoub says his company's growth haslagged due to Israeli restrictions. "I have 350 engineers because I don't have a state, right now. If I was in Romania or Ukraine, it'll be 3,500."

The Western-backed Palestinian Authority has exercised limited self-rule in the West Bank since the Oslo interim peace deals of the 1990s, with economic relations between Israel and the Palestinians governed by the Paris Protocol of 1994. Palestinians hoped the Oslo arrangements would lead to full statehood one day, but it never happened, with both sides blaming each other.

The West Bank remains under Israeli occupation, scattered with Israeli settlements and military bases and sealed off by checkpoints and a razor wire and concrete barrier. The Israeli government cites security considerations for the restrictions it and Egypt impose on Gaza, whose Islamist rulers Hamas refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist.

The Palestinian Authority's heartland is the West Bank, which 15 times the size of Gaza is the engine of the Palestinian economy. But the World Bank says close to a quarter of Palestinians live in poverty and that the Palestinian economy grew by just 1% in 2018, with a 7% contraction in Gaza. Unemployment in the Palestinian territories reached 31 percent last year, with the jobless rate standing at 52 percent in Gaza, the World Bank says. Palestinians blame huge cuts in US aid under the Trump administration and Israel's decision to withhold tax remittances because of a political dispute for bringing the Palestinian Authority's finances to the brink of collapse.

Israel analysts say a drop in foreign aid is primarily to blame for the Palestinians' economic woes, as donors lose faith in the prospects for peace and shift their efforts to other crises areas.

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With Palestinian leaders boycotting the Bahrain conference and Arab states backing their political demands, analysts are pessimistic about the meeting. "It doesn't stand a chance," said Nathan Thrall, director of the International Crisis Group's Arab-Israeli project.

"(The Palestinian cause) hasn't receded so far that the Arab leaders feel like they could betray the Palestinians on Jerusalem or refugees or any of the core Palestinian issues without suffering blowback," Trump's advisers have slammed Palestinian leaders for boycotting the conference. "The Palestinian leadership portrays participation in the workshop as treasonous. That is preposterous," Trump's Middle East Envoy Jason Greenblatt wrote in an op-ed for CNN.

"Supporters of this workshop want only the best for the Palestinians and the region," Washington has said Egypt and Jordan, which have been key players in Middle East peace efforts, have agreed to attend though Palestinians have urged them to reconsider. Qatar, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are also expected to take part in the workshop.

"If anybody wants to solve the Palestinian problem, they have to solve it through ending occupation, (and) the establishment of a Palestinian state," Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh told Reuters. "If there are people who want to support the Palestinian people, they should lift the financial siege that has been imposed on the Palestinian people," he said.

Turkey jails 151 for life in ‘coup ringleaders’ trial

SINAN, Turkey: A Turkish court yesterday gave life sentences to 151 people including senior military officers in one of the biggest trials over the 2016 failed bid to overthrow President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The judge handed 128 of those convicted between one and three aggravated life terms each over the deaths of 139 people, for "violating the constitution and attempting to assassinate the president",

The private DHA news agency reported. Such sentences carry harsher prison conditions. A further 23 individuals were given customary life sentences, the agency said, while 27 suspects received prison sentences of up to 20 years. Among the suspects was US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen, whom Turkey accuses of ordering the attempted putsch in which left hundreds were killed and thousands more injured.

Gulen strongly denies the claims. Turkey has failed to secure his extradition. Former air force chief Akin Ozturk and Mehmet Doci, the brother of former ruling party lawmaker Nahan Doci, who since September has served as Turkey's ambassador to the Netherlands, were among those convicted. Lieutenant Colonel Levent Turkkan, who was the aide to then Chief of Staff General Hulusi Akar, was given one aggravated life sentence, state news agency Anadolu reported.

Akar was appointed defence minister in July 2018. There was a tense atmosphere minutes before the judge issued his verdicts with dozens of people including relatives of those killed during the coup bid in July 2016 slamming the court for not allowing them to enter. Salihia Arigan, whose son was killed on the night of the failed overthrow, pressed herself against the gates, crying and shouting to be allowed inside.

"The state should be ashamed," she said. Even as the verdicts were handed down, the strained mood continued with further attempts by individuals to enter the courtroom complex by force. "I say justice should be done. But I have no trust. May my son rest forever and the traitors be executed," Arigan later told AFP.

An AFP correspondent was not allowed to enter the courtroom by police. Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul hailed the verdicts, praising "exemplary" Turkish judiciary and told journalists: "Justice has been delivered."

The trial began in May 2017 in the country's largest courtroom inside a prison complex in Sinan, outside the capital Ankara. The court also handed down an aggravated life sentence for "violating the constitution" to Colonel Ali Yazici, Erdogan's former military aide, Anadolu reported.

Yazici was already sentenced to 18 years in jail in 2017 after a trial of dozens who plotted to assassinate Erdogan at a luxury Aegean hotel during the coup attempt. Former brigadier general Golhan Sahin Sonmezates, who was suspected of leading an assassination attempt against Erdogan on the night of the coup bid, was given 137 aggravated life sentences and a 540-year prison sentence, Anadolu said.

The judge ordered the case of 13 fugitives including Gulen to be separated from the main coup ringleaders' trial. The failed overthrow left 248 people dead, according to the Turkish presidency, not including 24 coup-plotters killed on the night. —AFP

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Gaza City: Palestinian businessman Abed Alkarim Ashour shows an invitation letter from the United States Department of the Treasury for a US-led conference in Bahrain, in Gaza City — Reuters
Brexit campaigner Johnson far ahead in race to lead Britain

LONDON: Boris Johnson, a former foreign secretary who helped lead the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign, continued his progress towards the top job yesterday when he trounced his rivals again in the race to succeed Prime Minister Theresa May. In a fourth ballot of Conservative lawmakers, which eliminated interior minister Sajid Javid, Johnson was again way out in front of his rivals. The result of a fifth and final ballot is due at 1700 GMT yesterday.

Johnson, who served as London mayor for eight years, has cast himself as the only candidate who can deliver Brexit on Oct. 31 while fighting off the electoral threats of Nigel Farage's Brexit Party and Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. Despite a series of scandals in the past and criticism about his attention to detail, Johnson has dominated the race since May announced a month ago that she would step down after repeatedly failing to get her Brexit deal ratified by parliament.

Johnson, 55, has increased his share of the vote of Conservative lawmakers at each of the four ballots so far: 114 out of 313 votes in the first ballot on June 13, 126 on June 18, 143 on Wednesday and 157 yesterday. Environment minister Michael Gove was second with 61 votes and foreign minister Jeremy Hunt third with 59. Javid got 34.

After the final lawmakers' ballot leaves just two candidates remaining, around 160,000 Conservative Party grassroots members will vote on who will be their leader - and Britain's next prime minister - by the end of July. Bookmakers give Johnson an 89 percent probability of winning.

Johnson has pledged to leave the European Union on Oct. 31 with or without a deal. The EU has said it will not renegotiate the divorce deal that May agreed last year and the British parliament has indicated it will block a no-deal exit. He has not addressed how he will solve that riddle.

PM Johnson?

The rise of Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, cast by many as simply "Boris", into pole position for leading the world's fifth largest economy is the grandest twist so far in a career that has morphed from journalism via TV-show fame, comedy and scandal into the brinkmanship of Britain's Brexit crisis. Born in New York, Johnson was educated at Eton, Britain's most exclusive school, and at Balliol College, Oxford. He began his career at a management consultancy in the City of London but dropped out after a week. He then turned to journalism but was sacked from The Times newspaper for making up quotes.

Hired by The Daily Telegraph, Johnson infuriated European politicians and delighted then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher by lampooning the European Economic Community establishment with a host of sometimes misleading reports from Brussels.

After entering politics, he was sacked from the Conservative Party's policy team while in opposition for lying about an extra-marital affair. But his sometimes shambling personal appearance and disarmingly self-deprecating confidence allowed him to survive both gaffes and scandal. He won two terms as London mayor from 2008 to 2016.

In 2016, he became one of the most recognizable faces of the Brexit campaign which won the referendum with 52 percent of the votes cast versus 48 percent for stay.

His bid to replace David Cameron, who resigned after the referendum, was foiled by Gove who pulled out of his campaign saying Johnson was unsuitable for the job. After May won the premiership, she prompted consternation in European capitals by appointing Johnson foreign minister. He resigned in 2018 over May's handling of Brexit. "We must leave the EU by Oct. 31, with or without a deal, so we can begin to unite our country, restore trust in our politics, and move beyond Brexit to focus on delivering for everyone," Johnson said on Tuesday. — Reuters

Britain broke the law on arms sales to Saudi, rules court

LONDON: Britain broke the law by allowing arms sales to Saudi Arabia that might have been used in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk the weapons could be operated in Yemen's war, a court ruled.

According to a report released last month, the Saudi-led coalition is fighting a legitimate war at the behest of the West and its coalition partners which might be used in the conflict in Yemen.

Britain is the world's sixth largest seller of arms, after the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Saudi Arabia accounted for 43 percent of Britain's global arms sales in the past decade.

Fox told lawmakers Britain had always taken its export control obligations very seriously and would continue to do so. Britain had "fully and robustly engaged" with incidences of concern. "Our whole assessment has been infused with IHL (international humanitarian law) considerations, indeed everything was looked at through the prism of IHL," he said.

Iran would be the only beneficiary of any end to arms exports from Britain to Saudi Arabia, the kingdom's minister of state for foreign affairs said yesterday, adding that the deployment of weapons in Yemen was legitimate.

A UK court earlier found that Britain broke the law by allowing arms sales to Saudi Arabia that might have been used in Yemen's war. The ruling does not halt Britain's arms exports but means the granting of new licences will be paused.

"The decision by the court in the UK has to do with procedures for licensing, not any wrongdoing that took place," Adel al-Jubeir told reporters in London. "The coalition is an ally of the West and the coalition is fighting a legitimate war at the behest of a legitimate government to stop Iran and its proxies from taking over a strategically important country - but was overturned by his more cautious European counterparts, most notably Germany's Angela Merkel. Varadkar said that such caution had now gone. "What won't be entertained is an extension for further negotiations or further indicative votes," he said, referring to a series of non-binding votes in UK parliament that failed to end the impasse.

"The time for that is long since past," he said. Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel, one of the UK's most vocal critics, warned that the rejected deal on the table was all that was on offer, even after the leadership in London changed. "If they choose Boris Johnson, then he will have to deal with us on the agreement we have done with Theresa May," Bettel said.

In recent campaign promises, Johnson suggested he could reopen May's exit deal and even ditch the "backstop" arrangement concerning Ireland, the most controversial aspect of the deal. But he seemed to suggest he could negotiate a new arrangement with Ireland during a transition period after Brexit, and idea Varadkar dismissed. "There's no withdrawal agreement without a backstop and there's no implementation period without a withdrawal agreement," he said. — AFP

"Enormous hostility’ to new Brexit delay: Irish PM

BRUSSELS: Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar warned yesterday there is "enormous hostility" in the European Union to allowing Britain to delay Brexit once again to seek new concessions from Brussels.

Varadkar spoke as he arrived for an EU summit that could be the last for Prime Minister Theresa May, who has announced her resignation after failing to get her divorce deal approved by the UK parliament. The European leaders met in Brussels as May's Conservative party looked like backing Boris Johnson, a former British foreign minister widely seen as unreliable in Brussels, as their favourite to take over as premier.

"While I have endless patience, some of my (EU leader) colleagues have lost their patience... with the UK and there is enormous hostility to any further extension," Varadkar said. "I think an extension could really only happen if it were to facilitate something like a general election in the UK or something like a second referendum if they decided to have one," he said. At an earlier summit in April, French President Emmanuel Macron argued against granting Britain an extension, but was overturned by his more cautious European counterparts, most notably Germany's Angela Merkel. Varadkar said that such caution had now gone. "What won't be entertained is an extension for further negotiations or further indicative votes," he said, referring to a series of non-binding votes in UK parliament that failed to end the impasse.

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Conservative MP and Conservative leadership contender Boris Johnson leaves his home in London on June 20, 2019. Conservative MPs will decide on June 20 who will join Boris Johnson in the final two battling become Britain's next prime minister, with three contenders jostling for the second spot.
Trump reelection launch heralds political scorched earth campaign

Dems show how they might respond: With a collective shrug

WASHINGTON: With a 2020 campaign launch painting opponents in almost apocalyptic terms, President Donald Trump showed Democrats the scorched earth treatment they can expect in his fight for reelection. And Democrats-barring Trump’s most fiery leftist rival Bernie Sanders—showed yesterday how they might respond to a collective shrug.

Even for a showman president renowned for exaggerating achievements, insulting opponents and making wildly inaccurate claims, Trump’s speech to 20,000 people at an Orlando, Florida arena stood out. From the opening minutes, he attacked journalists at the venue, encouraging the excited crowd to hurl verbal abuse.

He branded Democrats “driven by hatred” and bent on “radical socialism.” He claimed that illegal immigrants threaten working class Americans, “cutting off their path to the American dream.”

Over nearly 80 minutes, the president delivered no new ideas. Neither did he make the slightest effort to reach beyond his right-wing base. This was about firing up Republican shock troops for what will be a toxic campaign.

“He excited the base and it sends a pretty strong message to the Democrats that this is going to be a pretty tough race,” Committee to Defend the President chairman Ted Harvey said on Trump’s go-to TV channel Fox News.

Deafening silence

Trump later dismissed his Democratic candidates in a television interview with Fox News host Sean Hannity on Wednesday night. “I look at some of them, I don’t see George Washington. I don’t see Churchill. I don’t see anybody in particular that I worry about,” he said.

He also justified his use of social media by claiming “it’s really a way of getting the truth out because the media has just gone loco, they have lost all control”, adding that without it “I don’t know that I would’ve been successful”. The 23 Democrats vying for their party’s nomination in the November 2020 vote are facing the conundrum of how to compete with such a rule-breaking player.

Do they get down in the pit and wrestle? Do they debate the false claims? Or do they stay completely aloof? Sanders, sometimes compared to a leftwing version of the bomb-throwing right-winger Trump, went for the first option. No doubt his passionate supporters would have been disappointed with anything else.

“An hour-and-a-half speech of lies, distortions and total absolute nonsense,” Sanders said in an immediate video rebuttal. “Our job is to defeat the most dangerous president in the modern history of this country.” The current Democratic frontrunner Joe Biden, who was vice president under Trump’s predecessor Barack Obama, went more for the second option, zoning in on the president’s claim to have brought an economic miracle.

“He’s been clear: President Trump inherited a growing economy from the Obama–Biden administration,” Biden’s campaign tweeted. “Now, he’s in the process of squandering it.”

But most Democrats responded with silence, or at best a formulaic tweet-something that Trump, who seems to thrive on being at the center of attention, might find especially galling.

Democratic strategist Dee Dawkins-Haiger, speaking on Fox, said that kind of calm response might be just what mainstream voters really want. “We have seen nothing but craziness in this country for the last two years and we have to get back to normalcy,” she said. — AFP

Two nights, 20 Democrats: What you should know about the first 2020 debate

WASHINGTON: When 20 Democrats take the stage next week for the first of 12 prime-time presidential primary debates, they will assemble according to months-in-the-making plans by the Democratic National Committee to accommodate its largest-ever field. For two hours each on the nights of June 26 and 27, the candidates will assemble according to months-in-the-making plans by the Democratic National Committee to accommodate its largest-ever field.

To make it onto the debate stage, candidates had to meet criteria set by the DNC, which required either reaching 1 percent support in three qualifying national polls; or receiving donations from at least 65,000 unique individuals, with 200 donors in at least 20 states. The candidates were assigned stages by a drawing.

NBC last week held a random drawing in New York City. Officials had two boxes, one containing the names of candidates who polled at 2 percent or above and the other those who polled below the 2 percent threshold. The names from the first box were selected at random and distributed between the two nights, and then the same process was followed for the second box to ensure a mix of candidates on each night, those familiar with the process said.

On each night, leading candidates will be center stage. The candidates’ podium positions on stage will reflect their standings in candidates’ national polls as of June 12, with leading candidates in the center positions and trailing candidates at the edges, NBC announced this week.

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Two Canadian naval vessels sail through Taiwan Strait: Taipei

TAIPEI: Two Canadian naval vessels sailed through the Taiwan Strait, Taipei’s defense ministry said, in the latest naval passage likely to irk Beijing. The ships passed through the strait. Relations between China and Canada have deteriorated since December when police in Vancouver detained Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou on a US arrest warrant. Days later China arrested two Canadians-former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor—in what is widely seen as a tit-for-tat move.

China has also blocked Canadian agricultural shipments worth billions of dollars. It was the latest such naval voyage in the Taiwan Strait in recent months. Beijing lodged a protest with Washington in May after a US destroyer and a supply ship sailed through the strait amid rising tensions between the two powers. US warships periodically conduct “freedom of navigation” exercises in the waterway, triggering angry responses from Beijing every time.

Beijing views any ships passing through the strait as essentially a breach of its sovereignty—while the US and many other nations view the route as international waters open to all. China sees Taiwan as part of its territory, despite the two sides being ruled separately since the end of a civil war on the mainland in 1949. In April, China said its navy warned off a French warship that had entered the Taiwan Strait earlier that month and lodged an official complaint with Paris. — AFP

Trump gives tax cuts guru Laffer highest US civilian award

WASHINGTON: Arthur Laffer, a major Reagan-era economist who is seen as the godfather of Republican tax cut policies, received the highest US civilian honor on Wednesday from President Donald Trump. The conservative economist, who championed a theory known as the “Laffer Curve,” was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom in the Oval Office.

Trump, who touts tax cuts he ordered early in his first term as one of his main achievements, praised the controversial thinker. “Few people in history have revolutionized economic policy like Arthur Laffer,” he said. Laffer, 78, has inspired succe ssions of Republicans with his theory that lowering taxes ultimately raises revenue for governments by stimulating economic activity. He has been dubbed the “father of supply side economics,” but also blamed for what critics derided as president Ronald Reagan’s “voodoo economics” in the 1980s.

Reagan, who brought in big tax cuts in 1981, George W Bush, and now Trump were among his supporters. Trump called a diagram developed by Laffer to explain his tax theory the “curve that changed history.” But the idea has been widely attacked as wrong, leading only to bigger deficits.

When Laffer was invited to advise on tax cuts in 2012 by the Republican governor of Kansas, the state’s coffers quickly plunged into the red. The state later scrapped the tax cuts. On receiving the medal in the White House, Laffer declared himself “awed.” — AFP

Xi meets North Korea’s Kim ahead of Trump meeting

Two leaders face challenges of their own with US president

PYONGYANG: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un welcomed Chinese President Xi Jinping to Pyongyang yesterday on a historic visit to burnish an uneasy alliance, with the two men each facing challenges of their own with US President Donald Trump.

Xi is the first Chinese president to visit North Korea in 14 years, after relations between the Cold War-era allies deteriorated over Pyongyang’s nuclear provocations and Beijing’s subsequent backing of UN sanctions. But as he embarked on a flurry of diplomacy last year, Kim ensured that Xi—the leader of his country’s key diplomatic supporter and main provider of trade and aid—was the first head of state he met.

The North Korean has now visited his older ally four times in China and Pyongyang has been increasingly keen for Xi to reciprocate, while according to diplomats Beijing has been biding its time to see how nuclear talks between Kim and Trump play out. But Beijing’s own trade negotiations with Washington hit a wall last month and some analysts say Xi is now looking for leverage ahead of his meeting with Trump at next week’s G20 summit in Japan.

“When both China & North Korea are confronted by US, they have a lot to discuss with each other,” Li Jian, the deputy chief of mission of China’s embassy in Pakistan, wrote on Twitter.

Kim met Xi at Pyongyang airport as he began a two-day state visit with his wife Peng Liyuan, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and other officials, according to Chinese state media.

Portraits of the two leaders stood outside the terminal, pictures showed, and a 21-gun salute was fired. Chinese flags hung throughout the capital and hundreds of thousands of residents were lined up along the streets according to CCTV-standard procedure when a foreign leader visits the isolated North, whose authorities are adept at mounting spectacular displays.

But in an unprecedented move, Xi was welcomed at the Kumsusan Palace, the mausoleum where the preserved bodies of the North’s founder Kim Il Sung and successor Kim Jong Il—the grandfather and father of the current leader—he in state.

Kim and Xi went on to hold formal talks, Xinhua reported. The Rodong Sinmun newspaper, the mouthpiece of the ruling party, devoted the top half of its front page to the visit, with a color picture of Xi accompanying a profile. In an editorial, it said the trip at a time of “complex international relations” showed that the leadership in Beijing attached “high importance on the DPRK-China friendship.”

“Our people are proud of having a trustworthy and close friend like the Chinese people,” it added.

Symbolic visit

Xi’s visit will be largely symbolic, with no formal joint communique expected— as was the case with Kim’s April summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Vladivostok. Authorities have imposed tight restrictions on coverage. International journalists in Pyongyang were told they would not be able to cover it, while foreign media organizations invited to attend proved unable to secure visas. Sources said the Chinese media delegation accompanying Xi was also reduced in size from initial plans.

The North wants to demonstrate to Trump that it has China’s support with nuclear negotiations at a standstill after Trump and Kim’s second summit broke up without a deal.

In Hanoi in February the two men disagreed on how to move talks forward. In an editorial, it said the talks process, at a time when it is at loggerheads with the US over trade.

In clear assertion of Beijing’s role, Xi said in a rare opinion piece in the Rodong Sinmun that China would play an active part in “strengthening communication and coordination” between the North and “other relevant parties” to push forward negotiations. Beijing has fretted over being sidelined after the North Korean leader agreed to meet Trump last year, with the US leader going as far as declaring he had fallen “in love” with Kim.

“Xi wants everyone to remain acutely aware that he can influence Kim, and that no comprehensive, durable deal with North Korea can occur without China’s assistance—and approval,” Scott Seaman, Asia director of the Eurasia Group consultancy, said in a research note.

Beijing sees the North as a strategic buffer, keeping the 28,500 US troops in South Korea far from its borders, and Xi’s trip will include a visit to pay homage at Pyongyang’s Friendship Tower, a monument to the millions of Chinese troops who saved Kim Il Sung’s forces from defeat during the Korean War.

But Zhao Tong, North Korea expert at the Carnegie Tsinghua Center think tank in Beijing, said Xi and Kim were unlikely to have substantive discussions on demilitarization, because “China and North Korea do not have enough mutual trust.” — AFP

Two Canadian naval vessels sail through Taiwan Strait: Taipei

TAIPEI: Two Canadian naval vessels sailed through the Taiwan Strait, Taipei’s defense ministry said, in the latest naval passage likely to irk Beijing. The ships passed through the narrow waterway separating the Chinese mainland and Taiwan in a “freedom of navigation” operation, the ministry said in a statement issued late Wednesday, without providing any details.

It added that Taiwan’s military had closely monitored the “movements of the relevant aircraft and vessels in the region” as the ships passed through the strait. Relations between China and Canada have deteriorated since December when police in Vancouver detained Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou on
India in talks with US on H-1B visas, no official word on limits

NEW DELHI: India is in talks with the United States on H-1B work visas but has not heard anything official from Washington on capping such permits for Indians, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

Reuters reported on Wednesday the United States had told India it was considering caps on H-1B work visas for countries that force foreign companies to store data locally, according to sources familiar with the matter. Asked about the report during a news conference, foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said there had been no official communication from the United States on the issue.

“We have not heard anything officially from the US government. We continue to reiterate and engage with the US government on this matter,” Kumar said, without elaborating. News of the US plan to restrict H-1B visas comes days before a visit to India by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Disagreements between the countries over trade have resulted in tit-for-tat tariffs in recent weeks. Two senior Indian officials said they were briefed last week on the US plan to cap the number of H-1B visas given annually to Indians at between 10 percent and 15 percent of the total number issued.

There is no country-specific limit on the 85,000 H-1B work visas that the United States grants each year, and an estimated 70 percent of them go to Indians. Indian IT stocks fell on Thursday following concern about any work visa curbs. Indian tech lobby body Nasscom said such a US plan would imply a “further crunch” for businesses in the United States getting skilled workers.

Sources said the US proposal was linked to a push by many US payment companies such as Mastercard, India is also working on a broad data protection law that would impose strict rules for domestic storage of data. It, Kumar said the Indian government remained in talks with the United States on the issue of data localisation.

The government would also take a decision on involvement of Chinese telecom giant Chinese telecom giant Huawei Technologies Co in 5G trials, based on India’s economic and security interests, Kumar said. The global roll out of 5G technology has been complicated by US sanctions against Huawei. US officials have lobbied allies not to use Huawei network equipment. United States had told India it was considering caps on H-1B visas but has not heard anything official from Washington on capping such permits for Indians.

Protesters urge ASEAN leaders to ban trash imports

BANGKOK: Protestors in Bangkok yesterday dumped plastic in front of a government building and called on Southeast Asian leaders to ban imports of trash from developed countries.

The protest comes ahead of a weekend meeting of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with many countries struggling to deal with the flood of plastic waste unleashed by China’s decision last year to stop importing recyclables from abroad. Countries in ASEAN now receive more than a quarter of global plastic waste, most of which comes from developed economies like Canada, the US, Australia, and Japan.

A group of about 50 Thai activists, some holding placards reading “No Space for Waste”, joined Greenpeace campaigners to call for an end to all trash imports to Southeast Asia. “The communities are here today to reclaim...the right to live in a sustainable environment in Thailand,” said Tara Buakamsri of Greenpeace Thailand. They called for ASEAN countries to ban the export of waste “from anywhere in the world into the region”, Tara said.

The trash pile-up in Southeast Asia accelerated after China stopped accepting waste in 2018, and Greenpeace says plastic refuse imports have increased by a staggering 171 percent since 2016.

The imported waste is supposed to be recycled, but sometimes arrives mixed with unrecyclable items or is improperly handled and ends up being burnt or leaking into waterways and the sea. —AFP

Himalayan glaciers melting twice as fast: Study

WASHINGTON: Himalayan glaciers are melting twice as fast now as they were before the turn of the century, according to a study released on recently declassified Cold War-era satellite imagery.

The study, which appeared in Science Advances on Wednesday, is the latest indication that climate change is eating the Himalayan processing of data. It, said lead author Joshua Maurer, a doctoral candidate at Columbia University in New York.

Scientists combed 40 years of satellite observations spanning 2,000 kilometers (1,243 miles) across India, China, Nepal and Bhutan, and found that the glaciers have been losing the equivalent of a foot-and-a-half (45 centimeters) of ice each year since 2000.

Many of the 20th-century observations came from recently declassified US spy satellite imagery.

The study came from research has found similar trends, but the latest work is bigger in its geographic and historic scope. It concluded that rising temperatures are the biggest factor.

Though temperatures vary from place to place, average temperatures were one degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) higher between 2000 to 2016 than they were between 1975 and 2000.

Other factors the researchers blamed were changes in rainfall, with reductions tending to reduce ice cover, and the burning of fossil fuels which lead to soot that lands on snowier glacier surfaces, “It shows how endangered (the Himalayas) are if climate change continues at the same pace in the coming decades,” said Etienne Berthier, a glaciologist at France’s Laboratory for Studies in Geophysics and Spatial Oceanography, who was not involved in the study.

Greenland ice melt

A separate study also published Wednesday found Greenland’s ice sheet may have completely melted within the next millennium if greenhouse gas emissions continue at their current rate. The Greenland ice sheet holds the equivalent of seven meters (yards) of sea level. “If we continue as usual, Greenland will melt,” said lead author Andy Aschwanden, a research associate professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks’ Geophysical Institute.

It is the most recent warning about warming in the world’s coldest regions. “What we are doing right now in terms of emissions, in the very near future, will have a big long-term impact on the Greenland ice sheet, and by extension, if it melts, to sea level and human society,” Aschwanden said. The study, which used data from NASA’s Operation IceBridge airborne campaign and was published in Science Advances, is the latest to suggest a much greater rate of melt than was estimated by older models. The model relies on more accurate representations of the flow of “outlet glaciers,” river-like bodies of ice that connect to the ocean.

“Outlet glaciers play a key role in how ice sheets melt, but previous models lacked the data to adequately represent their complex flow patterns,” NASA said in a statement about the study. “The study found that melting outlet glaciers could account for up to 40 percent of the ice mass lost from Greenland in the next 200 years.”

As ocean waters have warmed over the past two decades, they have melted the floating ice that once shielded the outlet glaciers. As a result, “the outlet glaciers flow faster, melt and get thinner, with the lowering surface of the ice sheet exposing new ice to warm air and melting as well.” In the next 200 years, the ice sheet model shows that melting at the present rate could contribute 8 to 16 centimeters (3.2 to 6.5 inches) to global sea level rise, 80 percent higher than previous estimates. In October, the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) reported that avoiding global climate chaos will require a major transformation of society and the world economy that is “unprecedented in scale,” and warned time is running out to avert disaster. — AFP
Belgium to work toward giving visas to Uighur family in China

One million ethnic Uighurs are believed to be detained in camps

BEIJING: Belgium says it is working toward providing visas to a Uighur family that went missing after being escorted out of its embassy in Beijing last month under murky circumstances. The woman and her four children disappeared for weeks, alarming her husband, before reportedly being located back home in Xinjiang. An estimated one million ethnic Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities are believed to be detained in internment camps in the restive region.

Abdulhamid Tursun, a political refugee in Belgium, said he has not heard from his family since May 31, a few days after they left the embassy. “I am worried about their safety,” he said. “I hope they can safely come be at my side as soon as possible, and our family can reunite.” Belgium had said one of its diplomats would travel Tuesday to Xinjiang to ascertain the whereabouts of the family. The Belgian Foreign Ministry said Wednesday evening the family had been located in Xinjiang. “The goal of the mission has changed,” ministry spokesman Karl Lagatie said. “The embassy offered to accompany Abdulla and her four children back to their hotel, but they refused to leave the embassy in a kind of sit-in,” a Belgian ministry spokesman said. In an interview published Tuesday, Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders told Le Soir newspaper the diplomatic police “asked the family to leave the premises” and the situation was explained to the father the next day. An embassy is not intended to “lodge people” applying for visas, he said. In the end, Chinese police escorted them away, the ministry said. There was a misunderstanding about the procedures to follow, Lagatie said Wednesday. He said Belgian authorities spoke to the Chinese about “following the correct procedure.” The family did not have Chinese passports when they first showed up at the embassy, Lagatie added.

A few days after leaving the mission, Abdulla and her children were taken away by Xinjiang police, her husband said, and he has not heard from her since. — AFP

China’s former Interpol chief pleads guilty to bribery

BEIJING: Former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei pleaded guilty at a trial in China yesterday to accepting $2.1 million in bribes—a remarkable fall from grace for the former vice minister of public security. The Tianjin No.1 Intermediate Court said Meng “showed repentance” during the hearing, which was the culmination of a dramatic case that shook the international police organization and put a spotlight on China’s opaque judicial system. The verdict will be announced at a “select date or time,” said court in northern China in a statement, without specifying further.

Photos released by the Tianjin court showed Meng, who disappeared last year, sitting between two police officers in the courtroom, wearing a light brown jacket. His hair had greyed and he appeared gaunt compared to photos from 2017. Meng is among a growing group of Communist Party cadres caught in President Xi Jinping’s anti-graft campaign, which critics say has served as a way to remove the leader’s political enemies.

Over one million officials have been punished so far during Xi’s six-year tenure. Meng vanished last September during a visit to China from France, where Interpol is based, and was later accused of accepting bribes and expelled from the Communist Party. The court said that between 2005 and 2017 Meng used his status and positions, including as vice minister of public security and Marine Police Chief, to accumulate bribes equivalent to some 14.46 million yuan ($2.1 million). — AFP

Fall armyworm invades crops across Asia

BAN NONG TOR, Thailand/SINGAPORE: Looking out at his empty, red-earth field, Thai farmer Puang Timdorn said his two-week-old maize crop didn’t stand a chance against the fall armyworm pest. “All the 8 rats (1.28 hectares) I planted were all heavily infested,” said the 42-year-old farmer from his farm in Ban Nong Tor town in Pak Chong district, 180 km (120 miles) northeast of the capital Bangkok. “The worm ate the whole field in three days, leaving so much damage that it wasn’t worth saving.”

Fall armyworm, a caterpillar that got the name because it invades croplands in droves, much like an army, has rapidly spread across Asia since it was detected in southern India late last year. Fields in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia and Taiwan have fallen victim. In Thailand, it has badly affected the country’s corn crop, much of which is sold to the animal feed industry.

In recent months, the pest has also been found in 18 of China’s 33 provinces and regions and is now threatening to spread across the key corn region in the northeast. China is the world’s second biggest corn consumer and producer.

“It is a major issue for crops. It could pose a food security threat,” said Phin Ziebell, an agribusiness economist at National Australia Bank. “Management cost is an issue for small farmers.”

Marjon Fredrix, an agricultural officer at the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said some countries have reported damage to crops hit by the pest at 1.2 percent to about 10 percent, while others had put the figure at 20 percent to 40 percent.

“Once the fall armyworm has arrived, it can’t be eradicated, and farmers will have to manage it,” Fredrix said. A dip in the production of corn, largely used in Asia to feed animals, could force hog, poultry and cattle growers to rely on expensive imports and dent incomes of millions of small farmers. The fall armyworm invasion comes against the backdrop of planting delays in the United States which lifted benchmark Chicago corn futures by nearly a fifth last month.

“Abnormal combination”

Asia’s millions of smallholder farmers – many with less than an acre of land – are likely to take a bigger hit from the pest than larger growers given their reluctance to adopt new technologies to combat production threats. “There is an inertia about new technologies,” said Paul Voutier, Singapore-based director at Grow Asia, a World Bank funded organization that works with small farmers and other stakeholders to improve productivity. “And the treatment for fall armyworm has the abnormal combination of being both costly and difficult,” he said, noting the pest’s tendency to burrow low into the stem of the crop made it hard to combat with traditional pesticide sprays. Asia is the world’s biggest consumer and importer of corn. The region accounts for 34 percent of global corn imports and nearly 36 percent of world corn consumption, according to the US Department of Agriculture data. The pest, which has been known for almost 200 years in the Americas, was first reported in Africa in 2016 and has since spread across the entire continent, according to FAO. In July 2018, fall armyworm – which can fly up to 100 km in one night - was spotted in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, and by the end of February 2019 it was reported in 10 of India’s 29 states. The armyworm has been detected in more than 50 of Thailand’s 76 provinces, and is concentrated in six western provinces with large maize areas. It has a preference for corn, but can attack 80 crops, including rice and sugarcane.

The pest thrives in tropical and sub-tropical climates. Its life cycle is 24 days to 40 days, and so two or three generations of it can feed off a single crop during a growing season before moving on. “Fall armyworm attacks the corn crop in all stages, from the germination of seeds and early establishment of the crop, which is the most vulnerable stage, till the harvesting stage,” said Prasanta Patra, who heads the corn and row crops market in Asia for global agrichemicals firm Corteva. — Reuters
Tale of two cities: Hong Kong turmoil may boost Singapore

Controversial extradition bill shakes HK’s reputation

SINGAPORE: Hong Kong’s reputation as a stable financial hub has been shaken by a controversial extradition bill that prompted massive protests, and its loss might just be Singapore’s gain, experts say.

The Chinese territory and the Southeast Asian city-state have long vied for the title of Asia’s top financial destination, attracting international business from around the world.

But a decision by Hong Kong’s Beijing-backed government to introduce a bill allowing extradition to the mainland sparked concern among the business community and brought up to two million protesters into the street. Hong Kong’s political crisis is “definitely a dent in its reputation,” said Lawrence Loh, director of the Centre for Governance, Institutions and Organizations at the National University of Singapore’s Business School.

“There will be some immediate benefits (for Singapore),” he added, pointing to reports that tycoons were already shifting money from Hong Kong. Hong Kong offers access to China but enjoys freedoms unseen in the mainland, under the terms of its 1997 handover from Britain to Beijing.

It has a large expatriate community and prides itself on its reputation as a financial capital in the region.

But its status is temporary—the handover agreement expires in 2047—and in recent years there has been increasing concern about Beijing’s influence.

Companies were unsettled not only by the massive demonstrations, but also by the proposed law, which they feared could undermine Hong Kong’s reputation as a safe place to do business.

Opponents of the proposal worry it will entangle people in China’s notoriously opaque and politicised justice system, and threaten those critical of Beijing’s policies. “Enacting such an open-ended law by fiat will only drive business to places like Singapore,” Richard Harris, chief executive of Port Shelter Investment, wrote in Hong Kong’s South China Morning Post.

The territory’s Chief Executive Carrie Lam has now suspended the bill, but she has declined so far to fully withdraw it from consideration. And that uncertainty could mean firms looking for a first-time base in the region will lean away from Hong Kong and towards Singapore, said David Webb, a Hong Kong-based investor who advocates for stronger corporate governance.

“If you are considering doing it (opening an office) for the first time... then you would probably look at the potential for these laws to be reenacted,” he said. Singapore has sought to promote itself as a less crowded, more orderly alternative to Hong Kong, though it is sometimes mocked as dull and criticized for its restrictions on civil liberties. The media is tightly controlled and rights groups say financially ruinous defamation suits are used to silence critics and political opponents.

“Singapore is not known as a bastion of free speech but it does have sovereignty on its side,” Webb said. The city-state has also built a reputation for a strong rule of law—key in attracting businesses—and a growing number of foreign companies come to Singapore to settle commercial disputes.

“The Singapore International Arbitration Centre, one of several similar centers around the world, received over 400 cases last year and has seen its case-load increase four-fold over the past decade.”

In Hong Kong by contrast, critics say the extradition bill is the latest sign that a traditionally sound legal system is being eroded as Beijing seeks to assert greater control. Still, any shift away from Hong Kong is likely to be more of a trickle than a flood, experts said. “Investors in mainland China will still prefer Hong Kong over Singapore due to proximity,” noted Ahsineet Kaul of consultancy Frost & Sullivan. “I do not believe that the uncertainty and loss of confidence has reached a tipping point where you will see the floodgates open,” added Loh. —AFP

HK protesters call for new demo after demands are snubbed

HONG KONG: Hong Kong opposition groups called for another major demonstration yesterday after the pro-Beijing government did not respond to demands of protesters who have shaken the city with massive rallies. Millions have marched this month to oppose a proposed law that would have allowed extradition to the mainland, but the huge protest movement has morphed into a larger rebuke of Hong Kong’s administration. Under-fire chief executive Carrie Lam has apologized and suspended the controversial bill, but that has failed to quell the opposition, with protesters demanding she step down and completely withdraw the legislation.

A number of protest groups, including student unions, called for supporters to gather in various parts of the city to show their support. “Blossom everywhere,” read a statement circulated in a chat group on the messaging app Telegram by eight informal protest groups. “There are many ways to participate. Think carefully about your own ways to show your love to Hong Kong. June 21 is not the end of the fight, there will be more in the coming days.”

The groups also recommended a mass strike, but it was not immediately clear which business or professional groups would support such a call. In addition to Lam’s ouster and the extradition law’s withdrawal, protesters have also demanded the release of those detained during sporadic clashes with police last week, and an investigation into allegations of police brutality.

“The hope is to apply pressure before civil servants go to work if we have a certain amount of people,” said So Tsan Fung, president of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUBK) Students Union.—AFP

Japan opposition leader sees ‘double election’ unlikely

TOKYO: Prospects are fading for a snap election for parliament’s lower house in tandem with a summer upper house poll, the leader of Japan’s second-biggest opposition party said yesterday. But Yoichiro Tamaki, head of the Democratic Party For the People (DPFP) told Reuters he would prefer to see a lower house poll soon to boost momentum for unifying the opposition into a viable rival to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s conservative ruling party.

Abe said on Wednesday he was not considering a snap lower house poll but speculation remains that he might call one. Tamaki said he put the likelihood of a snap, lower house poll at between 10 percent and 20 percent, in part because Abe’s government has come under criticism after an advisory panel suggested that many retirees could not live on pension income alone.

“Because of the pension issue, the wind isn’t blowing in such a good direction (for Abe),” Tamaki said.

Abe has led his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to five general election wins since returning as party leader in 2012, aided by a fragmented opposition and low turnout. “We are divided, so voters feel their votes would be marginalized and would not lead to any big change” if they opted for an opposition party, Tamaki said.

He said he feared a future in which Japan’s political sphere was divided into a permanent ruling bloc versus a permanent opposition camp.—Reuters
A model presents a creation by Belgian fashion designer Walter van Beirendonck, during the Men Spring-Summer 2020 collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP

‘Wild Boars’ deal with fame one year after Thai cave rescue

See Page 20
A football team made up mostly of poor or stateless teenagers entered a tourist cave complex in northern Thailand a year ago on a day trip, accompanied by their coach. They emerged 18 days later to global acclaim, courted by film producers, authors and talk show hosts eager to tell the remarkable story of a daring operation that rescued them from the flooded depths. Most of the 12 “Wild Boars”, as the team was known, still live in the poor northern town of Mae Sai, once a sleepy backwater but now inundated with selfie-snapping tourists. They still play football—their coach who led them down the Tham Luang cave complex continues to run training—and they share the same basic homes with their families.

But life for the team has taken an extraordinary trajectory since they were rescued, led out of the cave heavily sedated by teams of expert divers. They have signed a film deal with Netflix, of the fame one year after Thai cave rescue

Stateless no more

The boys were on a day trip to the cave complex on June 23, 2018, when up-country rains flooded the complex via underground waterways. They were feared dead until two British cave divers negotiated a series of narrow waterways and corridors and found them on July 2, trapped in a damp chamber, four kilometers (2.5 miles) from the entrance. It was then that Adul Sam-on, aged 14 at the time, became one of the stars of the drama.

He went into the cave complex as a stateless person-like several others in the group, including the coach Ekkapol Chantawong, denied citizenship in Thailand. But he was thrust into the limelight by his gracious "thank you" spoken in English to the British divers who found the group, emaciated, cold, but alive, nine days after they went missing. Born in Myanmar’s self-governing Wa State and raised in Thailand, Adul lived in legal limbo with no birth certificate.

After their dramatic rescue, Adul, his coach and two other teammates were granted citizenship and passports for the first time, allowing them to travel to destinations from Los Angeles to London. With the anniversary of the start of the saga this Sunday, those close to the Wild Boars say fame has not changed them. "He’s an ordinary person just like before," Adul’s friend Aman Sommol told AFP from his school.

On the shelves

"The Great Cave Rescue," "The Boys in the Cave" and "Rising Water", are all available on Amazon. Authors and publishers scrambled to be the first to hit stores. "It was definitely a race to get the book out before Christmas," said Liam Cochrane, a correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and author of "The Cave", which is also about the rescue. "There was a sense of urgency but also pressure to get the story right," he added.

Australian diver doctors Craig Challen and Richard Harris, who helped sedate the "Wild Boars" team before they were extracted, are due to release "Against All Odds" in November. Ellis Henican, who helped write the book, said it will reveal tantalizing details and "change how everyone sees the Wild Boar rescue".

On the big screen

Expected to be released later this year, "The Cave" will be the first film about the drama. Using some of the real-life rescuers, Thai-Irish filmmaker Tom Waller says the movie packs plenty of high drama. "We all know that the boys got stuck in a cave... but it’s how they got out which makes the story so remarkable," Waller told AFP. It is expected to premiere in Thailand as early as September.

Also in the pipeline is a Netflix production arranged by US television star Ellen DeGeneres, who hosted the team on her show. "I thought I was brave, but these kids, this team is... braver than me," Ibrahimovic said. — AFP

(LCOMBO) This combination picture shows (clockwise from top left) a player from the “Wild Boar” football team, who was rescued from the Tham Luang cave in Thailand, fighting for the ball with a player from the River Plate youth team during a match in Buenos Aires on October 7, 2018, members of the “Wild Boar” football team posing for a photo with their coach Ekkapol Chantawong (back center) during a press conference in Bangkok on April 30, 2019 regarding a Netflix series about the rescue of the team from the Tham Luang cave, the 12 members of the “Wild Boar” football club greeting attendees at a reception in Bangkok on October 28, 2018, and “Wild Boar” coach Ekkapol Chantawong (center) and members of his football team taking their seats for the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Everton at Old Trafford in Manchester on October 28, 2018. — AFP photos

‘Wild Boars’ deal with fame one year after Thai cave rescue

Books at a bookstore in Bangkok relating to the rescue of the 12 boys from the “Wild Boars” football team and their coach from the Tham Luang cave in the Mae Sai district of Chiang Rai province last year.
Lifestyle | Features

Family members of the 12 boys and their coach from the “Wild Boars” football team trapped in the Tham Luang cave pray before a shrine in Nang Non Forest Park in Mae Sai district. (File photo)

A dedicated student, Adul still teaches his friends English and helps them with homework. “He’s a role model for the younger kids at school,” Aman added. “Adul and several other Wild Boars now play for the Ekkapol Academy, a new club founded by Coach Ek, as he is known. As he runs drills, Ek smiles at the visiting media, but bound by Netflix’s gag order he cannot talk about the cave drama. His peers say he is delighted to have finally realized his dream of running his own football school. “After the storm came calm, this is a new life for him,” assistant coach Noppadol Kanthavong told AFP. Coach Ek also now heads a media company which will act as the go-between for the production houses, the boys and their families and for a Netflix production that will include “Crazy Rich Asians” director Jon M. Chu. Rumors have swirled about payments to the rector Jon M. Chua. “After the storm came calm, this is a new life for him,” assistant coach Noppadol Kanthavong told AFP.

“Running his own football school.”

“After the storm came calm, this is a new life for him,” assistant coach Noppadol Kanthavong told AFP.

Lucky number 13

Fame has also come to some of the divers who helped rescue the boys. After weighing several options, the boys and the coach were eventually given sedatives and brought out wearing wetsuits. Extracting everyone took three days because crews had to replace air tanks and other supplies, requiring up to twenty hours between each run. Many of the rescuers were Thai Navy SEALs, some were experts running tourist dive operations, while others were lifelong cave hobbyists who flew in from Britain and Australia to assist. All found themselves at the heart of a drama without precedent.

“Thirteen is not an unlucky number anymore.” — AFP

At 8:30, the concert was held in the brand-new 17,000-seater Coca-Cola Arena in City Walk, Dubai. The show was the first announced act in this arena and was the first music performance to be hosted here. When did such a large-scale venue open up in the UAE, you wondered?

“Last night a dream came true,” said Ben Reymenents, a Belgian who runs Blue Label Diving in Phuket. Among the rescuers was Saman Gunan, the only fatality during the near three-week saga. Today a statue of the Navy SEAL, who ran out of oxygen in a twisting, flooded passage, stands near the cave’s entrance. Other rescuers like Vernon Unsworth were shuttled into the media spotlight against their will. The British diver is suing US tech mogul Elon Musk, who called him a “pedo” on Twitter after Unsworth questioned the billionaire’s usefulness when he showed up at the rescue site. Speaking to the BBC, Unsworth played down his central role in helping the trapped thirteen to safety. “None of us are heroes. We just did a job we were asked to do,” he said. “Thirteen is not an unlucky number anymore.” — AFP

By Abigail Mathias

Earlier this week, Grammy award winning hand, Maroon 5 played a sold-out concert to an audience not seen before. The Red Pill Blues Tour is the sixth concert tour by the band, in support of their sixth studio album Red Pill Blues (2017). The tour began on May 30, 2018 in Tacoma, Washington and is scheduled to conclude in August 31, 2019 in Willemstad, Curacao. The tour was sponsored by their current chart busters, “Girls Like You”.

“Last night a dream came true,” said Ben Reymenents, a Belgian who runs Blue Label Diving in Phuket. Among the rescuers was Saman Gunan, the only fatality during the near three-week saga. Today a statue of the Navy SEAL, who ran out of oxygen in a twisting, flooded passage, stands near the cave’s entrance. Other rescuers like Vernon Unsworth were shuttled into the media spotlight against their will.

True to the spirit, of ‘the show must go on,’ the band including Sanghurst, James Valentine and James Farrar on bass, played some mind-blowing guitar riffs. My son, Daniel looked at me and we knew something wasn’t quite right. “This is my first music concert but it can’t be over right?” he asked. I’ve been listening to some of the songs by this band from before 12-year-old Daniel, was born. Luckily moments later Levine came right back and did a rendition of “Forever Young,” from the 80’s fused with one of their current chart busters, “Girls Like You.”

By the crowd's response saying he never heard people sing so loud. He then dedicated the song, “She will be loved,” to the multitude of women in the audience and yes you could hear a collective sigh (or maybe that’s just me). “Last night a dream came true,” said Urvashi Khandoikar, a resident of the UAE and a fan from Mumbai, India.

Maroon 5 play to 17,000 fans from across the region

Friday Times
Style superstar Virgil Abloh produced one of the big moments at Paris men’s fashion week Wednesday when he had Gigi Hadid walk through a field of white carnations at his Off White show. The black American creator—one of the hottest talents in fashion right now, who also heads Louis Vuitton’s menswear line—brought a host of stars to his front row.

Columbian singer Maluma rubbed shoulders with Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton and Chinese K pop star Li Wen Han to see Hadid close the show wearing an oversized white tuxedo adorned with abstract expressionist designs by the legendary New York graffiti artist Futura. Abloh, the first African American to head a major French label, used the veteran artist’s work to great effect throughout his brightly-coloured spring summer collection.

Field of carnations
US rapper Sheck Wes opened the show in another Futura-decorated white ensemble, with one of the artist’s sculptures called “Nosferatu” looming out of the field of white blossoms Abloh had transplanted inside a converted market in central Paris. Abloh’s army of models trampled the carnations—which are a symbol of innocence—at the end of the show. Abloh seemed to question what humans were doing to the planet, opening the show to the sound of the steam trains that heralded the Industrial Revolution and ending it with the haunting Beatles song, “Blackbird”.

The song is said to have been inspired both by nature and the US civil rights movement. Several of the garments in the show Abloh called “Plastic” had recycling symbols alongside his own four-pointed square logo.

But he later said he was using the word as a metaphor for how in “our generation a banal term all of a sudden turns into a whole different context, basically in a matter of moments”.

Socks and sandals
The former architect introduced a line of blanket-like capes to his high-end streetwear, with his usual trainers replaced by sandals with socks and hiking boots. A major retrospective of Abloh’s startlingly prolific work in art, fashion and design opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago last week. Maluma, the reggaeton star who appears with Madonna in the “Medellin” track of her new album “Madame X”, has been hailed as a “menswear icon in the making” this week by Vogue magazine.

American designer Virgil Abloh acknowledges the audience at the end of Off-White during the men’s Spring/Summer 2020 collection fashion show. — AFP

He had already turned up at the Heron Preston show Tuesday and has been sending regular updates to his 43 million followers on Instagram of his progress through the Paris collections. Despite Madonna wearing a Palomo Spain outfit for their video, the Columbian was noticeably absent from the flamboyant Spanish designer’s show Tuesday which opened Paris men’s fashion week.

Belgian maverick Walter van Beirendonck created the day’s most colourful and way out show which he called “Witsblitz”, full of wacky atomic superheroes as well as some rather gorgeous one-of-a-kind jackets. Where Van Beirendonck turned heads with avant-garde colour combinations his compatriot Y/Project’s Glenn Martens went for the unexpected through deconstruction of everyday garments, so “a pocket becomes a sleeve, a collar opens up and turns into a shoulder pad, a bomber jacket can be worn upside down”.

Japanese designer Jun Takahashi of Undercover took a much more conventional look at the classic black and charcoal grey double and single breasted suit/bomber jacket combinations, before adding ecotoplasmic prints of peoples and faces which slowly emerge from the fabric as the collection wore on. Former Dior and Calvin Klein supremo Raf Simons is due to round off the day with a late-night show in the Paris suburbs. — AFP

Models present creations by Off-White during the men’s Spring/Summer 2020 collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos
Rolling out her concept of fashion that is not a slave to the seasons or the shackles of Fashion Week, Rihanna opened the second pop-up shop of her Fenty brand in New York Tuesday, a month after the launch of the new fashion house in Paris. Fenty, which the Barbados-born diva launched with French luxury powerhouse LVMH, has set up shop in fashionable Soho store The Webster and officially opens to the public from Wednesday until June 30. It provided an occasion for the young fashion house to unveil a new mini-collection, called “6-19” after its launch date, following on from the inaugural “5-19” collection in Paris last month.

Some pieces from the first collection are back, alongside some new items, including a series of dresses and skirts in bold colors like orange or yellow but also some very dense prints. The cuts are figure-hugging with plunging necklines and the label has chosen soft materials such as satin or mesh. Most of the pieces are available online from Wednesday, with the exception of a set of T-shirts, at $230 each, which are only available in the store before being marketed online in July.

The prices of the collection are similar to the Paris offerings, which ranged from $250 for a T-shirt to more than $1,000 for a denim jacket or pantsuit. Rihanna, the world’s richest female musician, is the first black woman to head up a fashion house for Paris-based LVMH, which owns Dior, Louis Vuitton, Fendi and Givenchy among others. Fenty, named for the 31-year-old singer, born Robyn Rihanna Fenty, is LVMH’s first new luxury brand from scratch since the launch of Christian Lacroix in 1987. — AFP

Barbadian singer/actress Rihanna opens New York pop-up shop for her Fenty label

Rihanna, Barbadian singer/actress Rihanna arrives to the launch of FENTY’s upcoming collection release event at The Webster in New York City. — AFP
SKIN DEEP: JAPAN’S ‘WASHI’ PAPER TORN BY MODERN LIFE

Once an indispensable part of daily life in Japan, ultra-thin washi paper was used for everything from writing and painting to lampshades, umbrellas, and sliding doors, but demand has plunged as lifestyles have become more westernized. Despite its 1,300-year history and UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status, washi paper is struggling to attract consumers and the market value has dropped by more than 50 percent in the past two decades.

But at a small workshop in western Japan, Hiroyoshi Chinzei, a fourth-generation traditional paper maker, creates washi with a unique purpose that may help revive interest—both at home and abroad. Chinzei's product, the world's thinnest paper, has helped save historical documents at major museums and libraries—including the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum and Washington's Library of Congress—from decay. "Washi paper is more flexible and durable" than what Japanese refer to as "western paper", which disintegrates into tiny pieces when it becomes very old, the 50-year-old told AFP. The traditional hand-made paper is manufactured from plants called kozo, or mulberry, which has fibers that are much longer than materials used for paper in the west such as wood and cotton. "Old Japanese books from the seventh or eighth century remain in good condition... thanks to the fibers of the kozo plants," the washi maker told AFP at his small factory in Hidaka, a village 640 kilometers (400 miles) southwest of Tokyo.

‘Wings of a mayfly’
The papermaking process begins with steaming the kozo plants and peeling off the bark, which is then boiled until soft, while impurities are removed by hand in clear water. The fibers are then beaten and mixed with glue and water, before being placed on a wooden screen. This screen is then dipped repeatedly in water with the fibers and shaken to spread the liquid evenly to make a sheet of paper, a technique which requires years to master.

Because washi is hard to break, damaged, old documents can be reinforced by attaching a piece of washi or sandwiching them between two sheets of the paper, Chinzei explained. For documents, transparency is key to be able to see the text, meaning the thinner the washi, the better. Chinzei's washi, a type called tengu-joshi paper also known as "the wings of a mayfly," is 0.02 millimeters thick and weighs 1.6 grams per
square meter. This compared to a standard sheet of photocopy paper, which is about 0.09 millimeters thick and weighs 70 grams per square meter.

“It's a mesh-like paper mainly made with fibers... It's as thin as human skin,” Chinzei said. Using both machines and handmade techniques passed down for generations, the firm can create ultra-thin paper, which is also used by conservationists to restore and protect cultural objects.

‘Pure, strong and lasting’

One such conservationist, Takao Makino, carefully applies washi with a brush onto golden sticks representing the halo of a Buddhist statue estimated to be around 800 years old. Makino said he used washi for the first time in 2007 to protect the surface of one of the two main statues at Tokyo’s historic Sensoji Temple. “The surface was damaged and peeled off. So we covered all of it (with washi) to contain the damage,” the 68-year-old said. “Washi naturally fits into intricately-shaped sculptures, but papers with chemical fibers or wrapping films don’t,” he said.

“The history proves washi is very durable... The material is pure, strong and lasting. It’s reliable.” The production of the Japanese paper peaked in the Edo period between the 17th and late 19th centuries but declined as papermaking was mechanized. Now, due to the westernization of Japan, the washi market is shrinking again, Chinzei said. “We have no tatami rooms and almost no space to display a hanging scroll in the current lifestyle,” he said. “Washi used for those things are now gone.”

According to the industry ministry, the total value of handmade washi dropped to 1.78 billion yen in 2016 from 4.15 billion yen in 1998, while that of washi for calligraphy and shoji sliding screens fell to 5.86 billion yen from 25.1 billion yen. Chinzei didn’t plan on taking over his family trade and went to business school in Seattle to study finance. “But I came back... because I felt responsible for passing the baton to the next generation,” he said, hoping to find ways to expand the market. The volume of washi used for restoration is still small, but it’s been shipped to more than 40 countries and Chinzei is hopeful interest will grow. He explained: “For restoring cultural assets and as a canvas for art... I think washi has the potential to be used more in the world of art.” — AFP

Impressionism’s ‘forgotten woman’ shines in new Paris show

The first major show of Berthe Morisot’s paintings in France in nearly 80 years puts the forgotten woman of Impressionism back at the center of the movement she helped found. One damning review of the first exhibition by the group that would revolutionize art blasted it as no more than “five or six lunatics of which one is a woman...[whose] feminine grace is maintained amid the tourpurings of a dolorious mind.” That 1874 show included such soon-to-be art giants as Monet and Manet, whose brother Eugene later married Morisot.

But after her early death at 54, when she caught pneumonia after nursing their daughter through the illness, Morisot slipped back into the shadow of her more famous male peers like Renoir and Degas. Now a new show at the Musee d’Orsay, the first dedicated to her work by a major Paris institution since 1941, puts Morisot back in the rightful place as one of the most startling and innovative artists of her time. Curator Sylvie Patry said Morisot’s work was always seen through the lens of the male artists who taught her like the great landscape painter Corot, or those she worked alongside like Manet or Renoir.

‘Giving her back her place’

“We had to clear away some cliches about the woman artist and give her back her place at the heart of Impressionism,” Patry added. The show highlights how radical she actually was. Like Degas and the American painter Mary Cassatt—who suffered similarly at the hands of art historians for decades—Morisot preferred intimate portraits to the luminous landscapes that the group pioneered.

The Paris show is full of her penetrating and domestic scenes and tasks, children and flowers, subjects. Morisot was also lucky to be married to Eugene Manet, a minor painter, who did not take umbrage at her talent or her friendships with his brother Edouard, or Degas, Renoir, Monet and Mallarme. Tellingly, the largest ever retrospective of her work was organized just after her early death in 1895 by her Impressionist peers who so admired and respected her.

Unlike theirs, which are scattered among the world’s great museums, the 70 Morisot works in the Musee d’Orsay exhibition—which runs until September 22 — mostly come from private collections. Running alongside the show, the museum has organized a week-long itinerary called “Women, art and power” to highlight the work of female artists in its vast collection of 19th-century French art. — AFP

Philippe ‘Zdar’ of France’s Cassius duo dies in fall from window

French DJ and producer Philippe Cerboneschi, a star of the electro duo Cassius, has died after falling from a window in Paris, his agent said. He was 50. “He suffered an accidental fall, from the window of a high floor of a Paris building,” said Sebastien Faran of the incident which occurred on Wednesday evening. Cerboneschi, who was better known as ‘Zdar’, formed Cassius in 1996 with Hubert Blanc- Francard, or ‘Boom Bass’.

The duo became a staple of the French electronic scene with their first album “1999” released the same year and mixing hip hop, house and funk. They had met a few years earlier when Zdar was already working as a sound engineer for artists such as Serge Gainsbourg and was part of the Motorbass duo with Etienne de Crecy. Three other Cassius studio albums followed, “Au reve” in 2002, “15 Again” which marked a turn towards rock in 2006 with the single “Toop Toop” and “1hormia” in 2016. A pioneer of the so-called ‘French touch’ house music craze, he also collaborated extensively with other artists such as the Beastie Boys, Phoenix, The Rapture, Cat Power, Chromeo, Tiga, M and Franz Ferdinand. — AFP
**Dive into a Greek gyro, with lamb and yogurt sauce in a pita**

What’s not to love about a Greek gyro, a sandwich of seasoned, marinated lamb, tomato, lettuce, and cucumber-yogurt tzatziki sauce stuffed inside a soft pita? The traditional method for cooking the meat employs an electric vertical rotisserie on which layers of sliced and marinated leg of lamb are stacked. After cooking for hours, the meat is shaved with a long slicing knife, revealing pieces with crisp exteriors and moist interiors infused with garlic and oregano.

We wanted to translate this recipe for the home kitchen. Surprisingly, using ground lamb—which we formed into patties and grilled—was easy and came close to reproducing the texture of rotisserie lamb. A modified panade, or wet binder, of pita bread crumbs, lemon juice, and garlic gave our patties a sturdier structure and fuller, more savory flavor. For a crisp outside and moist inside, we browned our patties on the grill until a crust formed on each side. Then we grilled the pitas as well to warm them and add a little smoky flavor. If using pocketless pitas, do not cut off the tops; instead, use a portion of a fifth pita to create crumbs.

**GRILLED GREEK-STYLE LAMB PITA SANDWICHES**

**Ingredients**

- Servings: 4
- Start to finish: 40 minutes
- 4 (8-inch) pita breads
- 1/2 onion, chopped coarse
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano or 1 teaspoon dried
- 4 teaspoons lemon juice
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 pound ground lamb
- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup Tzatziki (recipe follows)
- 1 large tomato, cored and sliced thin
- 2 cups shredded iceberg lettuce
- 2 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (1/2 cup)

**Preparation**

Cut top quarter off each pita bread. Tear quarters into 1-inch pieces. (You should have 3/4 cup pita pieces.) Lightly moisten 2 pita breads with water. Sandwich unmoistened pitas between moistened pitas and wrap stack tightly in lightly greased heavy-duty aluminum foil; set aside.

Process pita bread pieces, onion, oregano, lemon juice, garlic, salt, and pepper in food processor until smooth paste forms, about 30 seconds; transfer to large bowl. Add ground lamb and knead with your hands until thoroughly combined. Divide mixture into 12 equal portions. Shape each portion into ball, then gently flatten into round disk about 1/2 inch thick and 2 1/2 inches in diameter.

For a charcoal grill: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter three-quarters filled with charcoal (4 1/2 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

For a gas grill: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn primary burner to medium-high and turn off other burner(s). Clean and oil cooking grate. Place patties on hotter side of grill, cover (if using gas), and cook until well browned and crust forms, 4 to 6 minutes per side. Transfer patties to paper towel-lined plate, cover loosely with foil, and let sit while heating pitas.

Place packet of pitas on cooler side of grill and flip occasionally until heated through, about 5 minutes. Using spoon, spread 1/4 cup Tzatziki inside each warm pita. Divide patties evenly among pitas and fill each sandwich with tomato slices, 1/2 cup shredded lettuce, and 2 tablespoons feta. Serve immediately.

**TZATZIKI:**

Tzatziki is a traditional Greek sauce made from strained yogurt and cucumber, as delicious eaten as a dip for raw vegetables as it is dolloped over grilled chicken or lamb. To make our own classic version, we started by shredding a cucumber on a coarse grater, salting it, and letting it drain to keep any excess liquid from watering down the dip. Greek yogurt gives tzatziki its pleasant tang and richness, but before stirring in our drained cucumber, we enhanced its flavor with minced fresh herbs and garlic. Using Greek yogurt here is key: do not substitute regular plain yogurt or the sauce will be very watery.

Makes about 2 cups

- 1 (12-ounce) cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and shredded
- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup whole-milk Greek yogurt
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh mint and/or dill
- 1 small garlic clove, minced

Toss cucumber with 1/2 teaspoon salt in colander and let drain for 15 minutes.

While yogurt, oil, mint, and garlic together in bowl, then stir in drained cucumber. Cover and refrigerate until chilled, at least 1 hour or up to 2 days. Season with salt and pepper to taste before serving.
Too many recipes for glazed grilled chicken give you meat that’s scorched or sickeningly sweet or both. We wanted nicely glazed, unimpeachable peachy grilled chicken. To start, we sprinkled the chicken with salt and pepper and let it sit for at least an hour before cooking to season the chicken and enable it to retain more moisture. Then we faced the main challenge: balancing real peach flavor with the necessity of not incinerating our dinner.

Cooking chicken covered in sweet preserves led to intense scorching on the grill, but just applying a glaze at the end of cooking didn’t yield much flavor. We created a setup that cooked the chicken most of the way through in the sauce without exposing it to open flame by using a disposable aluminum pan. We started the chicken skin side down to render some fat before flipping the pieces skin side up to dry off and crisp up. We then finished the meat over the coals for perfect browning. A fresh peach and a jalapeno chile cooked alongside the chicken, and incorporated into the sauce added heat and flavor to the finished dish.

### PEACH-GLAZED GRILLED CHICKEN

#### Ingredients
- Servings: 4
- Start to finish: 1 hour, 20 minutes
- 3 pounds bone-in chicken pieces (split breasts cut in half, drumsticks, and/or thighs), trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup wood chips
- 1 cup peach preserves
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 (13 by 9-inch) disposable aluminum pan
- 1 peach, halved and pitted
- 1 jalapeno chile
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar

#### Preparation
- Pat chicken dry with paper towels and sprinkle with 2 1/4 teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper. Place in 1-gallon zipper-lock bag and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours. Just before grilling, soak wood chips in water for 15 minutes, then drain. Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in 8 by 4 1/2-inch foil packet. Cut 2 evenly spaced 2-inch slits in top of packet. Whisk preserves and cayenne together in disposable pan. Place peach halves (cut side up), jalapeno, and chicken (skin side down) in pan.

- For a charcoal grill: Open bottom vent halfway. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Place wood chip packet on coals on 1 side of grill. Set cooking grate in place; cover, and open lid vent halfway. Heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 5 minutes.

- For a gas grill: Remove cooking grate and place wood chip packet directly on primary burner. Set grate in place, turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 15 minutes. Turn all burners to medium. (Adjust burners as needed to maintain grill temperature between 350 F and 375 F.)

  - Clean and oil cooking grate. Place disposable pan with chicken over side of grill opposite wood chip packet. Cover grill (position lid vent over chicken if using charcoal) and cook for 10 minutes. Flip chicken, and rotate pan 180 F. (Open top and bottom vents fully for charcoal grill.) Continue to cook, covered, until breasts register 155 F and drumsticks/thighs register 170 F, 10 to 14 minutes.

  - Flip chicken, peach halves, and jalapeno to coat with preserves, then transfer to grill grate (skin side down for chicken). Leave pan on grill to let preserves chicken and caramelized slightly around edges, 3 to 5 minutes, then remove pan from grill.

  - Meanwhile, cook chicken, peach halves, and jalapeno until well browned on first side, 2 to 5 minutes. Flip and continue to cook until chicken breasts register 160 F and drumsticks/thighs register 175 F and peach halves and jalapeno are well browned on second side, 2 to 5 minutes. Return chicken, skin side up, to pan with preserves, tent loosely with foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Transfer peach and jalapeno to plate to cool slightly.

  - Remove any loose skin from peach halves and jalapeno (no need to remove all skin), then chop peach halves, seed and mince jalapeno, and transfer both to bowl. Arrange chicken on serving platter. Pour preserves from pan into bowl with chopped peach halves and jalapeno; stir in vinegar. Season glaze with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon glaze over chicken and serve.
A weekend in Barcelona can only ever be a teaser of what this majestic beachside city has to offer, so here is a grab-bag of highlights, spanning ancient and modern and packaged into a geographically convenient, walkable two-day tour.

It is also all-weather, but in high summer you might want to substitute some sightseeing for an afternoon at the beach, or some fresh air and panoramic views up on Montjuic. We strongly advise that you book all big sights online in advance, both to save money and to avoid disappointment or big queues. A low-level view of the whimsical facade of Casa Batllo in Barcelona; it is sprinkled with bits of blue, mauve and green tiles and studded with wave-shaped window frames and balconies, rising to an uneven roof with a solitary tower.

**SATURDAY**

10am

There are many things that make Barcelona unique, but foremost among them is the architectural style known as Modernisme, a close relation of Art Nouveau. Start with breakfast at Els Quatre Gats in a building designed by Puig i Cadafalch - one of Gaudi's contemporaries, with his own distinctive spin on the Modernista style.

11am

Wander up Portal de l'Angel to Placa Catalunya, the starting point for the elegant Passeig de Gracia, a long showcase for haute couture shops and Modernista architecture. Three perfect examples of the style, each displaying the distinctive traits of the three main proponents of the movement, sit almost side by side on the Manzana de la Discordia (Block of...
Discord). On the left is Domenech i Montaner’s frothy Casa Lleo Morera; in the middle is Puig i Cadafalch’s Flemish-inspired Casa Amatller, which houses a small chocolate museum; and to the right is Gaudí’s celebrated Casa Batlló, also open to the public.

1.30pm
Continue up to Gaudi’s La Pedrera apartment block, and from here it’s a short walk to Catalan bistro Embat for a leisurely lunch.

4pm
Get the metro or a bus to the stunning but under visited Recinte Modernista de Sant Pau, a former hospital designed by architect Domenech i Montaner. For a fee, visitors can stroll through the grounds and admire the fanciful pavilions that once served as wards.

6pm
Take a 15-minute stroll from here to Gaudi’s unfinished cathedral, La Sagrada Familia. Love it or hate it, it’s one of Barcelona’s quintessential sights. It’s usually essential that you book ahead online; allow an hour or two to see it properly.

8.30pm
By now you might be ready to jump in a cab to Tapas 24, a smart basement haunt from local celeb chef Carles Abelló serving great-value gourmet tapas.

11pm
Head down into the Barri Gotic to catch some live music at Harlem Jazz Club (which offers music in every flavor, not only jazz) or El Paraigua, which specializes in funk and soul in its cozy basement space. Placa Reial in Barcelona in the late afternoon sun: people are walking round the large paved square, which is dotted with palm trees; restaurants, bars and nightspots lie beneath the arcades of 19th-century neoclassical buildings.

SUNDAY
8.30am
Forget breakfast in your hotel, and head straight out to beat the crowds and see La Rambla at its one peaceful moment of the day. If you begin right at the bottom, you can take a lift to the very top of the Mirador de Colom, Barcelona’s answer to Nelson’s Column - with Columbus at the top - from which you can see across the entire city and out to sea.

9am
From here head up La Rambla, a tree-lined boulevard that only displays its true elegance early in the morning, before the cruise ships disgorged their masses, and the human statues and pickpockets set up for the day’s roaring trade. From bottom to top, look out for the Placa Reial to the right, the Liceu opera house to the left, and the Miro pavement mosaic right in the middle, just after the historic Cafe de l’Opera, where you can stop for coffee and a croissant.

10am
From around the halfway point on La Rambla, follow the Carrer del Ferran, which leads north to the Placa de Sant Jaume. This handsome square is flanked on one side by the ajuntament (city hall) and on the other by the Generalitat, the seat of the Catalan regional government. A sidestreet to the right of the Generalitat takes you to the hidden Temple Roma d’August, with four soaring columns that have stood here since Roman times.

11am
Continuing down this street will take you to the back of La Catedral, a looming Gothic affair, famous for the 13 geese resident in the cloister - one for every year of St Eulalia’s life. Joint patron saint of Barcelona, her small corpse is buried in the crypt.

12.30pm
Come out of the main entrance of the cathedral, past the sardana dancers who perform here on Sunday mornings, and head right to the Via Laietana. A short walk uphill takes you
to the fanciful Palau de la Musica Catalana, a Modernista concert hall, where you can take a guided tour or simply admire the stunning facade.

2pm

A couple of blocks south of here is the Mercat de Santa Caterina, a colorful food market with an undulating Gaudiesque roof - walk past it on your way to El Atril, where you can have lunch in a small square in the sunshine.

A perfect weekend in Barcelona should take in the monumental waterfall at Parc de la Ciutadella, a dramatic combination of statuary, rugged rocks, greenery and water; there are trees and a modern building in the background and the greenish water of a lake in the foreground.

4pm

After lunch, stroll it off in the nearby Parc de la Ciutadella, a verdant oasis with a boating lake, a zoo and a rose garden, and then head to the Museu Picasso, which is free to enter on the first Sunday of the month.

7pm

Heading seaward from the Museu Picasso, you’ll arrive at the Passeig del Born, a pedestrian boulevard flanked at one end by the 14th-century Santa Maria del Mar basilica and at the other by the Born Centre Cultural. This handsome iron and brick construction was built in the 19th century as a market, and was recently renovated as an exhibition space and restaurant. In the centre you can see the remains of houses razed by the forces of Philip V in the War of Spanish Succession.

8pm

Just in front you’ll find laid-back cocktail bar Guzzo, run by one of the city’s best-known DJs, often to be found at the decks here. This is the perfect place for a sundowner before dinner round the corner at Casa Delfín, where you can try classic dishes from all over Catalonia.

—www.lonelyplanet.com
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 need in your life right now. Be accessible. Make it clear in a convertible. Just get outside and breathe in the fresh air. You crave a Cape. Let your hair down and head for wide open spaces. Take a ride careful not to shut yourself off from those who care about you. Their write, or escape with a good book. Yoga or meditation may even be Counter it by taking time for yourself to do what you enjoy most. Paint, evaluation could prove to be your best bet. A new acquaintance today. Don’t assume the you have been longing for. You need an es¬ and appreciated and today may just the day you receive that reward where you are in life. You have been feeling a that need to be needed learn to love and an appreciate yourself for who you have become and be surprised if taking a chance brings great reward. You may feel extra take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you. Don’t do not look back. Keep your eyes on the prize. Today is a day you have been longing for. You need an es¬ and appreciated and today may just the day you receive that reward where you are in life. You have been feeling a that need to be needed learn to love and an appreciate yourself for who you have become and be surprised if taking a chance brings great reward. You may feel extra take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you. Don’t do not look back. Keep your eyes on the prize. Today is a day you have been longing for. You need an es¬ and appreciated and today may just the day you receive that reward where you are in life. You have been feeling a that need to be needed learn to love and an appreciate yourself for who you have become and be surprised if taking a chance brings great reward. You may feel extra take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you. Don’t do not look back. Keep your eyes on the prize. Today is a day you have been longing for. You need an es¬ and appreciated and today may just the day you receive that reward where you are in life. You have been feeling a that need to be needed learn to love and an appreciate yourself for who you have become and be surprised if taking a chance brings great reward. You may feel extra take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you. Don’t do not look back. Keep your eyes on the prize. Today is a day you have been longing for. You need an es¬ and appreciated and today may just the day you receive that reward where you are in life. You have been feeling a that need to be needed learn to love and an appreciate yourself for who you have become and be surprised if taking a chance brings great reward. You may feel extra take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you. Don’t do not look back. Keep your eyes on the prize. Today is a day you have been longing for. You need an es¬ and appreciated and today may just the day you receive that reward where you are in life. You have been feeling a that need to be needed learn to love and an appreciate yourself for who you have become and be surprised if taking a chance brings great reward. You may feel extra take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you. Don’t do not look back. Keep your eyes on the prize. Today is a day you have been longing for. You need an es¬ and appreciated and today may just the day you receive that reward where you are in life. You have been feeling a that need to be needed learn to love and an appreciate yourself for who you have become and be surprised if taking a chance brings great reward. You may feel extra take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to you. Don’t do not look back. Keep your eyes on the prize.
Dr. Husain Alenezi

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- Endourology Society-Approved Fellowship In Endourology And Robotic Surgery At Western University, Ontario, Canada.

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**Change of Name**

I, Durairaj Murugaiyan, holder of Indian Passport No: L060/492, Salmiya, Block 9, Al Mugera St, building No. 84, first floor, flat No. 06, issued in Kuwait hereby change name as it appears in my passport from given name: MURUGAIYAN DURAIRAJ to surname: MURUGAIYAN and given name: DURAIRAJ for all future purposes. (C 5551) 19-6-2019

I, Raphael Jason, holder of Indian Passport No. M6102415, Hawally, Block-6, Building-2601, Flat Number-10 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare the name change as Surname Rajan Babu (RAJAN BABU) and given name Raphael Jason (RAPHAEL JASON). (C 5552) 17-6-2019

**Matrimonial**

Marriage proposal for a Christian/Born Again girl settled in USA. Proposal invited for an Orthodox/Born Again Keralite girl, born and raised in Kuwait, 35 years of age, 164cm height, medical graduate and currently in family business. We invite alliance from professionally qualified, God fearing Christian bachelors willing to relocate to USA. If interested kindly contact email: jobema33@yahoo.com. (C 5553) 19-6-2019
Mumbai slum-dwellers fear redevelopment

Project to uplift lives, but destroy Dharavi's social fabric

MUMBAI: Residents of Asia's most famous slum fear a multi-billion-dollar plan to transform the area into a Singapore-like enclave featuring luxury skyscrapers and shopping malls will destroy its vast informal economy. Indian authorities have asked a developer to tear down and rebuild Dharavi, a bustling settlement in Mumbai known as the backdrop for Danny Boyle's hit 2008 movie "Slumdog Millionaire".

Supporters say the project will uplift hundreds of thousands of lives, but critics claim it will destroy Dharavi's social fabric and accuse officials of pandering to property developers. "Dharavi is the beating heart of Mumbai," the government wants to grab it," says liquid soap manufacturer Asif Sheikh who recently went on an eight-day hunger strike over the redevelopment. Dubai-based developer Mepa Gudiya, who exports earthenware across India and abroad, said. "We have been living and working here for over 100 years... You'll have to shoot us before building your towers here," says potter Mepa Gudiya, who exports earthenware across India and abroad.

"Dharavi originated as a swamp and grew rapidly in the late 19th century as migrants moved to what was then called Bombay to work in its expanding British-era factories. Today, dozens of tourists armed with cameras meander through the area's narrow alleys every day, dodging goats and handcarts as they peer into tin-roofed shanties and ramshackle workshops. Dharavi is located in the centre of the coastal megapolis, close to the Bandra Kurla Complex business district, airport, a main railway station and a crucial waterway, making it appealing to developers. "We're not against redevelopment," says Malik Abdullah, owner of a plastics recycling unit. "But it was us who turned this area into "smart city" with separate commercial and residential zones, as well as creating a "New York-like Central Park" and a "modern marina" in a nearby polluted bay. "Lives will be enhanced without destroying their social fabric. It can be a model for the world," Shah said.

"Unfortunately it's the interests of the real estate lobby that is guiding decisions about Dharavi's development," says Kalpana Sharma, author of the book "Rediscovering Dharavi". Authorities are soon expected to survey Dharavi to determine how many families are eligible for free homes. "We're afraid that the intrinsic nature of Dharavi, where people live and work out of the same room, will disappear," she says. Many Dharavi residents are skeptical, however. They would welcome new homes with private bathrooms and running water but worry that the intrinsic nature of Dharavi, where people live and work out of the same room, will disappear. "We're afraid that the intrinsic nature of Dharavi, where people live and work out of the same room, will disappear," she says. Many Dharavi residents are skeptical, however.

A Dubai-based developer backed by royal families from the United Arab Emirates emerged as the highest bidder. The ambitious scheme, projected to cost around $4 billion, will include demolishing tens of thousands of dilapidated slum houses and replacing them with several hundred towers up to 30 storeys high.

Around 70,000 families could be eligible for free apartments around 300 square-foot in size "that will be as good as any in Dubai or Singapore," according to Nilang Shah, CEO of SecLink Group, the master developer. He wants to turn the area into a "smart city" with separate commercial and residential zones, as well as creating a "New York-like Central Park" and a "modern marina" in a nearby polluted bay. "Lives will be enhanced without destroying their social fabric. It can be a model for the world," Shah said.

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Stocks up, dollar, bond yields down on Fed rate cut signal

Oil jumps 3% after Iran shoots down US drone

LONDON: World stock markets rose yesterday after the US Federal Reserve signaled it was likely to cut interest rates next month, and the dollar and benchmark bond yields fell to multi-year lows. The Fed on Wednesday suggested rate cuts might start as soon as next month, saying it was ready to take action in the face of growing economic risks. The MSCI world equity index, which tracks shares in 47 countries, gained 0.4 percent on the prospects of further stimulus, heading for a third day of gains. The Euro STOXX 600 rose 0.66 percent in early trading and Wall Street futures indicated US stocks were set to open higher.

In Asia, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan rose 1.2 percent, led by gains in China. The dollar fell and benchmark US and euro zone government bonds fell after the Fed's move. The dollar was on course for its biggest two-day drop again, after a slide of other currencies in 14 months and dropped 0.5 percent to a half-year low against the Japanese yen. The Fed's rate signal came before meetings at major central banks in Asia and Europe that were expected to flag similar moves. The European Central Bank and the Australian central bank had earlier signaled this week more policy stimulus was needed.

“it becomes a race to the bottom for global markets, a race to the bottom for FX,” said Peter Chatwell, head of rates at Mizuho. The Bank of Japan left rates unchanged yesterday but stressed that global risks were rising, suggesting it was leaning towards boosting monetary support. But Norway's central bank raised rates, as expected, sending the Norwegian crown up 1.6% against the dollar and 1 percent against the euro.

The Bank of England was due to announce its policy decision at 1100 GMT. It looked set to stick to its message that it was likely to raise rates. Elsewhere, oil prices jumped 3% after Iran shot down a U.S. drone that its Revolutionary Guards said was flying over southern Iran, raising fears that a military confrontation could erupt between Tehran and Washington.

Trade talks

Geopolitical risks elsewhere persisted, although hopes grew for progress in US-China trade talks. The world's two biggest economies have imposed increasingly severe tariffs on each other's imports. Chinese and US officials will hold trade talks following instructions from their leaders, the Chinese commerce ministry said on Thursday, adding that Beijing hoped Washington would create the necessary conditions for dialogue. Christophe Barraud, chief economist at Market Securities in Paris, said stock markets had so far mostly dodged fallout from the trade war.

He warned they could suffer if economic indicators worsen in the second half of the year. “Equities are mainly benefiting from the easy money policy, without too much damage on the economic front,” he said. “That may change in H2... metrics will likely weaken through the world because of the impact of ongoing tariffs.”

BOND YIELDS DROP

The Fed's dovish tone caused the 10-year US Treasury's yield to fall as low as 1.974 percent, its lowest since November 2016. It made the 10-year Treasury yield into a medium-term investor, raising the chances it would create the necessary conditions for dia-
genve. Christophe Barraud, chief economist at Market Securities in Paris, said stock markets had so far mostly dodged fallout from the trade war.

“Since the Committee's previous meeting... downside risks to growth have increased. Globally, trade tensions have intensified,” the BoE said. "As expected, recent UK data have been volatile, in large part due to Brexit-related effects on financial markets and businesses," it added. The BoE said the UK's "economic outlook will continue to depend significantly on the nature and timing of EU withdrawal".

Britain is scheduled to leave the bloc on October 31, when it will lose access to major markets covered by EU trade agreements. Without a Brexit deal between London and Brussels, the UK will default to “third country” status with the EU, with trade relations run on World Trade Organization rules. The MPC yesterday added that the prospect of future UK rate hikes had also lessened because of Brexit. "Increased Brexit uncertainties have put additional downward pressure on UK forward interest rates and led to a decline in the sterling exchange rate," it said. Analysts do not expect a rise in British interest rates any time soon, also owing to falling UK annual inflation and against a background of dovish tones from the Federal Reserve and European Central Bank in recent days on their outlooks for US and eurozone borrowing costs.

"Given the drop in (UK) GDP in April and the fall in inflation back to target in May, there was never much chance that the MPC would raise interest rates from 0.75 percent today," noted Thomas Pugh, UK economist at Capital Economics research group. "What's more, the tone of the (BoE) statement and minutes followed the lead from the Fed and the ECB and softened a little compared to May, indicating that the MPC is happy to sit on its hands for the time being" regarding rates.

Emirates Airline provides Kuwait govt employees with travel discounts

KUWAIT CITY: Employees of six different government ministries and entities in Kuwait can now plan and book their holidays and leisure travel on Emirates Airline. The airline will be offering special flight discounts to employees of the Ministries of Interior, Defense, Health, Education, Public Works and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. Employees of these government entities can book for travel in Business and Economy class across its network, in addition to benefiting from special offers on Emirates holidays packages. Employees can also receive flight discounts in Emirates First Class from Kuwait to Dubai. Discounts range from 6-12 percent depending on cabin class and fare.

The offer is valid on bookings made today until September 30, 2019, for travel until November 30, 2019. Employees can book using a special promotion code online and can also book by visiting the local Emirates sales office and ticketing counters after presenting their ministry identification cards. Emirates Skywards will be offering fixed bonus miles for existing members that are employed in participating Kuwaiti ministries availing the special offer. New members who have just joined the Skywards program from the ministries and travelling during this period will receive double first flight bonus Miles.

Emirates operates to Kuwait with six daily flights to Dubai and onwards to over 150 destinations, and introduced its Boeing 777-300ER "Gamechanger" aircraft on June 1. From First Class through to the Business and Economy Class cabins, the latest Emirates 777 aircraft features ergonomically designed seats, multi-million dollar innovation and the latest version of the ice in-flight entertainment system across all cabins. Passengers travelling across all classes on Emirates can enjoy regionally inspired meals, 4,000 entertainment channels on ice - the airline's award winning in-flight entertainment system - and up to 20 MB complimentary Wi-Fi to stay connected with friends and family during the flight.

BoE warns on heightened no-deal Brexit prospect

LONDON: The prospect of Britain crashing out of the European Union without a deal has risen since last month, the Bank of England warned yesterday, as it kept interest rates unchanged. “Domestically, the perceived likelihood of a no-deal Brexit has risen” since May, the BoE said in a statement after its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) kept the central bank’s main borrowing cost at 0.75 percent.

“Since the Committee’s previous meeting... downside risks to growth have increased. Globally, trade tensions have intensified,” the BoE said. "As expected, recent UK data have been volatile, in large part due to Brexit-related effects on financial markets and businesses," it added. The BoE said the UK's "economic outlook will continue to depend significantly on the nature and timing of EU withdrawal."

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Trade disputes to dominate as ASEAN meets in Bangkok

BANGKOK: Southeast Asian leaders will dissect the impact of the US-China tariff war this weekend at a Bangkok summit, with Beijing determined to drive forward a trade pact sweeping in 40 percent of global commerce—but excluding America. Disputes in the flashpoint South China Sea and Myanmar’s treatment of Rohingya Muslims are also likely to make the agenda at the two-day Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting starting Saturday in the Thai capital.

But commerce will dominate, with the trade war between the world’s two biggest economies pushing some major manufacturers to flee China to Southeast Asia and casting doubts over the future of free trade. US President Donald Trump has imposed tariffs on $200 billion of Chinese goods, from sneakers and socks to washing machines and furniture, prompting Beijing to hit back with levies on $60 billion of American imports.

“One of the biggest beneficiaries is ASEAN,” said Drew Thompson, a research fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore, in reference to the gains Asia’s low-capital, labor-intensive nations stand to make from trade tensions between China and the United States. Firms including Brooks Running Company and washing machine maker Haier have already started migrating from China, seeking friendlier, lower-tariff markets in Vietnam, Thailand or Indonesia.

With the spat grinding on, Beijing is intensifying its drive to sign a massive trade pact that sweeps in Southeast Asia. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) includes all 10 ASEAN economies, plus India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. It links about half the world’s population and is seen as a way for China to draft the architecture of Asian-Pacific trade, following a US retreat from the region.

Shortly after his election, Trump pulled the US from the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP)—which would have been the world’s largest trade deal—slamming it as an American “job killer”.

‘Bad news for everyone’

Backers hoped to sign the RCEP deal by the end of this year, but negotiations have become sticky with Australia and New Zealand pushing for “high quality” environmental and labor protections. India is also seeking guarantees the deal will not force its market open to duty-free goods from its main economic rival China through Southeast Asia. In seeking to draw its own perimeters, New Delhi is the “glaring objector” to the free-trade deal, Thompson added.

Expectations of concrete progress in Bangkok have dimmed—although RCEP negotiators are scheduled to meet on Saturday. In the absence of a deal, observers worry the short-term gains for ASEAN from the US-China trade war may soon be consumed by falling global growth rates. “If China and the US continue and the world economy suffers... then it’s just bad news for everybody,” Fred Burke, managing partner at law firm Baker McKenzie in Vietnam, which specializes in investment, told AFP.

As usual, bitter disputes over competing claims in the South China Sea are likely to surface in Bangkok after a collision between a Filipino and Chinese ship in the resource-rich waterway. Some officials in Manila initially blamed Chinese sailors for deliberately ramming the boat and leaving Filipino fishermen stranded at sea. But the Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte this week downplayed the incident, saying it was “just a collision”. The flashpoint highlights the urgent need for toughened-up terms in a Code of Conduct for clashes between fishermen at sea, said Manila-based security analyst Richard Heydarian. “If the Chinese don’t rein in these fishermen... this is just going to get worse,” he said. Myanmar may also face pressure over the stalled repatriation of Rohingya Muslims, currently living in camps in Bangladesh, after more than 740,000 of the persecuted minority fled a 2017 army crackdown in Rakhine state.

The country’s de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi is expected in Bangkok as is Malaysian premier Mahathir Mohamad who has previously broken diplomatic protocol by criticizing a fellow ASEAN leader. An upbeat ASEAN report leaked to AFP this month was criticized for predicting that half a million Rohingyas will soon return, failing to use the word “Rohingya” and glossing over ongoing violence in Rakhine.—AFP

Zimbabwe’s currency hits new low, firms demand payment in US dollars

HARARE: Zimbabwe’s interim currency fell to a new low on the black market yesterday and local firms were demanding payment in US dollars as a hedge against inflation, which is running at its highest in a decade. The RTGS dollar has plunged 60 percent against the US dollar since its introduction in February, and public sector workers’ demands for a second pay rise this year could undermine a government drive to convince lenders of its fiscal discipline.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa won a disputed election last year on a promise to revive a Zimbabwe economy shredded by decades of mismanagement by his ousted predecessor Robert Mugabe. But a year later daily life is hard.Ordinary Zimbabweans are enduring a severe shortage of US dollars, fuel, medicines and bread and daily power cuts that last 10 hours.

The RTGS dollar, introduced by the government on Feb. 22 as the first step towards a new currency by year-end, traded at 10.5 to the US dollar yesterday, 14.3 percent lower than a week ago. On the official interbank rate, the RTGS currency was pegged at 6.2 compared to 5.9 a week ago. Zimbabwe formally adopted the US dollar as its official currency in January 2009, when most Zimbabweans had already ditched the hyperinflation-wrecked Zimbabwe Dollar. A decade later, analysts say the same situation is repeating itself.

More than 80% of Zimbabweans earn RTGS dollars but from bribes to rentals, car parts and many groceries, prices are now pegged in US dollars. That has seen inflation rise to 97.86% in May, its highest level in a decade, eroding savings and savagely causing Zimbabweans to fear a return to the hyperinflation of 2008 when the rate reached 500 billion percent, leaving many destitute. “I earn 400 RTGS, where do I get the US dollar? The government should fix this before we all die,” said Robson Ndiringepi, a security guard manning the central bank, and raise interest rates to curb inflation and avoid “spontaneous re-dollarization.” “Everyone now anticipates the RTGS dollar will weaken further, so businesses increase prices and workers demand more and the cycle continues. We are chasing our tails,” John Robertson, a Harare-based economist said.—Reuters

China tells top global CEOs it will ‘further open up’

BEIJING: Premier Li Keqiang vowed yesterday to further open up China’s economy during a meeting with CEOs of top global companies amid simmering trade tensions with the United States. Washington and other trade partners have long complained about the uneven playing field foreign companies encounter in China, theft of intellectual property and entry barriers that allow state-backed companies to dominate crucial sectors of the economy.

During the meeting in Beijing with heads of 19 multinational companies, Li pledged to make China more attractive to foreign investors. “We welcome more and more foreign investment to come to China,” Li told the group representing the Global CEO Council. “We will also relax (restrictions on) access to even more fields to create a market-oriented, law-based internationalized business environment.”

Among the industry leaders attending the meeting at Beijing’s opulent Great Hall of the People were Volkswagen head Herbert Diess, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla, Daimler’s Ola Kallenius, UPS chief executive David Abney, Honeywell CEO Darius Adamczyk and Nokia’s Rajeev Suri. Jean-Pascal Tricoire, head of Schneider Electric, told Li that foreign firms are the “best bridges” between China and the rest of the world. “Since some time though, the world has been going through turbulence, tensions and challenges,” Tricoire said.

The meeting comes as bracing US tariffs threaten China’s status as the “factory of the world,” with companies looking to move production outside the country, according to a recent survey by the American Chamber of Commerce in China. The Chinese government also convened top tech companies and warned them of consequences if they cut off technology sales to the country, the New York Times reported earlier this month.—AFP
Mexico ratifies new trade deal with US, Canada

MEXICO CITY: Mexico ratified the new North American trade agreement Wednesday, making the country the first to give it final approval despite recent tension with the US. The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) passed in the Mexican Senate with 114 votes in favor and just four against, sending what the government called “a clear message in favor of an open economy and deepening economic integration in the region.”

“This means foreign investment in Mexico, jobs in Mexico, access to the US market for our products,” said President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. There was little doubt the new deal would pass easily in Mexico; the agreement it aims to replace, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has helped turn the country into an exporting powerhouse over the past 25 years. It now falls to Canada and the US to ratify the deal.

The three countries signed the agreement on November 30 after a year of tough negotiations triggered by US President Donald Trump’s insistence on replacing NAFTA, which he called “the worst trade deal ever made.” Trump congratulated his Mexican counterpart on the ratification, and called on American lawmakers to do likewise. “Congratulations to President Lopez Obrador—Mexico voted to ratify the USMCA today by a huge margin. Time for Congress to do the same here!” Trump tweeted.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is due to visit Trump and US Congressional leaders Thursday to push for ratification of USMCA, among other issues. The deal faces a battle in the US Congress, where opposition Democrats have criticized a provision that would put the United States at a disadvantage against a weaker euro, which would make American exports less competitive. Powell declined to wade into that debate, or comment on the exchange rate, saying only that the central bank does not use interest rate policy to influence the American currency.

Bitterness over Trump’s ‘blackmail’

Tensions between the US and Mexico have been high since Trump threatened last month to impose tariffs on all Mexican exports in retaliation for the number of Central American migrants arriving at the two countries’ border. Mexico managed to negotiate a reprieve from the tariffs—which were due to take effect June 10—but agreed to step up its efforts to halt the migration flow and to ratify the USMCA.

The USMCA’s approval was a victory for Mexico and the USMCA aims to replace, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has helped turn the country into an exporting powerhouse over the past 25 years. It now falls to Canada and the US to ratify the deal.

MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador speaks during the opening of the workshop “Constitutional Standards for the Performance of the National Guard” in Mexico City.—AFP

Fed opens door to rate cut amid growing ‘uncertainties’

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve opened the door to a rate cut Wednesday, vowing to act to keep the economy growing as uncertainties about trade and other issues mount. US Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell said trade friction and slowing growth worldwide have led many central bankers to feel the case for an interest rate cut has “strengthened” and officials are “mindful of ongoing cross currents, including trade developments and concerns about global growth,” he told reporters.

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“While the baseline outlook remains favorable,” he said, “many FOMC participants now see the case for somewhat more accommodative policy has strengthened.” But he cautioned that it is important they not overreact to single bits of data or a “short-term swing in sentiment.” Markets are almost universally predicting multiple Fed moves this year and seem to view the Fed stance as dovish enough for now, with the three major US stock indexes closing with modest gains following the announcement.

However, Trump may be disappointed not to get a rate cut, since he has accused the Fed of undercutting his efforts to supercharge the economy. He even hinted Tuesday he might remove Powell from his post, but the Fed chairman said Wednesday he believes the law is clear that he has a four-year term. “I fully intend to serve it,” he said.

Trump on Tuesday also bashed European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi, saying his signal of more stimulus would put the United States at a disadvantage against a weaker euro, which would make American exports less competitive. Powell declined to wade into that debate, or comment on the exchange rate, saying only that the central bank does not use interest rate policy to influence the American currency.

His comments did impact the exchange rate. However, the dovish comments did impact the exchange rate, as the dollar weakened slightly against the euro and other currencies.

Dovish tilt

James Bullard, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis regional branch, voted against this decision, saying he wanted to see the federal funds rate cut by 25 basis points at this meeting. Bullard earlier this month was first central banker to give voice to the expectations of financial markets that economic conditions would require the Fed to act, saying a rate cut could be needed “soon.”

Diane Swonk, chief economist for Grant Thornton, who before the meeting had called for an immediate move, said the Fed’s language “suggests a willingness to cut rates in July.” But with Trump expected to meet China’s President Xi Jinping next week at the Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan, there is a chance for good news to deflate trade tensions and clear away some of the gloom.

There are some within the Fed who wanted to wait out the G20 meetings to see if the president leaves additional tariffs on China but their mood about the economy has clearly darkened,” Swonk said. The quarterly forecasts issued by the central banks on Wednesday revealed a decidedly more dovish tilt, with committee members were split on whether to keep the key rate where it is now or lower it.

But the projections did not reflect much change in the outlook for the economy: the median estimates for growth and unemployment were essentially unchanged compared to March, while the forecast for inflation was cut to 1.5 percent from 1.8 percent previously.—AFP
Inditex cuts stores but boosts space in home market Spain

Shutdowns lead investors to worry about slowing sales

MADRID: The list of retail casualties shutting up shop seems to grow by the month but Inditex, the world’s largest clothing retailer, is still betting on its network of physical stores to drive growth. The Zara owner has shrunk its network in its home market of Spain — by far its biggest portfolio globally — by 297 stores, or 15 percent, since 2012. Shutdowns have led some investors and analysts to worry about slowing sales growth at a company whose business has been built on a rapidly expanding store network.

However, despite the store closures, the company has actually increased its overall selling space in Spain since 2012 by opening or expanding flagship outlets in prime locations, according to a source with knowledge of the matter. Inditex’s net retail space in Spain also increased in the last financial year on an annual basis, said the source, who declined to be named because the figures are confidential. No store staff have been cut due to the closures, with employees instead reassigned to other outlets, according to company and union officials.

Inditex’s strategy of expanding net space could be risky at a time when shoppers are increasingly choosing bargains online, industry profit margins are declining and Amazon has become the biggest seller of clothing in the United States and Britain. The retailer is bucking the trend in an industry where companies are shrinking their real estate portfolios, either by shutting shops or reducing store sizes. US firm Gap Inc said earlier this year it would close 230 of its namesake brand stores, the latest in a string of apparel retailers from Victoria’s Secret to New Look that have shut stores without expanding net space.

Meanwhile, Abercrombie & Fitch, Target and Sephora are experimenting with slimmed-down stores in neighborhood locations. The success or failure of Inditex’s plan could help determine whether combining online sales with a large store network can prevail in mass-market fashion, where blazers sell for under 30 euros and midi dresses for under 50 euros.

“Consumers are changing shopping habits. Instead of going to the store for the second location they’re shopping online but they’re still valuing the super-prime flagship stores,” said Alastair Wittel, European equities portfolio manager at Cormest, a top 20 Inditex investor according to Refinitiv data.

“That’s the thinking behind the Inditex strategy — to close the secondary stores and enlarge and improve their flagship stores.” In Bilbao, for example, Zara opened a three-storey store last year in a historic building in the centre of town — complete with chandeliers, marble columns and stained-glass windows — while shutting three smaller stores in the city. Inditex, whose executives are famously tight-lipped and rarely grant interviews, declined to officially comment on whether it had expanded retail space in Spain.

Valuing super-prime flagship stores

Inditex has nearly 7,500 stores globally, over a quarter of which are fast-fashion leader Zara, with its other brands including Iberhaka, Stradivarius and Pull & Bear. That is almost twice as many as both Gap Inc and Uniqlo owner, Japan’s Fast Retailing, and around 2,500 more than Sweden’s H&M. Spain has by far its largest network, with more than 1,600 outlets, and accounts for about a sixth of group sales, but the reduction in store numbers is not limited to its home market.

Last year, for the first time, Inditex shut more outlets than it opened in China — its biggest network outside Spain. Globally, though, Inditex is still increasing overall store numbers — but the rate is slowing and the company surprised investors in March when it said it had shut more stores than expected in the last financial year. It said it had planned to open 300 to 400 stores, and close 200, but ended up opening 370 and closing 355.

“For us, the quality of the space is as important as the growth rate,” Capital Markets Director Marcos Lopez said at the time. In the same month, Zara opened a large two-storey New York store in the upscale Hudson Yards development in Manhattan. Globally, net retail space grew 4.7 percent in the last financial year. This year, the company expects growth of around 4 percent.

The accelerated closure of stores added to concerns that Inditex has lost some of its sparkle as it faces increased competition and falling margins. Inditex’s operating margins have fallen in each of the past six years, from 19.5 percent in 2013 to 16.7 percent last year. Refinitiv data shows the figure, which has been hit by the effects of a strong euro, is still far above many of its competitors.

Sri Lanka in talks with China for $1bn loan

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka is seeking a loan of nearly $1bn from China for energy and highways as the island recovers from the devastating Easter Sunday bombings, the finance ministry said yesterday. Talks are underway with China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to raise the new loan in addition to the $1.2 billion obtained from international agencies this year, the ministry said.

“We have been discussing with the AIIB to obtain nearly an additional US$ 1,000 million for further development of the Power and Highway sectors,” the ministry quoted Finance minister Mangala Samaraweera. Sri Lanka’s former government borrowed heavily to rollout ports, highways and railroads, but several ambitious infrastructure projects ended up as white elephants and left the country facing a mountain of debt-mainly to China.

Unable to service its loans, the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe leased a Chinese-built port at Hambantota to a Beijing company for $1.12 billion in 2017. Samaraweera said the country was able to maintain economic stability despite the April 21 attacks that killed at least 258 people at three churches and three luxury hotels. The government expects tourism to decline 30 percent this year as a result of the suicide bombings. The loss of revenue has been estimated at $1.5 billion.

The minister’s remarks came as the census department said the country’s economic growth in the first quarter of this year was 3.7 percent—better than the 3.5 percent forecast by the authorities. That compares to 1.79 percent in the final quarter of 2018 and 4.02 percent a year earlier. Last month, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka cut its main lending rate by 50 basis points to 8.5 percent to encourage borrowing and mitigate any fallout from the bombings.

Forty-five foreigners were among the dead from the April 21 suicide attacks and nearly 500 people were wounded. The government has begun subsidizing loans to hotels which were already suffering a decline in foreign guests following last year’s political crisis. The country had plunged into turmoil in October when President Maithripala Sirisena sacked his Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and called fresh elections.

However, the Supreme Court held that the president’s actions were illegal and restored the status quo. But, three international credit rating agencies downgraded the country’s debt making it more expensive to borrow abroad. Official figures show that Sri Lanka will have to repay a record $5.9 billion in foreign loans in 2019. Officials say about two-thirds of it has already been paid.—AFP

Swiss watchdog ‘in contact’ with Facebook cryptocurrency backers

GENEVA: Switzerland’s market watchdog confirmed yesterday that it is in contact with the “initiators” of Facebook’s new cryptocurrency, as questions mount over how the money will be regulated.

Switzerland has tried to establish itself as a global cryptocurrencies hub, but the entry into the market of a behemoth like Facebook will increase scrutiny over the rules Switzerland has in place. “We can confirm that we are in contact with the initiators of the project,” a spokesman for the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA), Tobias Lux, told AFP in an email. The Libra coin plan, launched this week by Facebook and some two dozen partners, is being overseen by a Geneva-based nonprofit called the Libra Association. Lux declined to comment on the details of FINMA’s exchanges with the Libra Association but said the watchdog’s role was to determine “whether the planned services require approval under Swiss supervisory law and, if so, which.” —AFP
Jaguares, Chiefs eye semi-finals place after early-season struggles

BUENOS AIRES: The Argentine Jaguares host the Waikato Chiefs from New Zealand today in a Super Rugby quarter-final pairing that seemed unlikely as the regular season approached halfway. Jaguares suffered four losses in their first six matches and the Chiefs fared even worse, winning one match, drawing one and losing four.

Both teams then turned their seasons around against the Northern Bulls at a ground far from their bases in Buenos Aires and Hamilton, 125 kilometers south of Auckland. Twice champions Chiefs were wireless and desperate when they came to the Loftus Versfeld stadium in Pretoria — a venue where they were humiliated 61-17 in the 2009 final. But three months ago there was no repeat of that embarrassing scoreline as the Chiefs scored seven tries in a 56-20 romp that went a long way toward turning the season around.

A couple of All Blacks figured prominently on the scoresheet with lock Brodie Retallick arriving in Pretoria two weeks after the Chiefs on the scoresheet with lock Brodie Retallick arriving in Pretoria two weeks after the Chiefs, while two All Blacks — including a 28-20 triumph over tourists marked the start of a stunning turn-around. The last time they met was February 2018, when the Jaguares came back from a 17-9 deficit to win 28-20 and take a 17-point lead.

Winning streak

With the Chiefs scoring 59 points and a virtual Jaguares reserve side 52 in the final round of league play last weekend, the stage is set for an intriguing quarter-final. Chiefs coach Colin Cooper acknowledged that his team are on a three-match winning streak and added: “We need to draw on the confidence gained from our past couple of games.” While demolishing the Melbourne Rebels coming from 20 points behind to beat trophy-holders Canterbury Crusaders convincingly must have sent morale sky-rocketing. “We have had a good week over here and there is plenty of energy in the team, especially from our leaders,” said Cooper.

“The Jaguares are a quality side. They have performed well and we have the utmost respect for them.” We are no strangers to quarter-finals rugby, we just need to stay focused and deliver a performance our fans are proud of.” Winger Emiliano Boffelli spoke of the motivation within the jaguares camp ahead of a second straight last-eight appearance having lost to the Golden Lions in Johannesburg last season. “Great being able to play a Super Rugby quarter-final,” he said. “We did it last year, but this time we are hosting the game. We have great expectations.” But thoughts of a first semi-final appearance for the Buenos Aires outfit are not on his mind: “We focus on this game (Chiefs) — we face a great rival.” According to a Super Rugby media release, the winners in Buenos Aires meet the ACT Brumbies of Australia or the Coastal Sharks of South Africa, who play tomorrow, in the semi-finals. In the other half of the draw, the Crusaders host the Otago Highlanders today in a New Zealand derby and the Hurricanes have home advantage over the Bulls tomorrow. — AFP

Semenya to race 800m for first time since ban

PARIS: Caster Semenya will race in the 800m at the Stanford Diamond League on June 30 in her first outing over the distance since she launched a legal battle against new rules targeting athletes with hyperandrogenism. The double Olympic champion was cleared to compete in the event after Switzerland's top court upheld her appeal against an IAAF ruling obliging women with higher than normal male hormone levels to artificially lower their testosterone levels before competing in races at distances of 400m to the mile.

“Caster’s representation requested that she be moved from the 3,000 meters (where she was originally entered) to the 800 meters and we are happy to comply.” Prefontaine Classic’s director Tom Jordan said in a tweet on Tuesday. An initial appeal by Semenya was struck down by the Court for Arbitration of Sport in Lausanne, leading to her appeal to the country's top court. Earlier this week the South African appealed the IAAF of using her as a “human guinea pig” as they “experiment with how the medication they required me to take would affect my testosterone levels.” The race on June 30 in the US will be her first race over 800m since winning gold at the Diamond League in Doha on May 4. This month’s meeting has been moved from its usual home in Eugene to California as the stadium in Oregon is being renovated for hosting the 2021 World Championships. — AFP

Crusaders to unleash All Black magic in quest for perfect 10

WELLINGTON: The Canterbury Crusaders have named a full-strength team for the first time this season as Super Rugby’s pace-setters take their quest for a third straight title, and 10th in all, into the competition’s knockout phase. The defending champions, packed with All Blacks stars, are overwhelming favorites to maintain a daunting home record and down South Island rivals Otago Highlanders in the quarter-finals on Friday.

They have not lost a playoff in Christchurch since Super Rugby launched in 1996 — a sequence of 21 matches — and are favorites to maintain a daunting home record and down South Island rivals Otago Highlanders in the quarter-finals on Friday.

The Crusaders have never lost a playoff to a South African side. The Hurricanes have won the most matches of any team this season with 12 victories, but did not meet the Bulls, who have troubled them in the past. The Hurricanes, who will be back to full strength after resting several key players last week, have a 11-10 winning record over the men from Pretoria. The last time they met was February 2018, when the Bulls edged a 21-19 victory at home.

The Jaguares will host a playoff match in Buenos Aires for the first time after finishing second on the ladder in a standout season, losing only one of their past 10 matches. However, they were defeated in their only two previous meetings at home against the Chiefs. — AFP
World number one Koepka says success comes from keeping calm

LOS ANGELES: Brooks Koepka isn’t one to sit still as the four-time major champion returns to the Travelers Championship less than a week after falling just short of winning a third straight US Open. World number one Koepka finished three strokes shy of fellow American Gary Woodland who claimed his first major championship at Pebble Beach on Sunday.

Koepka, who is seeking to win his seventh PGA Tour title, joins defending champion Bubba Watson, former back-to-back winner Phil Mickelson, and rising star Viktor Hovland in the field for the $12 million event that begins Thursday in Cromwell, Connecticut. Koepka says keeping busy is his way of staying sharp on the Tour and even though he was in contention in Pebble Beach he was as tired as he was last year when he won his second consecutive Open.

“Last year I don’t even think I knew where I was,” he said. “It was all kind of a whirlwind. “It’s a bit different when you win and you’re trying to play the week after. It’s a bit hectic, chaotic. “This week, it’s difficult still. I just feel mentally exhausted from last week just being in contention. But another day of rest today and I’ll be fine for tomorrow.”

Koepka has only two PGA Tour wins outside of his four major titles. He says he now has a routine that allows him to succeed where in the past he might have lost his focus in the middle of a round. “Not everything is results-based with me. It’s about the process,” Koepka said. “I think that’s why I’m able to play so well in the majors, because I’m not worried about winning.”

“I’m not worried about the pressure of being in first or trying to do something; accomplish three in a row, whatever it was. Even last week it’s just about the process. So if I can get the process down the result is going to come.”

Koepka said he’s matured as a golfer and a person and is no longer the type to get angry if he blasts a tee shot into the water or lands his ball in an awkward divot.

“I look back from college and I had to switch — I was a little head, you know. “I learned to understand that even if I hit it in the water or out of bounds, I’m not trying to do that. I’m human. “I’m going to make some mistakes. I can get over the outside of that and that’s part of why I’m not afraid to take chances and go at pins.”

Koepka said he’s thinking about the upcoming British Open and how he is going to get ready. He plans to pass on the Scottish Open and arrive a couple of days before the first round begins, “I usually go over to the British a little bit early, a couple days before, and just try to get some work in,” Koepka said.

“I’m not planning on changing my schedule. It’s always been that way. “It’s fun to get over, get acclimated a couple days before. That way when I get there on Monday I’m used to the time change and feel like I have a good understanding of the golf course.”

Acknowledging that an injury to his neck has bothered him throughout his career, even leading him to consider not competing on the Tour last year, Koepka said he is back in peak condition.

“I’m really back to where I need to be,” he said. “I’m really comfortable with where I’m at right now. “I feel like I’m in the best shape of my life.”

Koepka is hunting his sixth win this year and the 79th of his career.

Hamilton seeks to stretch Mercedes unbeaten run

LE CASTELLET: Lewis Hamilton will seek to stretch his lead and extend Mercedes unbeaten run to 10 races with a victory unaided by fortune at this weekend’s French Grand Prix. The defending five-time drivers’ champion, a lucky winner in Canada two weeks ago when Ferrari’s Sebastian Vettel was controversially penalized, will arrive in France on a high.

With team-mate Valterri Bottas, he has won all eight contests this year after finishing last season with two third places. The Finn had won twice this year.

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Athletics doping watchdog receives Moscow test files

PARIS: The Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU), the watchdog set up to police doping in athletics, said yesterday it had received testing data from a Moscow laboratory at the centre of a vast doping conspiracy. The independent body founded by the IAAF, athletics’ world governing body, said it had received around 110,000 files from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

The data, collected by WADA inspectors from the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) of the Moscow Laboratory, concerns testing samples analyzed in the period 2012 to 2015. “The AIU will start analyzing the LIMS data immediately with a view to reporting its findings to the IAAF Council in due course,” the watchdog said in a statement. The AIU said that no deadline had been set for the completion of the task.

Russia was banned from world athletics in 2015 following revelations of a state-backed doping program dating back years. Although the governing bodies of other sports have re-admitted Russia, the IAAF upheld the ban again earlier this month citing continued problems despite positive developments in anti-doping efforts in Russia.

Granting access to data from the Moscow laboratory at the centre of the scandal was noted as part of that progress.

Kucherov wins MVP trophies at NHL awards

LOS ANGELES: Nikita Kucherov won the Hart Trophy as the MVP of the NHL, but it was bittersweet recognition for the Russian forward after his Tampa Bay Lightning suffered a shocking first-round playoff exit.

Kucherov’s Russian teammate Andrei Vasilevskiy won the Vezina Trophy for being the top goalie as the Lightning, who earned 128 standings points in the regular season, were left licking their wounds when the Columbus Blue Jackets eliminated them in a four-game playoff sweep in April.

Kucherov, who finished with 128 points on the season, also picked up the Ted Lindsay Award as the top player voted on by his peers and the Art Ross Trophy as the league’s top scorer on the ceremony on Wednesday in Las Vegas. “It’s a huge night for me and my family,” Kucherov said. “Thanks to my teammates, my coaches, all the trainers, everybody involved in the team. Thanks to them for helping me get here. Without them, without all the work we’ve done together, I wouldn’t be here.”


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South Africa lick their wounds after more world cup agony

BIRMINGHAM: Captain Faf du Plessis was left contemplating the ruins of another World Cup campaign on the ground where South Africa experienced their greatest heartache in the competition 20 years ago. The Proteas’ hopes of reaching the semi-finals in England and Wales are all but over after a four-wicket defeat by New Zealand on Wednesday.

One minor consolation is that the recriminations from Wednesday’s reverse at Edgbaston are unlikely to be as great as those at Warwickshire’s headquarters 20 years ago when a disaster-ridden run-out saw them tie with Australia and miss out on the final due to an inferior net run rate. South Africa are still alive at the World Cup but with just one win from six matches it would take an extraordinary combination of results to see them into the semi-finals from a 10-team round-robin group phase.

On Wednesday, South Africa fought hard to get to 244 for six on a difficult pitch after losing the toss. And it so very nearly proved enough, with New Zealand needing a superbly paced 106 not out from captain and star batsman Kane Williamson. New Zealand came home with just three balls to spare. Fans of AB de Villiers will argue this proves the Proteas were wrong to refuse the gifted batsman’s offer to come out of internationals retirement for the World Cup, but others will say the offer came far too late for it to be accepted by South Africa’s selectors.

“Kane played a great knock, you know,” said Du Plessis. “It’s probably the difference between the two sides, just one guy taking it through. You need someone to go further, and we haven’t had that.” Inevitably, given their painful World Cup history, the question of whether South Africa “choke” on Wednesday is bound to be asked. “Choking,” however, implies squandering a winning position, whereas this match in Birmingham was more of a see-saw contest determined largely by Williamson’s knock.

Stuttering campaign

The New Zealand skipper is a world-class batsman and the truth is that South Africa’s World Cup campaign was in trouble long before this fixture. Losing Dale Steyn without the veteran fast bowler delivering a ball at the tournament was blow, but South Africa were gambling on the 35-year-old recovering from a longstanding shoulder injury. Having tournament hosts England and another highly fancied side in India as two of their early opponents meant South Africa had a tough start and it was no surprise when they lost both of those matches. But what really derailed their campaign was a 21-run defeat by Bangladesh, where the Tigers piled up 330.

Several South Africa batsmen got starts in reply, including Du Plessis, who made 62, but nobody was able to play the major innings required. The Proteas’ painful history at the World Cup is littered with self-inflicted wounds. As well as the 1999 run-out debacle, they exited in 2003 by misunderstanding the rules governing rain-affected matches, and made the controversial decision to drop Kyle Abbott for what turned out to be a nail-biting semi-final loss to New Zealand four years ago. South Africa did not help themselves on Wednesday when Williamson, who had made 76, got a thin edge off Imran Tahir to wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock. The Proteas did not request a review, only for replays to show a nick. “I think I was at long on at the time, and Quinty is the closest to the action,” said Du Plessis. “That’s not where the game was won and lost.” This World Cup could well mark the last appearance at the global showpiece for players in their mid-30s such as Du Plessis and Proteas opener Hashim Amla, who never really got back to his best after being hit on the head by a bouncer from England’s Jofra Archer. — AFP

Williamson is New Zealand’s greatest ODI player: Vettori

MANCHESTER: Former New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori has hailed Kane Williamson as New Zealand’s greatest-ever one-day player after his match-winning World Cup century against South Africa. Williamson made an unbeaten 106 at Edgbaston to guide the Kiwis to a nervy four-wicket win with three balls to spare. Fans of AB de Villiers will argue this proves the Proteas were wrong to refuse the gifted batsman’s offer to come out of internationals retirement for the World Cup, but others will say the offer came far too late for it to be accepted by South Africa’s selectors.

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Tsonga upbeat ahead of his Federer clash

HALLE WESTFALEN: French veteran Jo-Wilfried Tsonga believes he has nothing to lose against Roger Federer as he continues along the comeback trail in the second round of the ATP tournament in Halle. Tsonga, 34, missed seven months of last season due to knee surgery, but has shown solid form this month upon his return to grass court tennis for the first time since 2017.

After reaching the second round in Stuttgart last week, the Frenchman beat compatriot Benoit Paire in straight sets in Halle on Tuesday to set up a second round fixture with Federer. “It is always special to play Federer, I will give everything I’ve got,” Tsonga told AFP. “There is less pressure than usual, because there is no shame in losing to Roger Federer. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.”

The Frenchman is one of the few players who can boast of a perfect round-robin record on grass against eight-time Wimbledon champion Federer. The two have met only once on the surface, a grueling battle at Wimbledon in 2011, which Tsonga won after clawing back a two-set deficit. “It’s true I have never lost to him on grass, but that is only because we have only played once,” said Tsonga. “If we had played ten times, the roles would probably be reversed.” “It is a different situation now. I want to do well, but I coming back from a long way away.”

Once ranked number five in the world, Tsonga now sits at 77th in the ATP rankings, having slipped as low as 216th after his injury. Tsonga told AFP he was happy with his return to the tour this season, but that he still felt the effects of his spell on the sidelines. “I am still paying for it a bit after a whole year of not playing. It’s as if I actually retired last year,” he said. “But I am happy, there have been no catastrophes. Physically, I am getting better and better each week.”

Speaking after his own first-round victory against John Millman, Federer said he was happy to see Tsonga back on court. “We trained together in Miami a few weeks ago, and we got on well,” said the world number three. “Jo-Wilfried has shown in the past that he can beat me. Whether on hard court, clay or grass, he is always dangerous.” “It’s a tough draw for the second round.” — AFP
Argentina break Scots hearts but give Cameroon, Chile and NZ hope

Zimbabwe's Kadewere dreams of Cup success

PARIS: Florencia Bonsegundo's twice-taken penalty completed Argentina's dramatic fightback against Scotland on Wednesday and also opened the door at the Women's World Cup for four winless teams. Also in Group D, England and Japan were already through to the last 16 before meeting in Nice, where two goals by Ellen White secured a 2-0 victory and first place with a maximum nine points.

Argentina fought back from three down to draw 3-3 in Paris to eliminate the Scots as they climbed to third. But they now have two points and are weakly placed in the battle to finish as one of the four best third-place teams. To advance, the Argentinians need an unlikely pair of draws in Thursday's final set of group games. England will head to Valenciennes in northern France for a last-16 tie on Sunday against a third-placed side with China, Cameroon, New Zealand, Chile and even Thailand all potential opponents.

High stakes

The permutations are less complicated for Japan, but the Nadeshiko — World Cup winners in 2011 and runners-up in 2015 — will have a splitter-looking test in Rennes against either the Netherlands or Canada who meet in Reims on Tuesday to decide the Group E winners. The stakes are higher for Cameroon and New Zealand who play in Montpellier in the group's other game. Victory by two goals — or just one in a high-scoring match — would make either Cameroon or New Zealand one of the four best third-placed teams. “We just need to make sure we win on Thursday and make sure we do everything possible and get to the next round,” Cameroon defender Estelle Johnson said.

The situation is similar in Group F with Sweden and USA, who meet in Le Havre, both on six points. The group winner will face Italy in the last 16 with the runner-up playing the Netherlands or Canada. The Americans will be looking for revenge against Sweden, who eliminated them on penalties in the Olympic quarter-finals in 2016 meaning they became the first US women's team to fail to win a medal. Chile and Thailand, who meet in Rennes, are both pointless. Unless the earlier game in Montpellier ends in a draw, in which case by any score will be enough, Chile will need to win by three goals and Thailand, who let in 13 against the USA, will need to win by 14.

Grandstand finale

Scotland looked to be going through as one of the best third-placed sides when Erin Cuthbert’s 60th-minute goal put them 3-0 up against Argentina at the Parc des Princes in Paris after earlier strikes from Kim Little and Jen Beattie. However, Milagros Menendez replied with Argentina's first goal of the tournament in the 74th minute, and then Bonsegundo's shot went in off goalkeeper Lee Alexander to set up a grandstand finale.

With two minutes left, after an agonizing VAR review, Argentina were awarded a penalty. Alexander saved Bonsegundo’s tame first attempt, but VAR caught the goalkeeper straying off her line and the Argentine converted her second effort in the fourth minute of stoppage time.

The draw left Scotland on one point, bottom of Group D and eliminated. “We gave it all for 70 minutes of the game. We were very good but we didn't manage to see the game out, but at this moment in time we feel hard done by,” said Scotland’s disconsolate coach, Shelley Kerr. England's coach Phil Neville was happier. “We've got another clean sheet, we've won another game, we've played three and won three, and we're just where we want to be, in the last 16, and ready to attack the business end of the tournament,” he said. — AFP

Pilot David Henderson named in Sala manslaughter arrest

LONDON: A man arrested on suspicion of manslaughter over the death of Argentine footballer Emiliano Sala was yesterday named by the Times newspaper as pilot David Henderson. Sala, 28, died when a plane carrying him and pilot David Ibbotson came down in the Channel on January 21 just days after he had joined Cardiff City from Nantes.

“As a result of our enquiries we have today, Wednesday 19 June 2019, arrested a 44-year-old man from the North Yorkshire area on suspicion of manslaughter by an unlawful act,” Detective Inspector Simon Huxter, of Dorset Police said in a statement. “He is assisting with our enquiries and has been released from custody under investigation.” The Times newspaper named the arrested man as pilot Henderson, who worked regularly for Willie McKay, a football agent linked with Sala’s transfer. The agent has previously said he asked Henderson to fly the plane, but that he was unable to do so. Sala had been Cardiff's record signing after a fee of £15 million ($19 million) was agreed by the two clubs, after he wore the number nine jersey for the Ligue 1 side. However, the two clubs have been involved in a legal wrangle over the transfer fee, and Norway's Nantes reported Cardiff to FIFA after the first installment of the fee, believed to be £5 million, was not paid on time.

Cardiff previously stated they were “shocked” at reports that Ibbotson did not have a license to fly at night. — AFP

Zimbabwe’s Kadewere dreams of Cup success

CAIRO: While Tino Kadewere admitted to rooting for Mohamed Salah and Liverpool in this season’s Premier League title race, the Zimbabwean forward will be looking to upset the Egyptian star in today’s curtain-raiser at the Africa Cup of Nations.

“Everyone in Zimbabwe really wants us to try and get to the knock-out stages,” said Kadewere, who just completed his first season in French football with second division side Le Havre after three years in Sweden. “We, as players, we want to make history. We are hoping to make people remember our names. We are hoping to make good history, to make people know that Zimbabwe is one of the best countries in Africa.”

Ajax inspiration

Kadewere, one of just a handful of Zimbabwe players in Europe, is drawing inspiration from the Ajax side that came within seconds of reaching this season’s UEFA Champions League final after a run that saw the Dutch giants dump out both holders Real Madrid and Cristiano Ronaldo’s Juventus. “We want to make Zimbabwe well known and to do our best. If possible, get to the final,” he said. “No one ever knew that Ajax was going to be the semi-finals of the Champions League, and they did it, and they were one foot away from the final. Why can’t Zimbabwe get to the final also? We never know.”

The odds are understandably stacked against a side ranked 109th in the world below the likes of Palestine, India, Vietnam and the Faroe Islands — but Kadewere is hopeful Zimbabwe can significantly boost their standing over the course of the next month. “It has been very difficult for Zimbabwean football in the past years. We try to manage, to keep up the pace, but it’s very difficult,” he said. “There are many countries in Africa and we can’t compare ourselves to the big ones at the moment. This kind of tournament is the one that can showcase how we can be ranked in Africa. We want people to talk about Zimbabwe in the next two years, three years, they know that Zimbabwe did very well this time.” — AFP

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The odds are understandably stacked against a side ranked 109th in the world below the likes of Palestine, India, Vietnam and the Faroe Islands — but Kadewere is hopeful Zimbabwe can significantly boost their standing over the course of the next month. “It has been very difficult for Zimbabwean football in the past years. We try to manage, to keep up the pace, but it’s very difficult,” he said. “There are many countries in Africa and we can’t compare ourselves to the big ones at the moment. This kind of tournament is the one that can showcase how we can be ranked in Africa. We want people to talk about Zimbabwe in the next two years, three years, they know that Zimbabwe did very well this time.” — AFP

Pilot David Henderson named in Sala manslaughter arrest

LONDON: A man arrested on suspicion of manslaughter over the death of Argentine footballer Emiliano Sala was yesterday named by the Times newspaper as pilot David Henderson. Sala, 28, died when a plane carrying him and pilot David Ibbotson came down in the Channel on January 21 just days after he had joined Cardiff City from Nantes.

“As a result of our enquiries we have today, Wednesday 19 June 2019, arrested a 44-year-old man from the North Yorkshire area on suspicion of manslaughter by an unlawful act,” Detective Inspector Simon Huxter, of Dorset Police said in a statement. “He is assisting with our enquiries and has been released from custody under investigation.” The Times newspaper named the arrested man as pilot Henderson, who worked regularly for Willie McKay, a football agent linked with Sala’s transfer. The agent has previously said he asked Henderson to fly the plane, but that he was unable to do so. Sala had been Cardiff's record signing after a fee of £15 million ($19 million) was agreed by the two clubs, after he wore the number nine jersey for the Ligue 1 side. However, the two clubs have been involved in a legal wrangle over the transfer fee, and Norway's Nantes reported Cardiff to FIFA after the first installment of the fee, believed to be £5 million, was not paid on time. 

Cardiff previously stated they were “shocked” at reports that Ibbotson did not have a license to fly at night. — AFP
Messi rescues Argentina as Paraguay pay penalty

BELO HORIZONTE: A Lionel Messi penalty salvaged a 1-1 draw for Argentina against Paraguay on Wednesday as the two-time world champions once again struggled at the Copa America. Messi swept in a 57th-minute spot-kick at Belo Horizonte’s Mineirao Stadium to cancel out a first-half opener from Paraguay’s Richard Sanchez.

Argentina also had goalkeeper Franco Armani to thank for a second-half penalty save that prevented Paraguay from taking a 2-1 lead in the Group B battle. The draw left Argentina with one point from two games and on the bottom of the table with one game remaining. However with the two best third placed teams advancing to the quarter-finals, Argentina can still reach the last eight with a decisive win over Qatar in their final group game.

“We have to win,” Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said of his team’s date with Qatar. “We will take stock of what we did well and what we did not do well and we will make decisions. We are lucky that we are still alive in this tournament,” added Scaloni, singling out goalkeeper Armani for special praise. “We trust Franco,” Scaloni said. “He is our starting goalkeeper. He has a save and kept us alive. I’m glad he had a good performance.”

The South American giants will need to raise their game however to advance any further after another disjointed performance which followed their opening defeat to Colombia on Saturday. A lacklustre opening saw both sides struggle to generate any sort of attacking momentum, with neither side managing to get a shot on goal until Paraguay striker Derlis Gonzalez’s effort was deflected behind for a corner in the 29th minute. From the ensuing set-piece, centre-half Junior Alonso scooped a half-chance wide as Argentina escaped.

That flurry of activity spurred Argentina fleetingly at the other end, with Lautaro Martinez winning a free-kick in a dangerous position on the edge of the area after a foul by Paraguay skipper Gustavo Gomez. Messi however was unable to turn anything from the free-kick, floating his effort up and over the wall but without the pace to trouble goalkeeper Roberto Fernandez, who gathered comfortably.

In the 37th minute however Paraguay’s more organized performance got its reward. A swift counter-attack saw the ball transferred to Newcastle United’s Miguel Almiron near halfway. The livewire forward turned on the after-burners to roast Roberto Pereya down the left wing before crossing for Sanchez who drove a low finish into the bottom corner of the Argentina net.

A rattled Argentina were given a huge let-off moments later when Armani came racing out of his area to shut down Gonzalez. A wild kick brought down the Paraguayan playmaker but Armani somehow escaped a red card and was only cautioned. Scaloni went for broke at half-time, bolstering his attack with the introduction of Sergio Aguero and the move paid instant dividends.

Aguero deftly lost his marker on 51 minutes and pulled back for Martinez, whose shot cannoned off the woodwork. Messi pounced on the rebound but Fernandez blocked with a diving save. The chance appeared to have gone begging but VAR had spotted that Martinez’s shot had in fact struck Ivan Piris’s arm before hitting the bar and Brazilian referee Wilson Sampayo pointed to the spot.

Messi stepped up to sweep in the spot-kick and Argentina were level. Yet there was more drama in the 62nd minute when Paraguay’s Gonzalez burst into the box and was clumsily hacked down by Nicolas Otamendi for a clear penalty. Armani, who was fortunate to be on the pitch, dived the right way and parried Gonzalez’s spot-kick wide. — AFP

Zapata sends Colombia into Copa quarters with Qatar winner

SAO PAULO: Duvan Zapata scored for the second match running to send Colombia into the Copa America quarter-finals with a late header to beat Qatar 1-0 on Wednesday. Carlos Queiroz’s team became the first side into the knock-out rounds after following up Saturday’s 2-0 win over Argentina with another victory over the dogged Asian champions.

It was a deserved success but one that had looked likely to elude the 2001 champions as they toiled against a Qatar side that defended stoically and held on grimly for more than 85 minutes.

“It was difficult, but we showed patience and mustered the winning goal,” said Qatar, who will host the next World Cup in 2022, may now need to target a 2-0 home win over Paraguay to advance. “We hope for the best possible finish to the group stage.”

After an interminable delay — overturned referee Alexis Herrera’s decision — the Argentine referee gave them a 24th minute lead on 13 minutes as he met Martinez’s pinpoint cross just seven yards out, but the playmaker inexplicably headed wide. Much as they had been in the early stages against Paraguay, when they came back from 2-0 down to draw 2-2, Qatar were under the cosh as Colombia spread the play intelligently.

At times it looked like a game of attack versus defense but Colombia were struggling to break the massed ranks of bungary jerseys. When Martinez did split open the defense with a through ball for Cuadrado, the Juventus winger’s first touch was too heavy and Boualem Khouki darted across to clear the danger. Colombia thought they had a penalty early in the second half but VAR — after an interminable delay — overturned referee Alexis Herrera’s handshake award against Abdulaziz Hatem.

James found Martinez inside the area with a clever pass but the winger fired straight at Al-Sheeb. Qatar started to show greater ambition and Colombia’s goalkeeper David Ospina was called upon to make low saves from Hatim and Akram Alfi. Queiroz reacted by bringing on Falcao for Cuadrado and moments later James teed up Martinez again, but the Club America forward was denied by Al-Sheeb.

Colombia kept creating chances but at times they simply pumped aimless crosses into the Qatar box. The breakthrough finally came four minutes from time as James dinked a chip with the outside of his left foot to the back post where Zapata rose highest to power home a header. “They said we couldn’t play together with Falcao, but we showed that we could play with two strikers,” said Zapata, who lift above his strike partner to convert the winner. — AFP

Guardado gives Mexico Gold Cup win over Canada

LOS ANGELES: Andres Guardado scored two second-half goals as Mexico went top of their CONCACAF Gold Cup group with a 3-1 victory over Canada on Wednesday.

Guardado scored from long-range in the 54th minute added a goal to his first-half strike and the playmaker’s brace enabled the Mexican’s to conjure a comeback from two goals down on the trot. The 3-0 win over Cuba courtesy of goals from Joris Mammes, Stephane Abloul and Kevin Fortune.

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The Italian Job: Juventus position is ‘crowning moment’ of Sarri’s career

TURIN: Maurizio Sarri said his appointment as Juventus coach was “the crowning” moment of his managerial career. Sarri, who left Premier League side Chelsea manager was presented by the Serie A giants in Turin yesterday. The 60-year-old returns to Italy after just one turbulent season in the Premier League. The former banker has previously coached his hometown team Napoli for three seasons.

Juventus is the 20th team that Sarri has coached since the former banker took over at Stadio Olimpico in 1990. “The offer of Juve, the most important team in Italy, is the crowning of a very long career, which for 90 percent of the time has been quite difficult,” Sarri told a press conference at the Allianz Stadium in Turin. “In a Juventus team suit and tie rather than his usual tracksuit, was asked if he would adapt to the Juventus style. “I don’t know what the Juventus style is,” said the Neapolitan who once famously gave the middle finger to some Juventus fans. “Suit and tie or tracksuit? I have to talk to the club. “I would prefer not to wear the suit and tie on the pitch. The important thing is that at my age, they don’t send me out naked onto the pitch.”

Despite his long coaching career Sarri only lifted his first trophy last month when he guided the Azzurri to the Scudetto title. “I was absolutely the first choice,” said Juventus sporting director Fabio Paraìtichi of Sarri. “We chose Maurizio because we felt he was the best coach for Juventus right now, just as Allegri was five years ago and (Antonio) Conte three years before that,” Sarri showed he can win in the Premier League and internationally, so he’s the right man,” he said.

Alegri paid the price for another Champions League failure despite Cristiano Ronaldo’s 100-million-euro ($115 million) signing. Sarri said he was relishing the chance to coach five-time Ballon d’Or winner Ronaldo. “I coached some very strong players, but training him will be yet another step forward,” he said. “I’d like to help him break some personal needs to return to Italy,” he said. “I decided to come back to Italy because such an important club wanted me so strongly. “I have never seen so much determination on the part of a club to hire a coach.”

Best coach for Juventus

Sarri takes over from Massimiliano Allegri, who led Juventus to an eighth consecutive Scudetto title. “He was absolutely the first choice,” said Juventus sporting director Fabio Paraìtichi of Sarri. “We chose Maurizio because we felt he was the best coach for Juventus right now, just as Allegri was five years ago and (Antonio) Conte three years before that,” Sarri showed he can win in the Premier League and internationally, so he’s the right man,” he said.

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FIFA’s Samoura to oversee African football reforms

CAIRO: FIFA secretary general Fatma Samoura has been appointed general delegate for Africa for six months starting August 1 as part of ongoing reforms within African football’s governing body. The Confederation of African Football (CAF) and its president Ahmad Ahmad have been in the spotlight after recent governance issues, while he was questioned as part of an inquiry into corruption, breach of trust and forgery in France earlier this month.

He was later released without charge and has dismissed the allegations as “false”. Ahmad proposed the idea of seeking FIFA’s expertise to help assess CAF’s current situation and speed up reforms plans aimed at ensuring the organization operates with “transparency and efficiency”. The notion was unanimously approved by CAF’s executive committee, and Samoura and a group of experts will work in tandem with Ahmad and his team to cover a number of areas, in an agreement that can be renewed with the agreement of both parties.

These areas include overseeing operational management of CAF, ensuring the “efficient and professional organization of all CAF competitions”, and supporting the growth and development of football in all African regions. Samoura will remain as secretary general of FIFA but will delegate her functions within the administration, according to a joint statement from FIFA and CAF.

According to the new club competition was thrown into disarray in the run-up to the Cup of Nations after the announcement that its showpiece game will have to be replayed, with the Tunisian prime minister weighing in to call the handling of the affair a “farce”. CAFF said that the Champions League final between Tunisian giants Esperance and Wydad Casablanca of Morocco would be replayed at a neutral venue after the Cup of Nations, which runs from June 21 to July 19. — AFP

We are title favorites, says Egypt’s coach before Cup opener

CAIRO: Africa Cup of Nations hosts Egypt are confident of defeating Zimbabwe today in the opening match of a tournament expanded to 24 teams and staged in mid-year for the first time. Egypt lie five places higher on the world rankings ahead of the Group A clash, top the title betting at 5/1 with Zimbabwe 150/1, and have won three of the four previous Cup of Nations they hosted.

“We are the favorites to win the 2019 Africa Cup,” said 60-year-old coach Javier Aguirre, the first Mexican to guide a nation that has won the competition a record seven times. “Egypt are playing at home, can count on passionate support and have experienced and Austria’s best footballer,” he said. “I arrived surrounded by skeptics, but then I always am. I had the same at Empoli, Napoli and Chelsea. “In football, I know only one way of removing skepticism from the minds of people by winning convincingly. “I haven’t won a lot, but I believe that having fun on the pitch doesn’t stop you winning. “You can’t think that just because a team is having fun they are superfluous and not determined.” — AFP

Mentally and physically ready

“All the players are mentally and physically ready and we look forward to beginning our campaign with a victory over Zimbabwe.” The countries have met only once in a Cup of Nations with Egypt winning 2-1 in Tunisia 15 years ago and both teams were eliminated after the first round. Aguirre expects the Zimbabwe Warriors to be “a well organized team who will seek to score mainly through counterattacks and set pieces.”

“We have studied videos of them and identified strengths and weaknesses. I do not believe they will take us by surprise,” Zimbabwe coach and former captain Sunday Chidzambwa was keeping his thoughts to himself ahead of the tournament opener. “I believe it is a well organized team that will not be easy for us to play against. “We are mentally and physically ready ahead of our opening match.” — AFP

Cafu: In this file photo taken on May 29, 2019 Chelsea’s Italian head coach Maurizio Sarri (C) holds the trophy as he celebrates winning the UEFA Europa League final football match between Chelsea FC and Arsenal FC at the Baku Olympic Stadium. — AFP

Student

Friday, June 21, 2019
BELO HORIZONTE: Argentina's Lionel Messi is pictured during the Copa America football tournament group match against Paraguay at the Mineirao Stadium. — AFP

Messi rescues Argentina as Paraguay pay penalty

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