Kuwait submits letter to UN Security Council

South Africa tries to contain ‘Afrophobia’

Nadal ‘in good shape’ after a scrappy US Open victory

Dorian hits US east coast

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Marsh Harbors: An aerial view of damage from Hurricane Dorian in Marsh Harbor, Great Abaco Island in the Bahamas. Hurricane Dorian lashed the Carolinas with driving rain and fierce winds as it neared the US east coast after devastating the Bahamas and killing at least 20 people. — AFP
Every time I go shopping to the local market to buy even a few small items, I end up with a handful of plastic bags, a few items in each. I feel pain about this because plastic bags are damaging to the environment.

The use of plastic bags represents a serious environmental problem, as they are made from materials that do not degrade and remain buried in the environment for many years and often end up in the rivers and oceans. Even in the case of burning them, plastic bags pose a threat as they emit chemical compounds in the form of a black cloud that leads to air pollution which negatively affects human health and increases global warming and climate change. I believe that we need to completely eliminate the consumption of plastic bags.

Some countries in the world began to ban the manufacture, import or use of plastic bags. The first country that passed a ban on the use of these bags was Denmark in 1993. They imposed a law charging a fee for the use of plastic bags, which reduced their consumption by 60 percent. I guess if we asked the public to pay for plastic bags, we would witness a similar reduction in use in Kuwait. But there should also be an alternative like paper bags or biodegradable bags for free. The public would welcome that.

In fact, there are a number of countries in the world that have felt the damage caused by excessive plastic bag use and have begun campaigns supporting this transformation supported by the law to eliminate plastic bags.

The United States began a campaign to fight plastic bags in 2007. In 2014, San Francisco banned the use of plastic bags and banned water bottles that were made of plastic.

In late 2018, a draft resolution was introduced in the Turkish parliament to impose a fee on plastic bags. The plan aimed to protect the environment by imposing purchasing value on the consumption of the plastic bags and selling it to the buyer.

Thus, the buyer and seller reduce the use of plastic bags, using old bags or other bags made of cloth, as the cloth will cause less environmental damage compared to plastic.

I hope that the municipality and the public authority of environment work together on the matter by issuing a law that deals with recycling waste and protecting the environment from the damage of plastic bags. Local coops have recently announced that they will begin to replace plastic bags with eco-friendly ones, a good step in the right direction.

A worm’s eye view of Kuwait Twin Towers. — Photo by Maisoon Alfares/KUNA

Paper, not plastic

Who’s the authority for parking meters?

By Ben Garcia

In this digital age, a century-old device such as the parking meter is still around. The meters allow motorists to park their vehicles in designated areas by paying 50 or 100 fils. Parking meters can be found in Salmiya, Fahaheel and Kuwait City. However, many of these meters are no longer functioning, as some of them are destroyed or dilapidated.

To report malfunctions, Kuwait Times approached the interior ministry, but were told they are not the right department for this particular concern. The Municipality and the finance ministry also said they are not the authorities on this matter. Many drivers admitted to not paying anything while using the space for parking. “I’ve been driving since 2003, and have never paid a single fils when using a metered parking space. There has been no trouble, so I keep on doing this,” a taxi driver told Kuwait Times. But according to a police officer, violators can be fined KD 50.

A parking meter is a device used to collect money in exchange for the right to park a vehicle in a particular place for a limited amount of time. The parking meters are used by municipalities as a tool for enforcing their integrated on-street parking policy, usually related to their traffic and mobility management policies, but also for revenue. An early patent for a parking meter was filed by Roger W Babson on August 30, 1928. The meter was intended to operate on power from the battery of the parking vehicle and required a connection from the vehicle to the meter. Holger George Thuesen and Gerald A Hale designed the first working parking meter, the Black Maria, in 1935.
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As part of our occasional series exploring various areas of Kuwait, Kuwait Times visited Shaab to discover the main features of this area. Shaab is located in the Hawally governorate of Kuwait. It is divided by the Fahaheel Expressway between residential Shaab, blocks 1-7 and Shaab Al-Bahri, block 8. The residential area includes many homes, a family-friendly park and playground, a coop and several restaurants. Across the highway in Shaab Al-Bahri, mostly apartment buildings mark the skyline and dozens of small restaurants, baqalas, businesses, gyms and medical offices and private clinics can be found.
Saud Al-Faisal, 36, said Shaab has a mix of races, religions and nationalities. “The area is characterized by its vitality. It includes a social mix of Kuwaiti people of all categories. There is no sectarianism or racism here,” he said. He added Shaab is a link between Daiya, Hawally and Salmiya, and people can easily enter and exit the area from the seaside or Road 30, which makes the area less crowded than others.

Abdulrahman Al-Jaafreh, 41, said the area is named after coral reefs in Arabic. “In the past, the sea was full of coral and sometimes it would be out of the water in the Shaab area during the rains. We were told that Sheikh Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah was the first person to inhabit the area, where he built the Shaab Palace,” he told Kuwait Times.

Um Ali, 43, pointed out that Shaab’s prime location attracts people from everywhere, but like many other areas of Kuwait, its roads need maintenance. “The government must develop the area, maintain the roads and walkways and add more services, because the area deserves more than this,” she said.

She added that residents of Shaab need more green spaces and parks, speed bumps should be removed and streets need to be maintained. “It is a vital area, but we need more services to be more civilized. There are not enough workers and services in the area. Even Shaab Co-op Society needs more supplies and goods, as we always buy our groceries from other co-ops. Also, we need entertainment places for children here.”
The historic remains of old civilizations, possibly dating back to more than 4,000 years ago, that were discovered in Kuwait indicate the country’s commercial significance in the Gulf region. Kuwait's unique and strategic location helped in linking together surrounding nations via sea and land routes, becoming a keystone exit for passing trade convoys from Iraq and Iran to the eastern region of the Arabian Peninsula.

Furthermore, several historical documents and data indicate Kuwait’s establishment dates back to 1613 when a group of migrating families and tribes decided to settle in the desert land after realizing its significance. They evolved over time into a civilized community of social and political structure, and launched their commercial and economic activities via land and sea, most notably timber trade.

Timber trade has been occupying a unique place in the country’s economy since that time and up until present day as it used to supply woods to almost all Gulf States except Oman that had its own merchant navy fleet, Kuwait’s Heritage researcher Saleh Al-Methen told KUNA. Most woods were imported from India, while the famed sandalwood used to be brought from Africa as it grew in specific hard-terrain lands, Al-Methen noted, adding timber traders in Kuwait used to stock their goods in commercial storage, called ‘Amara’ in Arabic, which location was usually overlooking the sea. There were more than 70 commercial storages in Kuwait, in which traders used to store and sell various types of imported woods that were used for building ships, housing, and other construction purposes, said the Kuwait historian. — KUNA
PM receives Kuwait Blind Association’s top officials

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday received the Honorary President of Kuwait Blind Association Fahad Sayyah Abushaiba, Chairman of the board of directors Fayiz Al-Azmi, and board members at Seif Palace. The officials presented His Highness with the first copy of Quran written in ‘Braille’ and issued by the association.

His Highness the Prime Minister hailed the association’s efforts to provide different services for blind people. He added that Kuwait is continuously working on meeting the needs of disabled people, as part of the country’s development plans. His Highness also applauded the issuing of Quran in Braille, which will enrich libraries in Kuwait and the Islamic World as well. — KUNA

Kuwait pitches plan over Gulf eGOV system

RIYADH: Kuwait has submitted an idea over how to go about compiling reports on the progress of establishing an e-government (eGOV) system in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The Kuwaiti proposal calls for more interaction among concerned bodies in the GCC as member states work on setting up an integrated eGOV system, said Dr Walid Al-Hasawi, an advisor at the Gulf state’s Central Agency for Information Technology. The Kuwaiti suggestion, made during talks involving an ad hoc committee tasked with looking into the matter, also underlines the need to achieve common objectives, which should be aligned with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, he added. — KUNA

Kuwait Fire Service inspects Husseiniyas

By Hanan Al-Saadoun, Agencies

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate organized inspection tours at the Husseiniyas to make sure they meet safety and security conditions, and provide with special fire prevention instructions. Meanwhile, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate and Communications Ministry have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in regards to coordinating search and rescue operations in Kuwait’s territorial waters. KFSD Director General Lt General Khalid Al-Mikrad and Communication Ministry Undersecretary Eng Khloud Al-Shihab signed the MoU.

Fake news

Kuwait Military General Headquarters said in a statement that a report on the social media about a plan to form a new brigade which will be use as a back up when necessary is untrue and there is no such plan at all. The statement said the rules of accepting members in Kuwait army are very clear, and joining the various units are governed by specialities and qualifications standards, and loyalty is for the country and HH the Amir.

Impounded cars

Traffic Department said impounded cars and motorcycles in Mina Abdullah area will be sold on Wednesday 11, September 2019. Those who wish to participate in the auction can go to the Traffic Department at Kuwait Public Transport Company Garage in Mina Abdullah a day before the auction to inspect the cars.

Interior Ministry said that the bus that was shown on the social media while violating the traffic law has been impounded.
Kuwait submits letter to Security Council over Fisht Al-Eij platform

Iraq urged to abide by the UN Security Council resolutions

NEW YORK: Kuwait has presented a letter to the UN Security Council in response to a letter submitted earlier by Iraq to the UN Security Council over Fisht Al-Eij, a platform in the territorial sea of Kuwait. The Kuwaiti letter, dated 20 August, was handed by Kuwait’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi to the UNSC president in response to the Iraqi letter, which was addressed to the UN Security Council president on 7 August, which was issued as an official UNSC document.

Al-Otaibi said in statements to KUNA that ‘the Iraqi letter focused on the maritime area beyond mark No 162, or the so-called demarcated territorial sea area between the two countries’ Iraq wanted to prove and document its stance that this area is not demarcated,’ he noted.

Al-Otaibi clarified that these letters are usual means to be handled by the UN Security Council. They are meant to document countries stances, he said. ‘We must distinguish between the UN-drawn borders and relevant international obligations on both countries on one hand and the territorial sea, which has not been demarcated yet,’ he argued.

He affirmed that Iraq and Kuwait were committed to the relevant UN Security Council resolutions (in particular resolution No 833) which determined land and sea borders. ‘There is no dispute over land and sea borders up until the border mark No 162,’ he pointed out. Al-Otaibi reiterated that Iraq abides by the UN Security Council resolutions and the UN-drawn border lines with Kuwait.

Compensations

‘The demarcation of the joint maritime border beyond the 162 mark is a purely bilateral issue and has nothing to do with Iraq’s international obligations, to which it is fully committed, he said. On another issue, the Kuwaiti envoy expressed hope that Iraq would complete payment of compensations of the occupation of Kuwait in coming two years.’

Iraq is also committed to implement its other obligations relating to knowing the fate of prisoners of war and missing persons and returning Kuwaiti property,’ he said. Al-Otaibi stressed that there is progress and cooperation between Kuwait and Iraq for accelerating the implementation of these obligations, which are stipulated by UN Security Council resolutions.

He pointed out that the issue of Fisht Al-Eij platform was raised during bilateral talks and there is correspondence between the two countries over it. Kuwait called on Iraq more than once to start negotiations to settle this issue due to its importance for both sides, as settling it would help build mutual confidence and strengthen bilateral relations, he underlined. According to the letter submitted by Al-Otaibi, Kuwait confirmed that its territorial waters have been determined by a decree issued on 17 December 1967, on the breadth of the territorial sea, which was updated by decree No 317 of 29 October 2014 on Kuwait’s marine areas as per Article 15 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Sovereign decision

It indicated that Fisht Al-Eij is an area of land formed naturally above the surface of water in the low-lying islands which are located in Kuwait’s territorial waters, thus the construction of the platform was a solely Kuwaiti sovereign decision. It stated that the platform was established and installed in Fisht Al-Eij to ensure safety of navigation in Khor Abdullah as this paragraph only identify communications means between the two sides, thus has nothing to do with the construction of the platform. It stated that Kuwait has responded to the memorandum of the Iraqi side dated 9 May, 2017 and 12 September, 2018, in which Iraq asked Kuwait to wait until the demarcation of maritime borders beyond the border mark No 162.

In those memos, Kuwait apprised Iraq of its plan to set up a platform in Fisht Al-Eij, and reiterated its stance that Kuwait alone has the right to decide on such an issue based on its sovereignty over its territorial land and sea. As for the demarcation of the maritime borders in this area, Kuwait has demanded Iraq, since 2005, in minutes of all joint higher ministerial committees to begin negotiations on the demarcation of the maritime borders beyond mark 162, which was established by the UN Security Council resolution 833 of 1993.

Kuwait also renewed its call in this regard during the seventh session of the joint ministerial committee held in Kuwait in May 2019. The letter stated that Kuwait takes into account its obligations under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and that works in its territorial waters are in line with its obligations under that convention.

Construction works currently underway in the Iraqi port of Al-Faw have reached advanced stages, nevertheless Iraq did not consult Kuwait despite the obligations imposed by Article 206 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, particularly those focusing on the assessment of impacts on the marine environment due to the construction of Al-Faw port and its breakwater, which was established 5.4 nautical miles off the Iraqi coast into Khor Abdullah waters and less than 1.5 nautical miles from the navigation channel.

Environmental impacts

The letter pointed to the geomorphological impacts seabed of Khor Abdullah and its navigation channel. It stated that the Kuwaiti side must have been informed about these effects prior to the establishment of the platform. The Iraqi side has not submitted any studies related to the environmental impacts of the establishment of Al-Faw port despite repeated requests from the Kuwaiti side in this regard.

The letter stated that because of the Iraqi side’s failure to provide the Kuwaiti side with the study on the environmental impacts or to discuss with the construction of the Al-Faw breakwater as per the provisions of Article 205 of the same convention. The Iraqi side has not submitted any studies related to the environmental impacts of the project and to consult with it in this regard. According to article 192 and article 194 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Iraq must submit all necessary measures to prevent, reduce and control pollution in this area.

In response to the Iraqi request to wait until reaching an agreement on the demarcation of the maritime borders beyond mark 162, Kuwait attached with the letter a list of the minutes of the joint meetings, in which Iraq voiced commitment to start negotiations on demarcating this area - but all in vain.

The letter pointed out that Kuwait sent invitations and letters urging the Iraqi side to start negotiations to demarcate the maritime border beyond border mark No 162, but the Iraqi side did not respond to all those calls. On this occasion, Kuwait calls once again on the Iraqi side to resolve this issue by starting negotiations on the demarcation of maritime borders after mark No 162 or by resorting to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea established under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
**Taliban kills 10 in ‘horrific’ attack**

Car bomb rocks heavily fortified area adjacent to Green Zone

KABUL: The Taliban killed at least 10 people, including a Romanian soldier, in a fresh bombing in Kabul yesterday – yet another horrific attack on the Afghan capital as the US and the insurgents negotiate a deal to see American troops leave the country. The car bomb blast shook Shash Darak, a heavily fortified area adjacent to the Green Zone and home to several important complexes including the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the Afghan intelligence service.

Apparent surveillance footage of the attack, which occurred at about 10:10 am (0540 GMT), showed a grey minivan explode just after it had cut in front of a line of white SUVs waiting to make a right turn right onto a street. One nearby pedestrian can be seen turning and trying to run away as the minivan crashed through a barrier just before the blast. Romania’s defense ministry said in a statement that a Romanian soldier “lost his life today while executing a mixed patrol mission near (the) Green Zone in Kabul”.

His death comes after a Romanian employee of the European nation’s embassy was killed in a separate Taliban attack in east Kabul on Monday. According to interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi, at least 10 civilians were killed and 42 more wounded. But Farid Ahmad Karimi, general manager at the Wazir Akbar Khan hospital close to the bomb site, told AFP that both civilians and security personnel were among the dead and wounded.

On Twitter, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack, saying a “martyrdom seeker”-or suicide bomber had triggered the car bomb and that 12 “foreign invaders” were killed. Massoud Zarai, who owns a photo studio across the street from the blast site, said he was in his shop when the explosion happened. “I fell off my chair and it got dark inside the shop because of smoke and dust,” Zarai told AFP.

“I went out to the scene moments after the attack, the side of the road was littered with debris and bodies. Through the smoke, Zarai said he could hear injured people crying and calling for their mothers and brothers. “I saw at least five very badly injured, one was covered in blood and not moving. It was horrifying.” The attack was close to where the Islamic State group killed nine journalists in a blast in April last year, including AFP Kabul’s chief photographer Shah Marai.

**‘Bitten by the snake’**

On Monday, a Romanian was among at least 16 people who were killed in a Taliban attack on a residential area in east Kabul. Currently, Romania contributes about 760 military personnel to the US-led NATO mission in Afghanistan, which has a total force size of about 17,000 troops from 39 countries. The capital has been gripped by a surge in deadly violence even after the US and the insurgents reached an agreement “in principle” that would see the Pentagon pull thousands of troops from Afghanistan in return for various Taliban security promises.

But there is increasing unease about the deal, with Afghans fearing it will lead to a return of the Taliban to power, and a growing chorus of US lawmakers and officials expressing doubts. According to parts of the deal made public so far, the Pentagon would pull about 5,000 of its 13,000 or so troops from five bases across Afghanistan by early next year, provided the Taliban hews to its security pledges. The insurgents have said they will renounce Al-Qaeda, fight the Islamic State group and stop jihadists using Afghanistan as a safe haven.

On Wednesday, the Afghan government expressed doubts about the prospective deal, saying officials need more information about the risks it poses. “There is too much concern about it, and we are still not assured of what consequences this agreement could have for Afghanistan’s future,” presidential advisor Wahid Omar told journalists yesterday. “The people of Afghanistan have been bitten by the snake before, and have been witness to the consequences of hasty deals.”

Even as negotiations for an accord have entered what are widely considered to be the final stages, violence has surged across Afghanistan. On Saturday, the Taliban attempted to seize the provincial capital of Kunduz in the north and sporadic fighting has continued on the outskirts all week. Insurgents launched an operation in the city of Pul-e Khumri, the capital of neighboring Baghlan province on Sunday. — AFP
Iran to unveil details on cuts to nuclear commitments

Netanyahu opposes talks, calls for international pressure on Iran

TEHRAN: Iran is set to detail its latest cut to commitments under a 2015 nuclear deal tomorrow, in response to US sanctions and perceived inaction by other parties to save the accord. Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi will hold a news conference to detail Tehran’s third round of cuts in its nuclear commitments since May, the semi-official ISNA news agency reported yesterday.

Iran and three European countries—Britain, France and Germany—have been engaged in talks to reduce tensions and rescue the multi-party deal, which has been unraveling since the US withdrew in May last year. But with no apparent agreement in sight, Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday made good on a promise to take another step away from the deal between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council powers, plus Germany (P5+1).

“The atomic energy organization of Iran is ordered to immediately start whatever is needed in the field of research and development, and abandon all the commitments that were in place regarding research and development,” said Rouhani, without elaborating. Iran’s arch-enemy Israel responded by calling for more international pressure on Iran. “This is not the time to hold talks with Iran; this is the time to increase the pressure on Iran,” said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The EU yesterday urged Iran to backtrack on moves to drop its commitments under the deal, known as the JCPOA. “These activities we consider are inconsistent with the JCPOA,” said European Commission spokesman Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela. “We urge Iran to reverse these steps and refrain from further measures that undermine the nuclear deal.”

Building leverage

A senior US official on Wednesday ruled out any sanctions exemptions that would permit a French-proposed credit line, which Tehran says could bring it back to full compliance with the deal. “We can’t make it any more clear that we are committed to this campaign of maximum pressure and we are not looking to grant any exceptions or waivers,” Brian Hook, State Department coordinator on Iran, told reporters.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif responded by tweeting that the US Treasury was “nothing more than a JAIL WARDEN.” “Ask for reprieve (waiver); get thrown in solitary,” he tweeted. Iran has expressed mounting frustration at Europe’s failure to offset the effects of renewed US sanctions in return for its continued compliance with the agreement. It had already hit back twice with countermeasures in response to the US withdrawal from the deal.

On July 1, Iran said it had increased its stockpile of enriched uranium to beyond the 300-kilogram limit set by the agreement. A week later, it announced it had exceeded the deal’s uranium enrichment limit of 3.67 percent. The UN’s nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, said on August 30 that Iran’s uranium stockpile stood at about 360 kilograms, of which just over 10 percent was enriched to 4.5 percent. Rouhani has stressed that the countermeasures Iran has adopted are all readily reversible if the remaining parties to the deal honor their undertakings to provide sanctions relief. The Iranian president on Wednesday gave Europe a 60-day ultimatum before Iran drops another commitment.

“Even if research is stopped, the intellectual gains are forever,” he said. But analyst Henry Rome argued that the appeared to be “provocative but reversible.” “Tehran is building leverage, not a bomb,” said Rome, a specialist on Iran for the Washington-based Eurasia Group consultancy. He added that the French initiative, meant to provide Iran with a multi-billion-dollar line of credit in exchange for returning to deal compliance, is “likely to wither away” because it requires Washington’s approval. “Why would the United States endorse a policy initiative aimed at explicitly and directly undermining its ‘maximum pressure’ policy?” he asked. — AFP

US offered millions in cash to captain of Iranian tanker

WASHINGTON: A senior US official personally offered several million dollars to the Indian captain of an Iranian oil tanker suspected of heading to Syria, the State Department confirmed Wednesday. The Financial Times reported that Brian Hook, the State Department pointman on Iran, sent emails to captain Akhlesh Kumar in which he offered “good news” of millions in US cash to live comfortably if he steered the Adrian Darya 1 to a country where the US government could seize it.

“We have seen the Financial Times article and can confirm that these steps and refrain from further measures that undermine the nuclear deal.” — AFP

“We have seen the Financial Times article and can confirm that the details are accurate,” a State Department spokeswoman said. “We have conducted extensive outreach to several ship captains as well as shipping companies warning them of the consequences of providing support to a foreign terrorist organization,” she said, referring to Iran’s elite Revolutionary Guards.

The Adrian Darya 1 was held for six weeks by the British overseas protectorate of Gibraltar on suspicion that it was set to deliver oil from Iran to its main Arab ally Syria—a violation of European Union sanctions on President Bashar al-Assad’s iron-fisted regime. Gibraltar released the ship, formerly called the Grace 1, on August 18 over US protests after receiving written assurances that the vessel would not head to countries sanctioned by the European Union.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif mocked Hook’s initiative as he pointed to the Financial Times story. “Here—pulling from the nuclear accord, the United States has unilaterally threatened sanctions aimed at ending all oil sales by Iran in a bid to diminish the clerical regime’s regional influence. — AFP

Six suspected jihadists killed in Egypt

CAIRO: Six suspected jihadists were killed yesterday in a shootout with police near the Bahariya oasis southwest of the Egyptian capital, the interior ministry said. Police carried out a dawn raid against “terrorist elements” in a desert area near Bahariya, roughly 300 kilometers southwest of Cairo, the ministry said in a statement. A shootout led to the death of six suspects, the ministry said, adding that a number of hunting rifles and four assault rifles were found at the site.

Jihadists have launched several attacks in the vast desert area west of the Nile. In November 2018, an Islamic State group attack killed six Copts and an Anglican after they left the Saint Samuel monastery west of the Nile in Minya province. IS carried out another attack nearby in May 2017, killing 29 Coptic pilgrims, many of them children. Tourists have also been killed in attacks, but the violence has mostly targeted police and soldiers.

Hundreds of security personnel have died in an escalation of attacks since the military overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013. The ouster was led by then-army-chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who became president following the 2014 polls before securing an official 97 percent of the vote in elections last year. — AFP
South Africa faces backlash after xenophobic attacks

Nigerians quit WEF event; S Africa tries to contain ‘Afrophobia’ fallout

CAPE TOWN: South Africa’s government said yesterday that prejudice was a factor in deadly riots that have targeted foreign businesses, as those attacks and reprisals overshadowed a pan-African economic conference it is hosting for a second day. President Cyril Ramaphosa had hoped the World Economic Forum summit would serve as a shop window for his efforts to revive South Africa’s ailing economy and boost intra-African trade. But the backdrop of a week of anti-immigrant violence, during which at least seven people have been killed and hundreds of arrests have been made, has dominated proceedings.

While the victims’ nationalities have not been made public, the rioting has above all exposed dormant tensions between the two countries and Nigeria, the continent’s two biggest economies. Yesterday Jim Ovia, chairman of Nigeria’s Zenith Bank and a co-chair of the whole Cape Town event, withdrew, citing the “hypersensitivity of the issues surrounding the lives and well-being of Nigerian citizens living in South Africa.”

Nigeria, whose vice president had boycotted the summit on Wednesday, also recalled its High Commissioner to South Africa.

But yesterday the highest-profile absentee was Ramaphosa himself who, as his ministers sought to manage the fallout, cancelled his appearance at the WEF plenary session to address a crowd protesting for a second day about violence against women. Speaking in his place, Finance Minister Tito Mboweni said most South Africans disapproved of attacks on foreigners and the principle of freedom of movement for the continent’s citizens was key.

But animosities were generating violence, and politicians were partly responsible. “We have to go to our people politically to discuss what some of them are doing is wrong.” The riots began eight days ago in Pretoria before spreading to nearby Johannesburg. Both cities, in Gauteng province, have large immigrant populations. Police yesterday reported 15 associated deaths since then, of which Gauteng police commissioner Elias Motswere confirmed seven were directly linked to the violence. Police had also made 423 arrests. Asked about the victims’ nationalities, he said that “has been taken to the pathologist.” Threats of violence will normalize by next week,” said NAM Chairman Siphiwe Reed, to shut its embassy and consulate there, its foreign minister said, and South African companies MTN, and Shoprite closed stores in the country after retaliatory attacks. In Democratic Republic of Congo’s second city Lubumbashi, residents protested outside the South African consulate and a South African-owned shop was looted, witnesses told Reuters yesterday.

Targeting Africans

Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor said the government was aware of a resentment-driven “Afrophobia” and was working to restore calm. It was also in constant contact with Nigerian authorities. “There is a targeting of Africans from other parts of Africa, we can’t deny that,” she told Reuters on the sidelines of the conference.

Police said they found two burnt bodies yesterday in the Gauteng township of Katlehong, but the incident could not be immediately linked to anti-immigrant violence. Some trade traffic was also affected. In neighboring Eswatini, the National Agricultural Marketing Board said trucks that normally carry farm produce south across the border were being kept in their depot after advice from South African counterparts that it was not safe to travel. “We are keeping our fingers crossed that things will normalize by next week,” said NAM-Board Agribusiness Manager Tammy Dlamini. Central Bank data yesterday showed South Africa’s trade balance swung to a deficit in the second quarter while the current account deficit widened. The economy grew more forecast in the same period but it had contracted sharply in the previous three months, and the heads of two local financial firms said yesterday that a meaningful recovery was years away. — Reuters

Myanmar airport closes after plane skids off runway

YANGON: Myanmar’s largest airport was forced to close temporarily after a military plane skidded off the runway, forcing inbound international flights to be diverted, an official at the civil aviation department said yesterday. A Chinese-made Y-8-200F transport plane slid off the runway at Yangon international airport in the morning after one of its engines failed, according to a government statement. There were no injuries reported, but outbound flights were delayed and inbound flights suspended.

“We are in a situation that the airport has temporarily shut down,” Ye Htut Aung, Deputy Director-General of Myanmar’s Department of Civil Aviation, told Reuters by telephone. International flights would not resume until the aircraft could be removed, he said. “My husband is now stuck at the airport in Dhaka, and can’t come home as he planned,” said Yu Liwen, a teacher at the airport with her toddler son. “We don’t know what’s happening or how long it will take,” she said.

In May, a Biman Bangladesh Airlines plane skidded off the runway at Yangon international airport in heavy rain, leading to more than a dozen people being sent to hospital. Later that month, a Myanmar National Airlines flight was forced to make an emergency landing after its nose gear failed. In June 2017, a Y-8 military plane crashed into the Andaman Sea off Myanmar’s southern coast, killing all 122 people on board. — Reuters

S Africa’s Ramaphosa vows to intensify war on rape, murder of women

CAPE TOWN: South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa yesterday vowed to tighten laws to fight rape and murder of women as the nation reels from high-profile murders in recent days. In an impromptu address thousands of protesters outside parliament, Ramaphosa admitted that it was time his government took emergency measures to deal with the scourge of rape and murder of women. At least 137 sexual-offence cases are committed each day, mainly against women, according to official figures.

Women Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, said this week that more than 30 women were killed by their spouses last month alone. “Enough is enough and we are going to act,” said Ramaphosa, promising to announce later Thursday a raft of new measures their government will take. “Men that kill and rape must stay in jail for life. “The law must change that once you have raped and killed you get life, no bail!”

Ramaphosa added. On Wednesday around 500 women demonstrated against South Africa’s “femicide epidemic” in front of Cape Town International Conference Centre, where a three-day World Economic Forum on Africa was opening. Last year South Africa recorded a 6.9 percent increase in the number of murders countrywide, with an average 57 murders committed each day. — AFP
UK’s Johnson seeks snap election to break Brexit deadlock

PM’s brother, Jo, quits cabinet, steps down as MP

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson called yesterday for an early election after a flurry of parliamentary votes tore up his hardline Brexit strategy and left him without a majority. His government said it would make a second attempt on Monday to trigger the national polls after the opposition Labour Party on Wednesday helped block Johnson’s first bid.

“It is now time for the people to decide after parliament has failed them so we can resolve this once and for all,” a Downing Street spokesman said. The vote’s timing is still being debated as the country hurtles toward an October 31 departure from the European Union without a plan for what comes next. The prime minister was dealt a further personal blow when his brother Jo said he was quitting his junior ministerial role and not contesting his seat in parliament in the new ballot. “I’ve been torn between family loyalty and the national interest—it’s an unresolvable tension & time for others to take on my roles,” Jo Johnson tweeted.

No real negotiations
Parliament is rushing through legislation designed to keep Johnson from breaking Britain off from its closest trading partners without a negotiated agreement with Brussels. MPs appeared on course to do so by Monday—a victory that would be accomplished just ahead of a five-week shutdown of parliament that Johnson controversially ordered at the end of last month. The pound surged to a one-month high against the dollar on rising market hopes of a chaotic breakup being avoided next month.

Reckless and chicken
Battle lines were drawn across the front pages of British newspapers after a particularly bruising week of UK politics did little to resolve the three-year impasse. The Labor-hacking Daily Mirror branded Johnson “Britain’s worst PM” for threatening a “reckless no-deal Brexit”. The Daily Mail shot back by calling Johnson “Britain’s worst PM” for threatening a “reckless no-deal Brexit”. The Daily Mail shot back by calling Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn “Britain’s worst PM” for threatening a “reckless no-deal Brexit”.

Italy swears in new cabinet eyeing fresh start for EU ties
ROME: President Sergio Mattarella yesterday swore in Italy’s new pro-European government, heralding a fresh start for the eurozone’s third largest economy as the far-right fails from power. Brussels warmly welcomed the coalition between the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and centre-left Democratic Party (PD), which is expected to markedly improve rocky relations between European and Rome. “We’re ready to give our utmost for the country,” Mattarella said.

PM’s brother, Jo, quits cabinet, steps down as MP

Junc’12i congratulated Conte and said Italy’s new political era came at “an important moment for our Union”, adding that he was sure Rome would play a “front-line” role on key issues. Italy has put forward former centre-left premier Paolo Gentiloni as its candidate for the incoming European Commission. PD chief Nicola Zingaretti said it was an “excellent choice for Italy, which returns to playing a leading role in Europe”.

The previous coalition between the M5S and far-right Matteo Salvini’s anti-immigrant League had fought bitterly with Brussels over its big-spending budget and critics had bemoaned Rome’s sidelining in the EU halls of power. The markets welcomed the new cabinet, with Milan’s FTSE Mib stock market up 0.5 percent after the swearing-in ceremony. It is the youngest ever in Italy’s post-war history—the average age being 47 — and has more ministers from the country’s disadvantaged south than the wealthy north.

Anti-Salvini
Of the 21 ministers, nine hail from the M5S, one from the small left-wing Free and Equals party, and one has no affiliation with any political party—the new interior minister. Political watchers have warned the tie-up between the M5S and PD-bitter foes until just weeks ago—is fragile. “We’re very aware that the forces that make up this government have harshly opposed each other over the years,” PD heavyweight and new culture minister Dario Franceschini said. —AFP

Putin finalizes ‘large-scale’ prisoner swap
VLADIVOSTOK: Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said Moscow was completing negotiations on a “large-scale” prisoner swap with Kiev, in what could be a step towards easing tensions between the neighbors. “We’re reaching the final stage of talks on the swap... it will be large-scale,” he told an economic forum in the Russian city of Vladivostok, adding that the date of the exchange would soon be announced.

Putin’s comments are the first time he has directly addressed the possibility of a prisoner swap, after weeks of reports that Ukraine and Moscow were planning the move. They came as a court in Ukraine released from pre-trial detention a man suspected of involvement in the Downing of flight MH17, amid speculation he could be part of the swap. Last week Ukraine released Russian state media journalist Kyrillo Vyshinsky, who had been in custody for more than a year, pending a trial for “high treason”. Ukraine’s new President Volodymyr Zelensky offered to hand Vyshinsky over to Moscow in exchange for Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov, who is a prisoner in a penal colony in the Russian Arctic. But Zelensky, whose election earlier this year raised hopes of an easing of tensions with Russia, declined to comment on whether the director would be part of any swap. Putin said Thursday it was a “difficult to make the decision” to swap the people requested by Ukraine, but did not name any names.

The swap “will be a huge step towards normalizing (relations),” he said. Sentsov, 43, has become Ukraine’s most famous political prisoner. He was arrested in 2014 and is serving a 20-year sentence for planning “terrorist attacks” in Crimea. Among other prisoners who could be eligible for an exchange are 24 Ukrainian sailors captured last year.

Russia has been holding the sailors since seizing their three vessels off Crimea last November, in the most dangerous direct clash between Russia and Ukraine in years. Some 13,000 people have been killed in Ukraine’s conflict with Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, which broke out shortly after Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014. —AFP

Putin finalizes ‘large-scale’ prisoner swap
MAPUTO: Pope Francis began the first full day of his visit to Mozambique yesterday, praising a peace deal between government and rebels and offering solidarity to victims of two devastating cyclones. His maiden visit to the poor southeast African country comes after the government and the former rebel group Renamo, now the main opposition party, signed a historic treaty. Mozambique’s 16-year civil war was attended by Renamo chief Ossufo Momade and other opposition leaders.

President Nyusi thanked the Pope for his support and encouragement. He expressed his “personal gratitude… for the efforts made in recent decades to ensure that peace is once more the norm.” Reconciliation, he said, is “the best path to confront the difficulties and challenges that you face as a nation.” He described the accord as “a landmark that we greet with the hope that it will prove decisive.” The talks at the presidential palace were also attended by Renamo chief Ossufo Momade and other opposition leaders.

Jihadist threat

Nyusi thanked the Pope for his support and encouragement. But he also warned that prospects for enduring peace were being threatened by a jihadist insurgency that erupted in northern Mozambique in 2017. “The effective peace that we long for… has been threatened in the northern provinces of Cabo Delgado, where faceless, evildoers sow terror, kill, destroy and plunder goods of defenseless populations,” said Nyusi. Nyusi is hoping for a second term in office at general elections scheduled for October 15. He met the pope last year at the Vatican. Nyusi, the first pope to visit Mozambique since John Paul II in 1988, arrived on Wednesday evening to a rapturous welcome by waving and dancing crowds on the streets of Maputo. His three-day trip to the disaster-prone country is the first on a tour of three African countries, including Madagascar and Mauritius. It comes after the country was ravaged by two cyclones that killed more than 600 and affected hundreds of thousands. “I would like my first words of closeness and solidarity to be addressed to all those struck by cyclones Idai and Kenneth, whose devastating effects continue to be felt by so many families,” he said. “I want you to know of my own participation in your anguish and suffering, and the commitment of the Catholic community to respond to this most difficult situation. Amid the catastrophe and desolation, I pray that, in God’s providence, constant concern will be shown by all those civil and social groups who make people your priority and in a position to promote the necessary rebuilding.”

EU launches counter-terrorism judicial database

BRUSSELS: The European Union’s judicial cooperation arm, Eurojust, launched a shared counter-terrorism database Thursday that officials said would be “crucial” for judicial action against terrorist suspects and organized crime. The Counter-Terrorism Register, operational from this month, will give investigators and prosecutors an overview of criminal proceedings made against suspects in other EU countries and in a few, data-compliant partner countries, Eurojust’s chief, Ladislav Hamran, told a media conference.

“Now that terrorists operate more and more in cross-border networks, the EU must do the same,” he said. The EU laid the groundwork for judicial data cooperation back in 2005 but the project stalled when some national law enforcement bodies in member states jealously guarded information. That changed in 2015, when jihadists staged attacks in Paris, killing 130 people in a concert hall, a national stadium and in several cafes, said Frederic Baill, a French former member at Eurojust who helped get the database started.

Suspects linked to those attacks—claimed by the Islamic State group—were traced across other EU countries and elsewhere, underlining the “multi national” dimension of such acts, Baill said. “You need to have a complete overview” to go after such suspects with prosecutable cases, he said. “If you don’t have this overview you’re a blind man.” The utility of the database was further highlighted with jihadist attacks in Germany in 2016 and Spain in 2017, prompting Belgium, France, Germany and Spain to throw their weight behind its creation last year.—AFP

AMLO reshapes Mexico’s language along with its politics

MEXICO CITY: The jury is still out on whether President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador will “transform” Mexico as he has promised. One thing is sure, though: he is reshaping its language. Elected last year in a wave of anti-establishment disgust, the folksy populist has elicited laughter, groans and head-scratching with his unique take on Mexican Spanish, reviving words that were fading from memory and bringing colorful new ones into widespread use.

“AMLO,” as he is known, is like no president Mexico has ever had. Since taking office in December, the leftist anti-corruption crusader has ditched the presidential mansion, guards and jet, and cut his own salary by 60 percent. That radical break with the past also extends to his speaking style, which—like almost everything about Lopez Obrador—has divided Mexicans.

Many opponents can hardly stand to listen to the silver-haired 65-year-old. He has a way of dominating the entire news cycle, starting with his daily press conference, held every weekday at 7:00 am—the “main amanera,” from a word meaning “morning sex.” But he is highly popular: his approval rating is around 65 percent. His opponents have responded by adopting some choice words of their own. In AMLO’s Mexico, “fifis” wage political war with “chairos,” “pirruris” get mocked for their “machuchon” style, and the “Peje” is out to stop the “moche.” Lost? Mexicans sometimes are, too. Many of those words were little-known until Lopez Obrador came along. Now, nine months into his presidency, they are fixtures of the national conversation. Experts say Lopez Obrador’s speaking style is one of the secrets to his success. “What distinguishes Lopez Obrador is his colloquial, popular vocabulary,” he has his own personal archive of traditional language, which he draws on constantly,” said Luis Fernando Lara, a linguist and author of the Dictionary of Mexican Spanish. “He’s a poet of the people.”

New dictionary

Lopez Obrador has even inspired his own online reference work: the “Dictionary of Peje-isms.” It defines AMLO favorites such as “machuchon,” a word for excessively luxurious things. “That plane is so ‘machuchon,’ even Donald Trump doesn’t have one like it,” Lopez Obrador said of the presidential jet he put up for sale, a Boeing 787 Dreamliner valued at $120 million. Lopez Obrador’s linguistic innovations often carry a political message—such as “moche,” or “kick-back payment,” the money that poor welfare recipients, for example, have to pay corrupt officials to receive their benefits. Like “moche,” many of the president’s favorite words portray his opponents as evil enemies of the noble Mexican people. That worldview is “polarizing,” said political scientist Jose Antonio Crespo. “I don’t remember ever seeing such deep fanatism in the country,” he said. Others are more upbeat about the linguistic phenomenon that is AMLO. “Words like ‘fifis’ are sometimes reductionist, but they serve to start a debate about addressing inequality in Mexico,” said analyst Herman Gomez Bruera.—AFP

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Dorian strengthens to Category 3 storm, lashes US east coast

Bahamas reels from Dorian's devastation

CHARLESTON: Hurricane Dorian lashed the Carolinas with driving rain and fierce winds as it neared the US east coast yesterday after devastating the Bahamas and killing at least 20 people. Parts of downtown Charleston were flooded, with video footage showing people kayaking in the dark in gushing knee-deep water in the stately city on the coast of South Carolina. Trees bent in wind gusting in from the sea. Dozens of streets were reported closed as up to 20 inches of rain were forecast and forecasters warned of flash flooding.

As day broke, the Category 3 hurricane was 80 miles southeast of Charleston, moving north along the coast with maximum sustained winds of 115 mph, the National Hurricane Center said. Hundreds of thousands of people in the Carolinas, Georgia and elsewhere were under evacuation orders as the US girded for the worst. Hundreds of thousands of people in the Carolinas, Georgia and elsewhere were under evacuation orders as the US girded for the worst. The US Coast Guard and Europe. The US Coast Guard and Britain's Royal Navy airlifted survivors and ferried in emergency supplies as floodwaters receded in the Bahamas. The United Nations said 770,000 people on Grand Bahama and Abaco islands were in "immediate need" of aid. Minnis also warned that looters will be prosecuted "to the fullest extent of the law," and said additional police and defense force officers had been deployed.

Shelter, safe drinking water, food and medicine were urgently needed for some 50,000 people on Grand Bahama and between 15,000 and 20,000 on Abaco, UN emergency relief coordinator Mark Lowcock said after a meeting with Minnis. "Speed is of the essence," Red Cross official Stephen McAndrew said of rescue operations on the two northernmost islands in the Bahamas archipelago which were pummelled by one of the strongest Atlantic storms on record.

People on Grand Bahama used jet skis and boats to pluck victims from homes flooded and pulverized by the monster storm. US and British helicopters were conducting medical evacuations, aerial assessments to help coordinate relief efforts, and reconnaissance flights to assess the damage. President Donald Trump spoke by telephone to the Bahamian leader and pledged US assistance, the White House said. "A big section of the Bahamas was hit like few people have seen before," Trump said. "They need a big hand." Aerial footage showed scenes of catastrophic damage in Abaco with hundreds of homes missing roofs, cars submerged or overturned, widespread flooding and boats reduced to matchwood.

Lucky in Florida

As rescue efforts ramped up, Dorian rolled along the coasts of South and North Carolina, the NHC said. Dorian left Florida largely unscathed. "We got lucky in Florida, very, very lucky indeed," Trump said. Life-threatening storm surge with significant coastal flooding was expected along large parts of the southeast and mid-Atlantic coast over the following days, the NHC said. The center predicted the Carolinas could be hit with dangerous storm surge of up to seven feet and six to 12 inches of rain. Roberto Smith, who was born in Abaco but now lives in Florida, said he was worried about his family. "I spoke to my dad on the night of the hurricane, on Sunday night, and his roof blew up," Smith told AFP. "I haven't spoken to him since then. I am really worried. I can't even eat." "The island is devastated," he added. "There is no power, no running water, no electricity."

Truly shocking

The US Coast Guard said it had rescued 61 people, including 19 injured patients from Abaco island's Marsh Harbor clinic who were flown to Nassau Tuesday. USAID, the US relief agency, said it was airlifting supplies such as plastic sheeting for shelter, hygiene kits and water from Miami. Larry Lewis, who runs Paradise Watersports in the city of Freeport on Grand Bahama, said most of the floodwaters had receded but some roads remained impassable. He said very few stores were open. "I saw a lot of people scrapping for something to eat," he told AFP.

A British landing ship, the RFA Mounts Bay, launched boats carrying supplies for Marsh Harbour on Abaco and Britain's Department for International Development said it had deployed a team of three humanitarian experts. "The clock is now ticking to get help to those in need," British International Development Secretary Alok Sharma said. Dorian dumped as much as 30 inches of rain on the Bahamas, a former British colony.

Outraged Indians lampoon govt over rise in traffic fines

BENGALURU: Many Indians have ridiculed a sharp increase in traffic fines this week, lampooning the poor state of roads and joking that the revenue from the fines would soon exceed that from taxes. The government hopes to bring order to India's often chaotic roads with a tenfold increase in fines for more serious offences to between 5,000 rupees ($70) and 100,000 rupees ($1,400). The new fines went into effect on Sunday.

They come as economic growth has slumped to a six-year low, and government data shows a slowdown in the growth of goods and services tax (GST) collections, raising the prospect that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government will miss its fiscal deficit target this year. "If the traffic police and government became half efficient in collecting fines for traffic violations, it will easily cross the GST and IT (income tax) collections," said one Twitter user. Another Twitter user joked: "At this rate Govt can abolish GST & concentrate on traffic fines."

Media reported a tractor driver in Gurugram - near the capital, New Delhi - had to cough up $820 in fines for 10 violations, while a rickshaw driver separately was hit with fines that were nearly twice the cost of his vehicle. "India's fiscal deficit will soon turn into a fiscal surplus," said another Twitter user, referring to the rate at which the government was raking in traffic fines. The size of the fines is particularly concerning in a country where the per capita monthly income is only 10,500 rupees ($147).

But officials say the heavy fines are needed to improve safety in a country where more than 100,000 people are killed and nearly 500,000 injured every year in road accidents. "Shouldn't people's lives be saved?" Nixin Gadkari, minister for road transport and highways, told the ANI news agency. Gadkari himself was not spared on social media, with some quick to repost old images of him riding a scooter without a helmet.

People also posted pictures of huge potholes and asked what his department was doing to fix them. An artist had his safety in a country where more than 100,000 people are killed and nearly 500,000 injured every year in road accidents. "Shouldn't people's lives be saved? There should be respect for the law," Nitin Gadkari, minister for road transport and highways, told the ANI news agency. Gadkari himself was not spared on social media, with some quick to repost old images of him riding a scooter without a helmet.

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Year after India gay ruling, a battle to change attitudes

Signs show Indian society becoming relaxed about homosexuality

GURGAON, India: Vivek Kishore and Vishwa Srivastava hit it off soon after meeting at a cafe, little knowing what lay in store for them as a gay couple in India where homosexuality was a criminal offence until a year ago. The couple’s worst fears came true when they were slapped, abused and threatened with police action by none other than Kishore’s parents, who found out they were living together.

But life changed for the duo a year ago on Friday when India’s Supreme Court overturned a British colonial-era law that had criminalized gay sex as “against the order of nature”. Hundreds of people had been prosecuted under the law, known as Section 377, which was often used to threaten, abuse and blackmail members of the LGBTQ community.

“It was huge, it was like getting independence... My immediate thought was both of us can have sex, that’s not criminal anymore,” gushed Kishore. “Legally there is nothing that my homophobic family can do now against me,” the 24-year-old said, locking eyes and toes with his partner at their home in Gurgaon on the outskirts of New Delhi.

Battle for equality

The decades-long legal battle to legalize gay sex began in India in the 1990s when arranged marriages were the norm, with families carefully choosing a partner for their children from the same religion, caste and status.

When the Delhi High Court ruled that the law could not be applied to consensual sex, the modern Hindu, Muslim and Christian groups challenged it in the Supreme Court, which then restored the law in 2013.

The LGBTQ community, however, refused to give up and in 2016, a group of high-profile petitioners including a gay dancer and a chef again approached the Supreme Court. They were joined by others and the court began hearing emotional arguments from a community long ostracized in a country that remains socially conservative. “It’s very important that people who have a voice should use it because it’s not easy to come out,” said Anjali Gopalan, one of the petitioners and a gay rights activist.

Attitudes

Gopalan, however, admitted that just scrapping the law on September 6, 2018 was not enough and that the real change would only come when regressive attitudes change.

In the past year, there have been tentative signs that Indian society is becoming more relaxed about homosexuality. Gay characters have featured in a popular online series as well as a Bollywood film, while more restaurants and cafes are declaring themselves gay-friendly.

In May, sprinter Dutee Chand became a trailblazer by becoming the first Indian athlete to reveal she is in a same-sex relationship. Pride marches were held across India with much gusto in June as students and members of the civil society joined to show their solidarity to the community.

Three dead as monsoon deluge sparks Mumbai chaos

MUMBAI: Three people were killed and dozens of lights were cancelled or delayed after severe flooding in India’s financial hub Mumbai, with authorities warning of heavier monsoon rains yesterday. Mumbai-home to 20 million people-has been hit by torrential downpours over the past two months amid the annual monsoon deluge. Non-stop rain over several hours on Wednesday paralyzed traffic, halted trains and delayed airport operations at the western city.

“Two BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) staffers died after falling in rainwater on Wednesday. Another man drowned in an overflowing Mithi river,” the city’s disaster management cell spokesman Tanaji Kambile said. Residents spoke of being trapped in traffic for several hours amid chaotic scenes. “It was a nightmare and the entire city came to a standstill,” charteried accountant Kevin Gogri said. Maharashtra state government minister Ashish Shelar said schools would be closed yesterday “as a precautionary measure”. The city’s residents were bracing for more chaos yesterday with the India Meteorological Department issuing an alert for the “possibility of very heavy rainfall”. —AFP

Man killed over kidnapping rumors

NEW DELHI: Indian police said yesterday that five people had been arrested for lynching a man after accusing him of kidnapping children, the latest in a renewed string of attacks fuelled by malicious rumor-mongering. Some 150 people have been attacked recently across the country based on false kidnapping reports, some of them shared on WhatsApp, leaving authorities in a fix.

Since August 1, at least nine people have died and 135 others injured in mob attacks, according to figures collated by local media. Police said in the latest incident a mob set upon the 45-year-old man in eastern Jharkhand state late Tuesday, thrashing him with sticks and shoes. “The rumor was going around in the village about child lifters roaming in the area. We have arrested five persons in the case,” senior local police officer Prabhakar Kumar told AFP by telephone. The attack came on the heels of six persons being thrashed in the same state on Monday.

A pregnant deaf and mute woman was also attacked in New Delhi in late August, with the mob wrongly believing she was involved in kidnapping. Lynchings are nothing new in India, but the spread of smartphones to even the most remote corners has enabled rumors to be shared at lightning speed and in huge volumes. —AFP
In Kashmir, shopkeepers refuse to open despite India easing curbs

Communication restrictions make reporting difficult

Srinagar: A month after India withdrew contested Kashmir’s autonomy, locked it down with thousands of additional troops and made mass arrests, residents are resisting attempts by authorities to show some signs of normalcy returning in the Muslim-majority valley. On August 5, Prime Minister Narendra Modi revoked special rights for Jammu and Kashmir state, striking down long-standing constitutional provisions for the Himalayan region, which is also claimed by neighboring Pakistan.

To dampen the possibility of widespread protests, India flooded Kashmir - already one of the world’s most militarized zones - with troops, imposed severe movement restrictions, and snapped all telephone, mobile phone and internet connections. Thousands of people were arrested. New Delhi has since eased some of the curbs although no one detained has been freed and mobile and internet connections remain suspended.

Officials in Jammu and Kashmir’s summer capital Srinagar say that 90 percent of the Kashmir valley is free of restrictions on daytime movement, some landline phone connections have been restored and thousands of schools have reopened. However, checkpoints remain in place and communication restrictions make reporting from the region difficult. Despite the partial relaxation, an informal but widespread boycott by students, shopkeepers and public and private sector employees against the recent repatriation attempt. —AFP

Self-imposed strike

In previous phases of protests in Kashmir, separatist groups would issue official calls for shutdowns and protests. This time, however, separatist leaders - who either want independence for Kashmir, or support joining Pakistan - have been detained alongside mainstream politicians, including three former chief ministers and hundreds of other civil society leaders. In posters across Srinagar, which began appearing in late August, shopkeepers have been asked to only open late in the evenings and early in the mornings to enable locals to buy essentials.

In the commercial areas of downtown Srinagar, the vast majority of shops remain shuttered. Despite security forces asking owners to return to normal opening hours, many have refused. “We were opening shops in the evenings for people,” said Mohammad Ayub, a Srinagar shopkeeper. “(But) the troops tell us either to open the shops for the full day or don’t open in the evenings.” Rohit Kansal, the official spokesperson of the Jammu and Kashmir state government, blamed anti-national forces for preventing shops from opening. “Security forces have taken note of it,” he said.

Schools, government shutdown

Attendance in major government offices in Srinagar is around 50 percent and those in smaller, subordinate offices in the city is substantially lower, a state government official said, declining to be named as he was not authorized to speak to the media. At an office of the state housing and urban development department in western Srinagar, only 30 out of around 300 staff are in attendance on most days, another official said.

“Only those who live nearby report to the office. The others come in once in a while,” the official said. Government workers employed to clean Srinagar’s iconic Dal Lake have not turned up for work in several weeks, officials said, and the water’s surface has become clogged with weeds. Many schools remain empty. “How can I send my children to school? There is a clampdown and we are concerned for the safety of our wards,” said Javed Ahmad, a Srinagar parent. Kansal said that 4,000 schools in Kashmir were now functional, and that attendance is improving, although it remains low in some areas.

The shutdown and the restrictions still in place are having an impact across all areas of society. With tourists avoiding the region, hotel owners say occupancy rates are close to zero. Srinagar’s historic Jama Masjid mosque has been closed for a month, Kashmir’s postal service is heavily disrupted, and online retailers, including Amazon, say their operations in Jammu and Kashmir remain suspended. — Reuters

Bangladesh bans two aid agencies from Rohingya refugee camps

COX’S BAZAR: Bangladesh yesterday said it has banned two aid agencies from Rohingya camps in the country’s southeast, alleging they were telling refugees to reject repatriation to their homeland in Myanmar. The move came amid growing impatience from Dhaka about the slow pace of relocation of the refugees in the country, two years after some 740,000 were driven over the border by a military crackdown on the Muslim minority.

The latest repatriation attempt by Bangladesh and Myanmar two weeks ago, the second in less than a year, failed with not a single refugee volunteering to cross the border back home. US-based Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and local organization Al Markazul Islami were accused by the government’s NGO Affairs Bureau of “instigating” the stateless minority against the recent repatriation attempt. —AFP

Stay or go? Asian nations mull options as seas rise, cities sink

BANGKOK: Small islands and coastal cities in Asia-Pacific need more funds to assist vulnerable communities and help them decide whether to relocate or stay and defend against rising sea levels and extreme weather, climate experts said yesterday. Indonesia last month said it would relocate its capital from the sinking city of Jakarta, while Fiji plans to move dozens of coastal villages inland, and the Marshall Islands is building sea walls to protect coastal communities.

“As much as possible, we must try to adapt and mitigate in situ because that’s where people have their homes, land and livelihoods,” said Harjeet Singh, global climate change lead at charity ActionAid. “But more places are becoming uninhabitable because of land degradation, rising sea levels or other weather impacts, and there is no choice but to relocate,” he said at the sidelines of a United Nations climate event in Bangkok.

More than 20 million people are uprooted every year by floods, storms, landslides and other extreme winter conditions, with the vast majority of such displacement occurring in the Asia-Pacific region, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Displacement can have devastating impacts on those who have to move, as well as on communities that receive them, said Victor Bernard, Asia-Pacific program officer at human rights advocacy the Raoul Wallenberg Institute.

“Countries must ensure relocations are not forced, and that the rights of vulnerable communities are protected,” he said. Fiji moved its first coastal community inland in 2014, and may have to move dozens more to higher ground as sea levels rise, said Niles Prakash, the country’s head of climate change and international cooperation. “Moving them inland means they lose access to livelihoods. There are also socio-cultural and traditional ties to consider.”

Fiji, with 900,000 people on hundreds of islands, plans to set up a fund to pay for loss and damages caused by the effects of climate change, including relocation, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Sea-level rise and erosion are set to make most island atolls uninhabitable by 2050, and for the Marshall Islands, home to 75,000 people, moving to higher ground is not an option. The islanders are already seeing the effects of warming oceans in damaged reefs and fish stocks, said Angelene Heine, the country’s national energy planner. — Reuters
One dead, 30 hurt as train, truck collide near Tokyo

Train company launches investigation into accident

YOKOHAMA, Japan: An express train travelling at around 120 kilometers per hour smashed into a truck at a crossing south of Tokyo yesterday, sparking a blaze and killing one person with around 30 others injured. The crash derailed the train’s front carriage and pinned the truck to a wall, as it burst into flames, spewing black smoke into the air and its cargo of citrus fruit on to the tracks. The force of the impact shattered the train’s front window and bent an overhead power line, with witnesses describing an intense fire and panic among the 500 passengers on board the train as it sped through the crossing near Yokohama, south of Tokyo.

“Emergency crews took 30 injured people into care. Of those, two sustained serious injuries. Of those severely injured, the hospital has confirmed the death of one person,” a fire department official told reporters at the scene. National broadcaster NHK said the truck driver was pinned under the train but it was not immediately clear whether he was the victim. Another woman in her 20s was also seriously injured. According to the Keikyu train company operating the service, the driver said he had applied the emergency brake but too late to prevent the collision.

The company said it had launched an investigation into the accident that took place just before noon. “The maximum speed there is set at 120km per hour and we believe the train was travelling as fast as that,” a Keikyu spokesman, who declined to be named, told AFP. “There is an abnormality detection system there for emergence in cases such as a truck getting stuck on the crossing. This system kicked in and an alarm signal was flickering,” added the spokesman.

A panic
Eyewitnesses spoke of a fierce fire and panic, with TV images showing terrified passengers streaming from the carriages after the collision. One man who was travelling in the first carriage told national broadcaster NHK there was a “sudden sound” and that the impact left people in heaps. “I saw flames. Then the fire became more and more intense. So everyone rushed to get outside. It was a panic,” this eyewitness said.

Another person who witnessed the scene said there were flames coming from the bottom of the truck and that the “smoke was awful.”

Another person who said they spoke to seven former waitresses who claimed they managed to escape while their colleagues were tricked into coming to Seoul.

The case had received “full cooperation” from the North but were not allowed to meet the 12 North Korean waitresses who are currently in the South, said Niuoule Bhabgat, vice president of the Confederation of Lawyers of Asia and the Pacific. — AFP

Indonesia restores internet access in unrest-hit Papua

JAKARTA: Indonesia has started restoring internet access in restive Papua, which has been gripped by two weeks of mass protests sparked by anger over racism and fresh calls for self-rule. A low-level insurgency against Indonesian control has simmered for decades in Papua, the country’s easternmost territory, and Jakarta has responded to the recent deadly riots by flooding the region with thousands of extra security personnel.

It also blocked internet access to quell the unrest, and on Wednesday charged a high-profile rights lawyer over spreading online videos about deadly riots in the territory. The government said the block was intended to stop what it described as a flood of hoaxes and provocative comments about Papuans that were stoking unrest. Late Wednesday, the government said it had started lifting the blockade—slammed by media and free speech advocates—in some 29 of 42 districts across the mountainous, jungle-covered region.

The security situation in some areas is recovering and the spread of fake news and provocative, hateful comments related to Papua is also declining,” the communications ministry said. “The government will keep monitoring developments in areas where data services are still blocked.” On Wednesday, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said she was “disturbed” by the violence in Papua.

“I encourage the authorities to engage in dialogue with the people of Papua... on their aspirations and concerns, as well as to restore internet services and refrain from any excessive use of force,” she said in a statement. Indonesia took control of the former Dutch colony in the 1960s after an independence vote widely seen as being rigged. Jakarta has refused to discuss fresh calls for an independence vote. The majority of Papuans are Christian and ethnic Melanesian with few cultural ties to the rest of Muslim-majority Indonesia.

Firestorm of protests
On Wednesday, authorities charged Veronica Koman, a lawyer and Papuan rights activist, for alleged incitement over a video she shared of the mid-August arrest and tear gassing of dozens of Papuan students, who were also racially abused. A firestorm of protests broke across Papua and other parts of the Southeast. As protests and arrests in Indonesia’s second-biggest city Surabaya. Koman could face six years in jail if convicted.

“These charges are clearly intended to deter others from speaking out against human rights violations related to Papua,” Amnesty International said. Dozens have been arrested for taking part in protests and the government banned demonstrations that could lead to what it called “anarchist acts”. Indonesia has also said it is restricting foreign travel to Papua after four Australians were deported this week for taking part in demonstrations. There have been conflicting reports about casualties.

Officially, five civilians and a soldier have been killed, while 15 local people and two police have been injured since the unrest broke out. But activists say there have been more civilian deaths, amid unconfirmed reports that security forces gunned down six protesters in the remote district of Deiyai last week. The government has denied those claims. The internet blockade has made it difficult to independently verify information. — AFP
Aztec ballgame returns to Mexico City after 500 years

See Pages 22 & 23
Justin Bieber opens up on drug abuse, weight of fame

Justin Bieber is opening up about “massive ups and downs” he experienced as he went from beloved teenage heartthrob to “the most ridiculed, judged and hated person in the world.”

In a lengthy Instagram post over the holiday weekend, the 25-year-old pop phenom reflected on how child stardom triggered depression and a lack of humility that led to drug abuse and his becoming “resentful, disrespectful to women, and angry.” “I became distant to everyone who loved me, and I was hiding behind, a shell of a person that I had become,” he wrote. “Everyone did everything for me so I never even learned the fundamentals of responsibility,” Bieber said, saying he had no skills in the real world despite “millions of dollars and access to whatever I wanted.”

Bieber had abruptly cut short his 2017 tour, later saying he needed to work out “insecurities.” The move came as the superstar was becoming known more for his antics than his music, including accidentally striking a photographer with his car. The star faced legal trouble for incidents that included racing a vehicle through Miami and throwing eggs at a neighbor’s house. In 2017, Chicago police said he kept home in the country due to his “bad behavior,” saying he had a lot of growing up to do if he wanted to return.

In his introspective Instagram post, Bieber said his marriage to model Hailey Baldwin along with support from his friends and faith helped him get his life back on track. “Luckily god and believers and everyone who loves me,” he said. “All this to say even when The odds are against you keep fighting.” —AFP

Singer Jackie Wilson Posthumously Receives Hollywood Walk of Fame Star

Singer Jackie Wilson, who helped usher in the emergence of soul and rhythm-and-blues music in the 1960s, was posthumously honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame Wednesday. The family of the late American soul singer Jackie Wilson, who passed away at 49 in January 1984, pose for a photo as his star is unveiled during a ceremony in Hollywood, California. —AFP

Californian charged with selling Mac Miller fentanyl-laced pills

Nearly one year after Mac Miller’s death, authorities on Wednesday arrested a California resident charged with selling counterfeit fentanyl-laced pills to the rapper two days before his fatal overdose. The 26-year-old performer born Malcolm McCormick died on September 7, 2018 after ingesting a lethal combination of fentanyl, cocaine and alcohol, according to the Los Angeles medical examiner. The Department of Justice said Cameron James Pettit, 28, was to supply Miller with 30 milligram oxycodone pills along with cocaine and the sedative Xanax.

But according to the criminal complaint filed against Pettit, who is expected to appear in a Los Angeles federal court later Wednesday, the Hollywood Hills resident actually sold Miller counterfeit oxycodone pills containing fentanyl—a synthetic opioid at least 50 times more potent than heroin. In social media exchanges obtained by the US Drug and Enforcement Administration and included in the affidavit, Pettit told another Instagram user that “most likely I will die in jail” as news of Miller’s death began circulating.

If convicted, Pettit would face a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison, according to the DoJ. Miller, a Pittsburgh native and one-time partner of pop-star Ariana Grande, had released his latest album “Swimming” days before his death and was set to embark on a new tour. Fentanyl late last year became the deadliest drug in the United States, killing more than 18,000 Americans in 2016, the latest year for which full data is available, according to federal health officials. The opioid, which acts on the brain like morphine or heroin, was blamed in the high-profile deaths of Prince and rocker Tom Petty, both of whom died of overdoses. —AFP
Fashion influencer Ferragni steals show at Venice film festival

The longest queues at the Venice film festival have not been to see Hollywood stars like Brad Pitt or Scarlett Johansson. Instead, the most hysterical fans were those who thronged to see the Lido dreaming of a selfie with Chiara Ferragni, the fashion influencer who has become rich selling clothes and her starry you-can-have-it-all lifestyle on Instagram. While heartthrob Timothee Chalamet signed autographs for 20 minutes before his premiere of "The King", even kissing one lucky woman’s “Call Me By Your Name” tattoo, the crowds were nothing compared to those Ferragni drew.

Selfies from the disaster zone: How TV show changed Chernobyl tourism

The hit TV series “Chernobyl” has attracted a new generation of tourists to the nuclear disaster zone but guides say that many are more interested in taking selfies than learning about the accident. “They do not need information anymore, they just want to take a selfie,” said Yevgen Goncharenko, an official plant guide, at the site of the worst nuclear accident in history. Tourists now are often on the look out for locations featured in the acclaimed HBO drama and can be surprised to discover that certain sites were fictional, he told AFP.

The hard-hitting mini-series recreates the April 1986 disaster, when one of the reactors at the Soviet Union’s Chernobyl plant, in what is now Ukraine, exploded during testing. The blast spread radiation over a vast swath of Europe and a 30-kilometre (19-mile) exclusion zone remains in place around the plant, although a small part of it is open to a growing number of tourists. The abandoned site had already become a “dark tourism” destination in recent years, even before the eponymous TV show that has picked up 19 Emmy nominations.

But some Ukrainian travel agencies have adapted their tours to take in locations from the “Chernobyl” series and offer further special trips, such as kayaking in rivers around the exclusion zone. Oleksandr Syrota, head of the Chernobyl information Centre, said that certain tourist companies were offering up the disaster zone as “fast food”—a quick and easy travel experience. And the trend towards more tourists looks set to continue. In July, new Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a decree that aims to develop the site further as a tourist attraction.

Spains picks Almodovar’s ‘Pain and Glory’ for Oscars

Spain's film academy said yesterday it has picked veteran director Pedro Almodovar's latest drama "Pain and Glory" to represent the country at the Oscars. The film, a semi-autobiographical story featuring Penelope Cruz and Antonio Banderas about an ageing Spanish director plagued by physical and psychological frailty who revisits childhood memories, will compete with other global entries for a nomination as Best International Feature Film.

The five nominations for the category that up until now has been known as the best foreign-language film will be announced on January 13. The 92nd Academy Awards will be held on February 9, 2020. Almodovar, who won the Golden Lion lifetime achievement award at the Venice Film Festival last month, has already picked up two Oscars—for best foreign film with “All About My Mother” in 2000 and for best original screenplay with “Talk To Her” in 2003. The 69-year-old has directed 21 feature films, including “Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown”, “Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!” and “High Heels.” — AFP

Tourists take pictures at New Safe Confinement (NSC), new metal dome encasing the destroyed reactor, at Chernobyl plant, Ukraine.— AFP photos

Italian blogger Chiara Ferragni poses on the red carpet as she arrives for the screening of the film ‘Chiara Ferragni Unposted’ presented out of competition during the 76th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido.

In this picture taken on September 4, 2019, Italian blogger Chiara Ferragni and her husband Italian singer Federico Leonardo Lucicia, also known as Fedez, arrive at the screening of the film ‘Chiara Ferragni Unposted’.

Italian blogger Chiara Ferragni and her husband Italian singer Federico Leonardo Lucicia, also known as Fedez, arrive at the screening of the film 'Chiara Ferragni Unposted'.

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Tourists take pictures at New Safe Confinement (NSC), new metal dome encasing the destroyed reactor, at Chernobyl plant, Ukraine.— AFP photos

Friday Times
Friday, September 6, 2019
Frida

Mexican Beatriz Campos, player of a pre-Columbian ballgame called ‘Ulama’ - in Nahuatl indigenous language- performs the ‘Copal’ ceremony ahead of a match at the FARO Poniente cultural center in Mexico City.

Mexican Uriel Ordaz, player of a pre-Columbian ballgame called "Ulama" - in Nahuatl indigenous language- poses for a photograph hitting a "Ulamaloni" (solid rubber ball) with his hip.

A man plays a pre-Columbian ballgame called “Ulama”.

Dancers and players perform ahead of a pre-Columbian ballgame called ‘Ulama’.

Mexicans perform ahead of a pre-Columbian ballgame called “Ulama”. — AFP photos

Aztec ballgame returns to Mexico City after 500 years

Five centuries ago, newly arrived in what is now Mexico, the Spanish conquistadors banned an indigenous game involving a heavy ball, circular stone goals and human sacrifice. Now, a group of young players are bringing the game back to life for the first time in Mexico City—without the human sacrifice—at the site of an old garbage dump. The players proudly tie thick leather belts around their waists as they prepare to play “ulama,” as the game is known in the Nahuatl language: a mixture of sport, ritual and ceremony whose promoters are now using it to help at-risk youth in a downtrodden neighborhood on the Mexican capital’s north side.

Pre-Columbian ballgames dating back thousands of years were once played across a broad swath of the Americas by civilizations including the Mayas, Incas and Aztecs, and they have been revived elsewhere in Mexico and the region in modern times. But this is the first time in half a millennium that there has been a place in Mexico City, once the capital of the Aztec empire, to play the game known in Spanish as “juego de pelota.”

“The game had been forgotten,” says Emmanuel Kakalotl, who coaches players at the cultural center where the new ulama court was built. “It was toppled 500 years ago, but now we’re raising it up again,” he told AFP. Wearing their traditional belts and loincloths, his players hit the nearly four-kilogram (nine-pound) rubber ball with their hips, trying to send it through a vertical stone ring six meters (20 feet) high. The game is played by teams of one to seven players. Centuries ago, they were all men. But here, the game is open to women, too. “We’re women—warriors at heart, because it isn’t easy. Not just anyone can play this sport. It takes a lot of practice, and your body takes a beating,” says Beatriz Campos, 25.
Life and death

In pre-conquest Mexico, ulama was played in various contexts, including fertility rituals and wars. The court was a highly symbolic realm, representing the duality of the universe. But the outcome was very real for the players, who risked being sacrificed, usually by decapitation. The tradition varied over the centuries, researchers say: sometimes, it was the winners who were sacrificed, which was considered an honor. At other points, it was the losers.

“The game and its religious connotations changed over time. First-hand accounts from the post-classical period (900 to 1521) suggest that by that stage, it was the loser who was sacrificed,” says Annick Daneels, an expert on pre-Columbian ballgames at Mexico’s largest university, UNAM. The ritual died out soon after the Catholic conquistadors arrived, in 1519.

“Players take the game very seriously. No alcohol or smoking is allowed at the court. For some, ulama is an escape from drug addiction or a history of crime. “There are some basic fundamentals in the indigenous worldview: the unity of our physical, intellectual, emotional and energetic beings. A lot of times, when people lose their way, it’s because they don’t have that unity. We help find it again,” says Lia Membrillo, coordinator at the cultural center, which is operated by the city government. Giovanni Navarro, 30, takes issue with the idea that he and his fellow players are “rescuing” ulama. “Actually, the game is rescuing us,” he says. — AFP
Peter Lindbergh, revolutionary fashion photographer, dies aged 74

Peter Lindbergh, the German photographer credited with launching the careers of supermodels such as Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford and Linda Evangelista, has died aged 74, his family told AFP Wednesday. Lindbergh's stark black-and-white images of models and stars staring straight at the camera, which played with light and shadow, helped overturn glossy standards of beauty and fashion in the 1980s and 1990s.

Lindbergh was born in Lissa in western Poland in 1944. When he was a few months old his family fled the advance of Russian troops to southern Germany. He grew up in the steel town of Duisburg, which he recalled as “the worst industrial, depressive part of Germany”, only discovering the art world when he later moved to Berlin. He shot the first ad campaign for Volkswagen Golf and also worked with Stern magazine-renowned for its photography—before moving to Paris in the late 1970s. It was his 1988 photo of a group of young women in white shirts and tousled hair on a beach in Malibu—a far cry from the big make-up, big-hair studio shoots of the day—that helped define his stark, cinematic style.

The new faces included Evangelista, Christy Turlington and Tatjana Patitz, all of whom would go on to become stars of the international catwalks. “He had a way of turning your imperfections into something unique and beautiful... and his images will always be timeless,” Crawford wrote on her Instagram account. “Caring, kind, and of course hugely talented. We shall miss him,” fellow fashion photographer Mario Testino wrote on Instagram.

‘No beauty without truth’
The Vogue editor at the time, who commissioned the shoot, was unhappy with the clean, natural look and tossed the picture aside. But it was unearthed by Anna Wintour, who took over the magazine’s helm a few months later and promptly hired Lindbergh for her first cover shoot. Lindbergh also worked with Vanity Fair, Harper’s Bazaar and The New Yorker magazine.

His aversion to touching up photographs to hide imperfections was legendary. “There is no beauty without truth. All this fake making up of a person into something that is not them cannot be beautiful. It is just ridiculous,” he said in November 2016 when launching the 2017 Pirelli calendar.

For that feminist-friendly edition of a calendar long synonymous with languorous nudes, he roped in veteran stars Helen Mirren and Charlotte Rampling-aged 71 and 70 — as “a cry against the terror of perfection and youth”. Lindbergh had most recently worked on the September “Forces for Change” edition of Vogue UK, guest edited by Meghan Markle, now the Duchess of Sussex.

It included his shots of New Zealand Premier Jacinda Ardern and the teenage Swedish activist Greta Thunberg: “There is no other photographer she considered to bring this meaningful project to life,” according to a post on the duchess’s royal Instagram account. — AFP
Crowds of children bustle around chessboards in Nigeria’s Lagos, figuring out their next moves as part of a project aimed at bringing hope in one of the city’s impoverished slums. Dozens of matches are played simultaneously as participants as young as three master a game often considered out of reach for the masses in Africa’s most populous country. “Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose,” 24-year-old teacher Tunde Onakoya tells his young charges after getting their attention. “But it’s how you respond that makes you a champion. Don’t get down when you lose, don’t feel like you can’t do it, just concentrate and do your best.”

Seasoned player Onakoya started the Chess in Slums project last September in the sprawling neighborhood of Ikorodu, a place where residents often feel cut off from the bustling business of the vibrant megacity around it. The goal of the club is to provide a space to play and learn the game for the young inhabitants of the slum, many of whom are not in school and work to support their families. Held beneath a makeshift tent in the courtyard of a garage in Ikorodu instead of attending school. He had to earn money for his family after his mother’s leg was mangled in an accident as she picked scrap at a local refuse site to sell on for a meagre profit. In February, Ninilowo joined the club and is now its best player.

Last year, he started the club in Ikorodu specifically to reach disadvantaged children. “Ikorodu is the kind of place where there’s a lot of troubles and poverty. It is a tough place to get to, there’s a lot of troubles and poverty. It is a tough place to get to, there’s a lot of troubles and poverty. It is a tough place to get to,” he says. “I felt it would be powerful to help children here because many of them are really talented. If they could master a game that people wouldn’t expect them to even know, it could really show them their potential and give them confidence.”

School sponsorship
The club already boasts several success stories. Ten-year-old Odunayo Ohukoya joined Chess in Slums in January. Four months later, she came first in the national chess championship for her age group. For Jamiu Ninilowo, 14, taking part has also been transformative. The skinny boy worked as a mechanic fixing cars at a local bar, in less than a year the program has already drawn an enthusiastic following. As elderly men sip beer and watch football nearby, a dozen volunteers divide the pupils into groups.

While some turn their figures into battling action heroes, most are focused and intent on winning. The youngest children sing rhymes about chess to help them master the rules, as the older ones settle down into intense games. They use mobile phone apps to time their moves and record the matches in notepads to review their mistakes and successes later. “I want to be a Grandmaster,” one of the children tells AFP, laughing.

‘Food for your brain’
Chess—a board game famous for its reliance on strategy—has a tiny but avid following in Nigeria. The West African nation ranks 88th out of 186 countries, according to the FIDE World Chess Federation’s rating of top players across the globe, but still does not have any Grandmasters. Other board games are more popular. Nigeria is a superpower in Scrabble, winning multiple championships and boasting 29 of the top 100 players in the world, more than any other country. Onakoya says that chess has lagged behind in part due to an image problem.

“There’s this perception of it as being a really difficult game, not as accessible, like for people of a different class,” he says. Onakoya took chess in primary school and works with private schools as a consultant to add it to their curricula. “I believe in the game because it helps your cognition, your creativity, your focus. It’s like food for your brain,” he said.

Last year, he started the club in Ikorodu specifically to reach disadvantaged children. “Ikorodu is the kind of place where there’s a lot of troubles and poverty. It is a tough place to get to, if you tell someone to come to Ikorodu they will laugh,” he says. “I felt it would be powerful to help children here because many of them are really talented. If they could master a game that people wouldn’t expect them to even know, it could really show them their potential and give them confidence.”

After he won a tournament in April, an impressed donor partnered with Chess in Slums to pay for his secondary education. “Chess is helping me to be a mechanical engineer by sending me to school,” he tells AFP, proudly wearing the medal he won.

The attention that the project has generated has helped shine a spotlight on more of these marginalized children. Videos of the budding chess masters shared on Instagram also showcase some of their other talents that have often been overlooked in the struggle to survive. One 11-year-old boy even got a mentorship from a leading Nigerian architect after he was seen building models out of cardboard. “At first it was about teaching the kids a game that can impact the way they think and boost their confidence, but actually it’s become a gateway to other opportunities,” says Onakoya. “It is helping us show them that their lives can go far beyond Ikorodu.”— AFP
K-Pop and Kimchi: Tokyo’s ‘Little Seoul’ shrugs off spat

TOKYO: In the “little Seoul” area of Tokyo, Japanese shoppers flock to get their fix of K-pop and Korean face cream, seemingly shrugging off a deep freeze in Japan-South Korean ties. Visitors to Shin-Okubo could be forgiven for thinking they had stumbled into a district in Seoul, with rows of restaurants serving kimchi and music shops selling the latest K-pop hits from BTS or Wanna One.

And in contrast to South Korea where anger over a deterioration in bilateral ties has sparked consumer boycotts of Japanese goods, it seems it takes more than a political spat to put off avid fans of Korean products. “I love everything, K-pop, the food, the clothes. I would also like the two countries to make up,” said Anna Kaneko, a 19-year-old student making one of her regular trips to Shin-Okubo with a friend.

The latest row is deeply rooted in the bloody history between the two, particularly Tokyo’s occupation of the peninsula as a colony, during which hundreds of thousands were forced to come to Japan as labor and women forced into brothels as wartime sex slaves. Koreans remaining in Japan after Tokyo’s defeat in World War II suffered discrimination and hardship and several exist to this day in a grey zone in terms of citizenship.

The diplomatic friction has culminated in tit-for-tat trade restrictions and the scrapping of a military information-sharing pact between the two, alarming the United States which has security treaties with both. Bae Cheo-leun, who runs an organization bringing together South Koreans in Japan, admitted that a few years ago “hate speech” against Koreans could be heard in the streets around Shin-Okubo but this has not been the case during the most recent row.

“There was a law brought in to prevent it which has proved effective, even though there is no real punishment,” Bae told AFP. “The young Japanese K-pop fans who come to this district have a deep love for South Korean culture,” added Bae, who accuses politicians on both sides of whipping up “nationalist sentiment.”

NO Japan protests
Kim Heun-hee, a Korean teacher who also runs a cultural cafe in Shin-Okubo, pointed to a difference in attitude between South Koreans living in Japan and those based in their homeland. “The feeling in South Korea is very severe against Japan now, so some people think it must be dangerous for South Koreans to be in Japan,” said Kim. “On the other hand, Japanese people in Shin-Okubo don’t want to talk about South Korea so much. Japanese people don’t have much interest in politics but many people also seem to be reluctant to respond heatedly to the political difficulties.”

Many South Koreans have taken up a “NO Japan” boycott campaign of Japanese products, ranging from beer, clothes and cosmetics to cigarettes, but there has been little apparent retaliation from consumers in the other direction.

South Korean culture has spread globally in recent years, led by the huge success of K-pop stars such as Psy whose 2012 hit “Gangnam Style” became the first video to top one billion views on YouTube and BTS, which finally topped charts in the US and Britain earlier this year.

A particular craze among young Japanese women is for Korean cosmetics such as exfoliating creams, anti-acne masks or stick-on false nails.

But while there seems to be little public anger in Japan at South Korea, there is also scant expectation that the situation will improve any time soon. South Korean journalist Park Jin-hwan said that “tensions including historical issues and economic issues between the two countries will remain for a long time. I think Japan and South Korea are now entering a period like the Cold War.”

So long as both sides have contrasting interpretations of the 1965 peace treaty that normalized diplomatic relations between the pair, political tensions will endure, added Park. Bae said ties between Seoul and Tokyo were “the worst since World War II” but sees hope for the future on the streets of Shin-Okubo. “Today I got off at Shin-Okubo station and I saw the town so busy with young people enjoying South Korean food and culture. These young people accept good as well as bad things about South Korea,” Bae said. “I have high hopes that people like them will respect culture no matter how sour the political situation gets.”—AFP

New York Fashion Week

Designer Chen Zhi of I-am-chen walks the runway at TMall China Cool: I-Am-Chen, Songta September 2019 during New York Fashion Week: The Shows at Gallery II at Spring Studios in New York City. —AFP photos
Bolivia’s fires destroy ‘heritage’ rock art sites

LA PAZ: Wildfires that have raged across forests and grassland in eastern Bolivia for weeks have destroyed rare rock art sites, archeologists announced Tuesday. “We believe that the damage is big and wide in terms of our heritage of rock art,” said Danilo Drakic, chief archeologist in the eastern Santa Cruz department. Santa Cruz is home to numerous rock art sites, including paintings and engravings spanning several millennia, experts say.

Drakic said fires that have raged since May had caused significant damage to rock art sites near the eastern town of Robore. The sites contain engravings dating from 1,500 BC. “A dark layer of soot has covered all the paintings,” said Drakic, citing an initial appraisal of the damage. Heat from the fires “has caused stones to break, even to collapse.” He said a full assessment of the damage could only be made once the fires had been quenched.

Authorities declared the town, some 1,300 kilometers east of the capital La Paz, a “departmental capital of rock art” in May 2017. Bolivia’s culture ministry said the fires were endangering the Jesuit Missions of the Chiquitos, six settlements built by the Catholic religious order in the 17th and 18th centuries that were declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Culture and Tourism Minister Wilma Alanoca said the Jesuit sites closest to the fires “have not yet been affected” but are in danger.

“There is no doubt that there is an impact on the intangible heritage of the area, which will have to be evaluated once all heat sources are eradicated, which is a priority for the central government,” state media quoted Alanoca as saying. Fires have so far destroyed 1.2 million hectares of forest and grasslands in Bolivia this year, the government said last week, though environmentalists claim the true figure is much greater.—AFP
The world’s largest street art mural is unveiled in Paris
French creatives Ella & Pitr have unveiled the world’s largest mural in Paris, but it may prove tricky to find. Created on the top of a building, the sprawling 25,000-square-metre mural can only be seen from above. It depicts the figure of an elderly grandmother pointing towards a six-lane highway that passes above the building and cuts through the artwork, while above her head on a separate site a red and white plastic bag floats away in the breeze. The mural has been done in an eye-catching cartoon style and incorporates France’s colors - red, white and blue.

“We were inspired by our grandmother Sylvette, who was always concerned with the small things in life. Compared to the artwork, the cars are very small and the people are like ants. The figure is looking at the road, probably thinking that there are a lot of people running everywhere. Things are going too fast for her,” Ella & Pitr told Lonely Planet. The process took eight days to complete, with the artists working 12-hour days alongside friends and volunteers. First they drew the main lines using magnetic stones, before painting in the colors in blocks.

“We don’t really care about any type of record, we just love to play. If you give us a small piece of paper, we’ll paint it. If you give us a huge roof, we’ll paint it too. After a gigantic project like that, we usually feel as if we have given birth - exhausted but happy,” Ella & Pitr said. The pair previously painted a mural on the 47-metre-high facade of Le Barrage du Piney dam near the small village of La Valla en Gier, close to St-Etienne.

—www.lonelyplanet.com
If you are a fan of wildlife travel, you may be interested in traveling to countries that have been deemed to be the best destinations for wildlife enthusiasts. The Global Wildlife Travel Index for 2019 ranked every country on its wildlife travel offering, analyzing a variety of factors including wildlife biodiversity, prevalence of national parks, conservation efforts and protected natural areas. It has been expanded to include more detailed insights this year, including an increased focus around environmental sustainability, which is ever important to the increasingly eco-conscious traveler.

True Luxury Travel analyzed various factors to determine the 2019 report, which found Finland to be the best destination in the world for wildlife travel. This is due to its high levels of environmental sustainability, its unique and varied diversity of species, beautiful natural landscapes and conservation efforts. The country has also continued to see a rapid increase in visitor levels over the last year. It came top thanks to its 39 national parks and the fact that it has forest areas that cover over 73.1 percent of its land.

When it came to environmental sustainability, the report looked at the risk posed to groups of species across every country. Using the Red List Index, it assessed the extinction risk of different species based on various genuine threats. Sweden ranked second in the overall report, came in top position in this category. According to the newly-released report, the rest of the top ten best countries for wildlife travel were 3. Brazil 4. Canada 5. US 6. Norway 7. Spain. 8. Germany 9. Poland and 10. Slovenia.

— www.lonelyplanet.com

Finland named best country to visit for wildlife travel
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You enjoy working hard and being organized and you exercise skill and discipline in anything that affects your career. This is a perfect com- bination for executive skills. Your disappointments come when people do not show respect for each other. Continue to keep your own personal stan- dards—one of your duties in life is to teach through example. You will have many students—some you are not aware of at just now. There is a tempta- tion to spend or give away money today. It is important for people to feel that they can support yourself and the values you are helping in guiding them toward a so- phisticated, clear mind. The planetary energies show a bit of anxiety on your part this evening but a little dinner and a little music puts all that anxiety to rest.

**Libra** (September 23-October 22)

Any emotional problem today deserves a bit of thought. Let a day or so pass, if possible, and then return to the problem. A work problem that in- volves mail, sales, shifting time, cutting back or building up the stock, trans- porting, etc. Should have your full attention. Do not make assumptions—get all the facts. You could be helping another co-worker as well as yourself. This af- ternoon you will find a common ground between you and a customer—the result is a positive. You will find yourself more concerned with maintaining and strengthening your position, rather than pushing outward. This can be a very rewarding time. You are very close to financial success—you may find opportunities for wise investments later today.

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**Health & Science**

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**Gastroenterology**

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- Dr. Ahmad Al Sabti: Consultant Gastroenterologist
- Dr. Nasir Al Khateeb: Consultant of Angiology & Gastroenterology

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Thiru Saravanan (Hindu), Son of Thiru Jayaraman, born on 28th April 1977 (native district: Thanjavur) residing at No. 347, Mariyamman Kovil Street, Murukkudi, Kumbakonam Taluk, Thanjavur - 612202, has converted to Islam with the name of AHAMED RASHEED on 17th June 2015. (C 5587)

I, Alvi Mirahussain Abdullatif, holding Indian Passport No. 22816291, S/o Abdullatif Dawood Alvi, PR/O 28/10, FLR-2, Ashok Niwas, Navroji RD-5, Mumbai-400009. Presently residing in Kuwait, hereby declare that henceforth my name is read as Mirahussain, Surname: Alvi, Father Name: Abdullatif (C 5588)

I, JOSEPH MORAIS, holder of Indian Passport No. M6712986 having permanent address at Benclean Vaddo, Cuncolim, Salset - Goa, at present residing in Kuwait, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as GIVEN NAME: JOSEPH and SURNAME: MORAIS. (C 5589) 5-9-2019
Recession risks for Germany rises in Q3

Industrial giant Thyssenkrupp relinquishes blue-chip status

BERLIN: Weaker demand from abroad drove a bigger-than-expected drop in German industrial orders in July, suggesting that struggling manufacturers could tip Europe’s biggest economy into a recession in the third quarter. Germany’s export-reliant economy is suffering from slower global growth and business uncertainty caused by US President Donald Trump’s “America First” trade policies and Britain’s planned, but delayed, exit from the European Union. Contracts for “Made in Germany” goods fell 2.7 percent from the previous month in July, data showed yesterday, driven by a big drop in bookings from non-euro zone countries, the economy ministry said. That undershot a Reuters consensus forecast for a 1.5 percent drop.

“The misery in manufacturing continues. The decline in new orders significantly increases the risk of a recession for the German economy,” VP Bank analyst Thomas Gitzel said. Germany’s gross domestic product contracted by 0.1 percent quarter-on-quarter in the second quarter on weaker exports, with the decrease in foreign sales mainly driven by Britain and below average demand from China.

“The danger is great that negative growth will also be recorded in the third quarter,” Gitzel added. The economy ministry said new orders in manufacturing had a weak start to the third quarter and that the outlook for the sector was also looking grim.

“In light of still unresolved international trade conflicts and muted business expectations in manufacturing, there are still no signs of a fundamental improvement in the industrial sector in the coming months,” the ministry added. Orders from non-euro zone countries plunged nearly 7 percent on the month while demand from other euro zone countries and domestic bookings rose slightly, the data showed. Without the distorting effects of bulk orders, industrial orders rose 0.5 percent on the month in July, the ministry added. The overall reading for June was revised up to an increase of 2.7 from a previously reported 2.5 percent increase.

Little light

The VDMA business association said engineering orders in July fell by 3 percent in real terms from the previous year, driven by weaker demand from both domestic and foreign clients. “The business and export outlook is still gloomy for the second half of the year given the economic and political risks,” VDMA chief economist Ralph Wuechers said. Germany’s DIHK business association said that companies around the globe were reluctant to invest due to slowing world trade and growing business uncertainty.

“So there is little light on the horizon for German industry which is characterized by its large share of capital goods producers,” DIHK economist Kevin Heidenreich said.

Carsten Brzeski from ING noted that the downward trend in manufacturing was not only driven by weaker foreign demand and trade conflicts.

Meanwhile, struggling German industrial conglomerate Thyssenkrupp is set for ejection from the DAX index of 30 leading shares on the Frankfurt stock exchange, operator Deutsche Borse said late Wednesday. The historic Essen-based giant’s shoes will be filled from September 23 by MTU Aero Engines, which makes components for aircraft motors. Thyssen was a DAX member from the index’s creation in 1987, becoming even weightier after a merger with rival Krupp in 1999. But its shares have plummeted more than 60 percent since 2018, with the European Commission’s decision to block its merger with India’s Tata in June worsening the slide.

“There’s no question we’re disappointed to leave the DAX,” chief executive Guido Kerkhoff said in a statement to AFP.

“We’re now looking to the future, it’s important to reconfigure the business in a more profitable way to win back investors’ trust,” Metzler bank analyst Pascal Spano judged that Thyssenkrupp “is currently only a shadow of its former self”.

One sign of that is the fact that its elevators division, one of its slew of products from submarines to construction materials, is valued more highly than the business as a whole, at 14 billion euros ($15.4 billion). While Thyssenkrupp has dropped plans to split in two, it remains set on listing separately the highly profitable lifts unit. For MTU, the switch comes after a meteoric rise, multiplying its market value by 20 since the 2008-09 financial crisis. — Agencies
Dubai house prices will decline sharply in 2019, 2020: Experts

Economic slowdown and oversupply pose big risks to outlook

BENGALURU: Dubai house prices will decline sharply this year and next, according to property market experts in a Reuters poll, who said a slowdown in the economy and an oversupply of housing units are big downside risks to their already weak outlook.

Dubai, with a diversified trade and tourism economy and one of the seven territories of the United Arab Emirates, has faced a sharp slowdown in its real estate market for most of this decade, barring a pick up for a brief period more than five years ago. That downward trend is likely to continue in Dubai housing market activity, one of the primary contributors to its gross domestic product.

The Aug. 14-Sept. 3 Reuters poll of market analysts at 11 investment firms and research institutions showed house prices in Dubai would fall 10 percent this year and 5 percent next. They are forecast to decline 3.3 percent in 2021.

Those views also driven by worries the US-China trade war is hurting global growth, and lines up with similar Reuters polls which showed housing market activity in the United States, Britain, Canada and India is struggling. Last year, Dubai’s economy grew just 1.94 percent, the slowest since the 2009 financial crisis, hurt by a rough patch amid a downturn in its real estate market.

Dubai, whose economy is focused on tourism and international business services, is now forecast to grow 3.8 percent in 2020 and 2.8 percent in 2021, according to the government but much will depend on external factors.

Market correction
While a recently announced government stimulus package could spur a recovery in the real estate market, the chances are high an oversupply of housing units would hurt prices and demand. “At the moment, there is a glut of supply coming into the market, which has been the case over the past couple of years,” said Haider Tuaima, head of real estate research at ValuStrat.

“There have been record numbers of off-plan projects since 2017 that were met by very successful sales campaigns promising very attractive payment plans for investors that run post-handover for a number of years, which has impacted the capital values of existing properties in Dubai,” he added.

But when asked what would boost the weakening property market, a majority of analysts in the poll said any introduction of affordable homes would provide the biggest upside. Other options available were strong economic performance, visa reforms and the upcoming 2020 World Expo. “Overall, price declines have been healthy for Dubai as prices were inflated,” said Lynnette Ahad, director of research and data for the Propertyfinder group.

“The new supply coming in will continue to put pressure on prices and we will see declines in the double digits, however this will make housing more affordable.” Property prices have contracted by 25-35 percent since a mid-2014 peak and there will be no respite until 2022 at least, the poll showed. Yet when asked on a scale of one to 10, where one is extremely cheap and 10 extremely expensive, what best describes the level of Dubai house prices, the median was seven which is leaning towards the expensive side. “The Dubai realty market is witnessing a market correction as property prices are adjusting to the increased supply,” said Shajai Jacob, CEO of Middle East business at ANAROCK Property Consultants. “This benefits consumers who may have previously aspired to own a property but were priced out.” — Reuters

Samsung to launch foldable smartphone after major delay

SEOUL: Tech giant Samsung has said it will launch its hotly anticipated first foldable smartphone today, months after faulty screens forced an embarrassing delay of its release.

The world’s largest smartphone maker spent nearly eight years developing the Galaxy Fold, but had to hold its launch in April this year amid a downturn in its real estate market. Samsung has a history of humiliating setbacks with major products, most notably a exploding batteries, which hammered its reputation.

The firm has also been racing to bring similar devices to market. Samsung has a history of humiliating setbacks with major products, most notably a exploding batteries, which hammered its reputation.

The Galaxy Fold has been widely promoted as the “world’s first foldable smartphone during its product launch in San Francisco, California on February 20, 2019.” — AFP

US private payrolls accelerate; weekly jobless claims rise

WASHINGTON: US private employers boosted hiring in August, suggesting the economy continued to grow at a moderate pace despite trade tensions which have stoked financial market fears of a recession.

Labor market resilience was underscored by other data yesterday showing a slight increase last week in the number of Americans filing applications for unemployment benefits.

The year-long trade war between the United States and China is weighing on business investment and manufacturing, threatening the longest economic expansion in history. That is expected to prompt the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates again this month. The US central bank lowered borrowing costs in July, citing growing risks to the economy from the trade fight and slowing global growth.

Labor market strength is supporting the economy, now in its 11th year of expansion, through strong consumer spending. “Extreme uncertainty over trade issues has soured the sentiment of some in the business community, but companies continue to hold on tight to the workers they have and are also hiring new workers at a fast clip,” said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFG in New York.

“This isn’t what a recession is supposed to look like.” The ADP National Employment Report showed private payrolls increased by 189,000 jobs in August after rising by 142,000 in July. — Reuters
Zain announces expanded cloud offerings with Oracle FastConnect

Innovative platform connects customers and different cloud service providers

KUWAIT: Zain Group, the leading mobile telecommunications innovator in eight markets across the Middle East and North Africa, and Gold level member of Oracle PartnerNetwork (OPN), yesterday announced it will offer dedicated private access to Oracle Cloud through Oracle Cloud Infrastructure FastConnect, becoming one of the first mobile operators in the region to receive this accreditation.

The elevation of Zain to becoming a gold level member with Oracle means the telco can now connect customers directly with Oracle Cloud Infrastructure including to applications such as compute, storage and content delivery, databases and other services. The collaboration bolsters Zain’s own Cloud-based activities that allow customers to connect their office/data centers to Oracle’s Cloud over Zain’s international MPLS network with dedicated bandwidth options ranging from 10Mbps up to 10Gbps.

Zain Cloud Connect is an innovative platform that connects customers and different cloud service providers (CSP) in a simple and cost-effective way. It may enable customers to build flexible and scalable hybrid cloud-based solutions, providing customers with the most convenient way to connect to different CSPs.

Commenting on the Oracle FastConnect relationship, Henri Kassab, Zain Group’s Managing Director, International, Wholesale & Roaming Solutions, said: “We have identified the government and enterprise market as key strategic customers and we are dedicated to providing them with the latest and most robust tools and solutions for them to go about their businesses successfully.”

Kassab continued, “Zain has been a pioneering company since inception and so we are proud to introduce another first to the communications sector in the MENA region through the availability of Oracle FastConnect. We believe strongly that innovation is driven by the delivery of cutting-edge solutions, and Zain continues to seek out partnerships with market-leading technology providers to achieve this goal.”

“Customers require seamless connectivity from their data centers and networks to Oracle Cloud for their most demanding workloads and applications,” said Vinay Kumar, vice president of product management, Oracle Cloud Infrastructure. “With the FastConnect service, customers can provision the dedicated and private connections they need today and easily scale with their growing business demands.”

Oracle Cloud Infrastructure FastConnect enables enterprise cloud connectivity to Oracle Cloud from trusted enterprise data centers. Connecting directly to the Oracle Cloud through Oracle FastConnect may enable a fast, private connection to the industry’s broadest and most integrated cloud platform, with a complete range of services across Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) and Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS).

Today, Oracle is the only company delivering a complete and integrated set of cloud services and building intelligence into every layer of the cloud. With Oracle Cloud Infrastructure, customers benefit from best-in-class security, consistent high performance, simple predictable pricing, and the tools and expertise needed to bring enterprise workloads to cloud quickly and efficiently.

ABK announces winners of salary transfer campaign

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the two winners of the sixth “Transfer your Salary and Find Reasons to Smile” monthly draw campaign, held on the 22nd August under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Interior. The lucky winners were Fajer Maitham Mohammad Bebbehani and Abdulrahman Hussain M Abdallah, who will each receive the equivalent of their monthly salaries.

The next draw for this campaign takes place on 19 September 2019, with the last draw taking place on 19th December 2019. Customers must have their salaries transferred to the bank at least one month prior to the draw date to enter, and the draw is open to both Kuwaiti and expatriate customers who hold Elite, Prestige or Al-Raed Salary Transfer Accounts.

In addition to the draw, the “Transfer your Salary and Find Reasons to Smile” campaign offers ABK salary account holders a range of exceptional rewards. Kuwaiti salary account holders receive cash gifts of up to KD 1,000 provided they transfer a salary equivalent to or higher than KD 500. Moreover, Kuwaiti customers are eligible for an interest-free loan of up to KD 10,000 and expatriates up to KD 5,000. These loans are subject to ABK’s terms and conditions, as well as the Central Bank of Kuwait’s regulations and policies.

Indonesia scrambles to toss millions of eggs to boost chicken prices

JAKARTA: Cheap chicken may be good for consumers, but it has dug its claws into the poultry industry. — Reuters

JAKARTA: Indonesia is set to get cracking on a plan to destroy millions of eggs in a bid to prop up slumping chicken prices, calling on poultry breeders to cut supply by either destroying them or giving them away.

“The only way we can do something about it is by discarding 10 million... eggs,” said I Ketut Diarmita, director general of Livestock and Animal Health Services. Officials hope reducing the number of eggs will cut chicken supplies and boost market prices.

Cheap chicken may be good for consumers, but it has dug its claws into the poultry industry. Prices have tanked 25 percent this year to 30,050 rupiah ($2.10) per kilogram, the lowest in three years, according to official figures. Dozens of firms are expected to take part in destroying the eggs, according to the Indonesia Poultry Breeding Association. — AFP
France's energy transition is set to be disrupted by a fierce opposition in Brandenburg, following state elections. Berlin: Wind power is a key pillar of Germany’s ambitious renewables transition plan, but the sector is in crisis and struggling to deliver on its goals. After years of breakneck growth in capacity and uptake that has seen wind power delivering a fifth of Germany’s total energy production, vocal “not-in-my-backyard” opposition by residents and a lack of government support have seen investments shrink in the sector.

In the months following the 2016 amendment to the law, which expanded the feed-in tariff scheme to cover onshore wind power plants, more than 600 citizen initiatives have sprung up against the giant installations, with a district called Saale-Orla even offering 2,000 euros to anyone taking action to get expert opinions opposing wind farms. The far-right AfD party, branding itself as the climate-sceptic outfit, had seized on the topic during state elections in Brandenburg, saying it stands by residents steamrollered by wind energy corporations.

Against the backdrop of bitter division, expansion in Germany’s wind power production capacity plunged in 2018 to half that in 2017 as companies struggled to obtain permission to build. And only a few dozen new turbines were installed since the beginning of this year, down 82 percent from a year ago, said Germany’s Wind Energy Association (BWE). And repeatedly every quarter, official figures for electricity production have returned undersubscribed—a “worrying” trend, said the Federal Network Agency. “With regard to the expansion of onshore wind power, Germany has moved from the fast lane to the breakdown lane,” said Achim Derer, president of the German Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK). For BWE president Hermann Albers, the implication is clear—“this development calls into question the success of Germany’s energy transition.”

Ending subsidies
Market players said the tipping point came in 2016 when Germany amended its Renewable Energy Act. After almost two decades of providing subsidies to prop up the nascent sector, Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government decided that the industry was now sufficiently mature and began withdrawing support. With obtaining building permits often taking years thanks to stubborn local opposition, projects took even longer to recoup costs, also shifting the calculation by firms whether to invest.

In the months following the 2016 amendment, the wind power sector shed 26,000 jobs in Germany, more than in the dwindling coal industry, according to figures provided by the Bundestag, Germany’s lower parliament. “We have sounded the alarm, but why the German government has chosen to go down this path remains a mystery to this day,” said BWE head Albers, who feels that Berlin had put too much “emphasis on costs” in the transition to green energy.

‘Tip of the iceberg’
But the crisis in the sector has now shot back up to the top of the political agenda as youths took on the climate emergency with their vocal Fridays for Future protests. In order to meet the government’s target of sourcing 65 percent of Germany’s energy from renewables by 2030, the proportion of wind power will have to grow from around 20 percent currently to replace coal, which still makes up close to a quarter of the mix. Ahead of a broader government announcement on September 20 on its climate strategy, Economy Minister Peter Altmaier (CDU) will host crisis talks on Thursday in Berlin with key players in the wind energy sector.

With 5,000 first generation wind turbines also up for renovation, the stakes are high. For some however, the political attention has come too late. “We’ve been asking for help for months. I don’t think the government understands that is is destroying an economic ecosystem that is a source of cutting-edge engineering and innovation, that has taken time to create and has made Germany famous,” Yves Rannou, head of the German wind turbine manufacturer Serenion, told AFP.

The company said last week that it is closing down, as its German revenues, which once represented 60 percent of its revenues, have shrunk to just 20 percent. “We are only the tip of the iceberg, the first to get down on our knees, but not the last,” Rannou warned. —AFP

Russia’s Novatek announces launch of huge Arctic gas project
VLADIVOSTOK: Russia’s Novatek yesterday announced the launch of a major liquefied natural gas project in the Arctic with Chinese, French and Japanese partners.

The privately owned company said that a “final investment decision” had been made on financing the $21 billion Arctic LNG 2 project with partners including France’s Total, CNPC and CNOOC of China, and a Japanese consortium. The announcement came during Russia’s Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, where President Vladimir Putin is hosting Asian leaders including Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Arctic LNG 2 will see the development of the Utrenneye field and the building of a natural gas liquefaction plant on the Gydan Peninsula in Russia’s Arctic.

The plant will have a capacity of 19.8 million metric tonnes and its first exports are expected in 2023. “Today we have taken another step forward in our goal to become one of the largest LNG producers in the world,” Novatek CEO Leonid Mikhelson said in a statement. Novatek became Russia’s largest independent natural gas producer following the launch two years ago of its first Arctic LNG plant in the Yamal Peninsula. Russia, already the world’s biggest gas exporter, is keen to develop its LNG potential in the Arctic, in particular for Asian markets. —AFP

Nissan CEO Saikawa admits receiving excess pay
TOPKYO: The head of crisis-hit Japanese automaker Nissan admitted yesterday he received more pay than he was entitled to but denied wrongdoing, as the firm’s former chief faces financial misconduct charges.

Nissan is already mired in scandal over the arrest and ouster of ex-boss Carlos Ghosn, who is accused of wrongdoings including misrepresenting his compensation.

And yesterday, current CEO Hiroto Saikawa acknowledged he had received pay to which he was not entitled. “I left the issue to someone else so I had thought it was dealt with in an appropriate manner,” he told reporters in Tokyo.

But he denied any wrongdoing and said he would return the excess payments. The admission came after local media reported an internal Nissan probe found that Saikawa and other executives received more equity-linked remuneration than they were entitled to. Contacted by AFP, the automaker said “findings from Nissan’s internal investigation are scheduled to be reported to the board of directors on September 9.”

“We have heard that share appreciation rights will also be part of this report,” it added, declining to comment further. The Nikkei business daily said Saikawa was suspected of improperly adding 47 million yen ($443,000) to his compensation by altering the terms of a bonus.

However, Nissan does not believe the overpayment was illegal, Kyodo News reported, citing unnamed sources. The overpayments were made in a scheme known as stock appreciation right, under which directors can receive a bonus if their company’s share price rises above a certain level in a set time period. Nissan is currently undergoing an overhaul intended to strengthen governance after the Ghosn scandal.

In June, Nissan shareholders voted in favour of various measures including the establishment of three new oversight committees responsible for the appointment of senior officials, pay issues and auditing. —AFP
Vietnam Airlines secures first license for direct US flights

Vietnam plans to nationalize civilian airports operator

HANOI: Vietnam Airlines has become the first carrier in the country to secure a coveted license to fly direct to the United States, according to the airline and a regulatory filing seen by AFP. The approval has for months been sought by Vietnamese carriers eager to exploit a fast-growing market for air travel among Vietnam’s booming middle class.

Domestic and regional air travel has mushroomed among Vietnamese travellers, and carriers are hoping the market will extend to US travel too. Vietnam Airlines has been licensed to fly from Hanoi and the southern business hub Ho Chi Minh City to Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Seattle and Dallas, according to a regulatory filing from the US Department of Transportation obtained by AFP.

The carrier will also be able to connect to Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto in Canada, it said. The terms, which came into effect on August 26, cover “air transportation of persons, property and mail” between the Vietnamese and North American cities. It was not immediately clear if the flights would be non-stop or would transit through Taipei, Osaka and Nagoya, which were listed as approved intermediate hubs in the filing.

The national carrier confirmed the approval yesterday, calling it “an important move by Vietnam Airlines in preparing its plan to fly to the US in the coming time”. It did not say when the first flight could take to the skies. The regulations were announced after the US Federal Aviation Administration in February awarded Vietnam a “category 1” rating, meaning airlines from the country can fly to the United States. Vietnam’s newest airline Bamboo Airways has also said it plans to fly to the US by the end of this year, with budget carrier VietJet expressing interest as well.

Vietnam’s aviation sector has soared in recent years, with passenger numbers jumping from 25 million in 2012 to 62 million last year. Tourist visits from the US have also climbed, jumping nearly 60 percent in the past five years, Aviation analyst Greg Waldron said a move into the US market is a big bet for Vietnam Airlines, which will face tough competition from established hub carriers in Taiwan, South Korea and China.

Visa issues could also create obstacles—both US and Vietnamese travellers require entry permits for travel—along with the steep costs required to run long-haul routes. “There are some serious competitive and practical restraints facing Vietnam Airlines,” said Waldron, Asia managing editor at Flightglobal. Last year Singapore Airlines launched the world’s longest direct flight with its route to Newark, New Jersey, topping out at 19 hours and 15,290 kilometres (9,500 miles).

Meanwhile, Vietnam is considering nationalising the country’s largest airline Bamboo Airways. The move is aimed at “ensuring the highest level of safety and defence conditions”, Dong said without elaborating further in a statement posted on the government website. The proposal comes as Vietnam has been seeking to speed up its privatization of state firms in recent years to improve their performance and to fill its coffers. The government said last month it would sell stakes in 93 state-owned enterprises, including the country’s largest bank by assets—Agribank, by the end of 2020.

US sees ‘modest’ growth, businesses show ‘near-term’ optimism: Fed

WASHINGTON: The US economy grew at an unspectacular pace in recent weeks, while businesses still took a rosy view of the near future despite the escalating US-China trade war, the Federal Reserve said Wednesday.

But Fed still drew a spotty portrait, pointing to an array of softening or deteriorating conditions just as concrete signs emerge that the trade conflict is weighing on growth. “Although concerns regarding tariffs and trade policy uncertainty continued, the majority of businesses remained optimistic about the near-term outlook,” the central bank said in nationwide survey of economic activity.

Though disagreements remain, policymakers are widely expected to cut interest rates again in two weeks to insulate the United States from the weakening global economy and mounting fears of economic damage wrought by the US-China trade war. The Fed cut rates last month for similar reasons,marking the first downshift for monetary policy in a decade.

The latest “beige book” survey, which gathers anecdotal reports from business people and other contacts in the Fed’s 12 districts, said growth had continued “at a modest pace.”

Sharp deterioration
The report may not have reflected all of last month’s sharp deterioration in the trade conflict with Beijing, as research concluded on August 23, just as Beijing and Washington announced fresh increases on hundreds of billions of dollars in two-way trade. According to the Fed, anecdotal reports say auto sales rose and tourism was “solid,” while bank lending and commercial real estate leasing both increased a little.

Elsewhere, however, things were less than stellar. Farms were beset by a trio of woes: had weather, low prices and uncertainties from America’s trade wars. Meanwhile, consumer spending—the sole strong point in the US economy—was “mixed” outside the auto sector, demand for transportation softened, home sales “remained constrained” and housing construction was flat. Across the nation, employers complained they had difficulty finding workers to fill open positions and faced “strong upward pressure” to offer higher pay to entry-level and low-skill workers. —AFP

France’s number 2 airline suspends some flights, sales

PARIS: France’s second-largest airline Aigle Azur, which went into receivership earlier this week, said yesterday it had halted flights to several destinations and was suspending ticket sales. In a brief statement on its website, the airline said that “we inform all our passengers from/to Sao Paulo, Bamako and Porto that all our flights are cancelled” and apologized to customers. It added in a separate statement that for the moment it had also halted the sale of tickets for all flights from September 10, the day following the deadline for submitting bids to acquire the airline.

Following years of losing millions of euros, Aigle Azur filed for bankruptcy on Monday and was placed into receivership. While flights have been suspended for the moment to destinations in Brazil, Mali and Portugal, the airline’s top market, Algeria, which accounts for a majority of its activity, is not affected.

However, the airline said that bankruptcy rules would force it to gradually suspend regular flights.

The largest shareholder in Aigle Azur, which has 1,150 employees, is the Chinese conglomerate HNA Group, which owns Hainan Airlines, with a 49-percent stake. David Neeleman, an American airline entrepreneur whose companies include JetBlue and TAP Air Portugal, owns 32 percent, and French businessman Gerard Houa owns 19 percent. —AFP
LOS ANGELES: Joc Pederson hit two more home runs Wednesday, and the Los Angeles Dodgers set a National League record for homers in a season during a 7-3 victory that gave them a three-game sweep over the visiting Colorado Rockies. The Rockies saw their losing streak reach a season-high nine games, during which they have allowed 82 runs. Pederson hit two home runs in a game for the second time in the series. He did not play Tuesday after crashing into the right field wall Monday and leaving the game after already hitting a pair of homers. He also hit a game-winning, pinch-hit homer in the 11th inning Sunday at Arizona. The Dodgers now have 250 home runs, eclipsing the 2000 Houston Astros, who previously held the NL record at 249. The As- tros moved to the American League in 2013.

YANKIES 4, RANGERS 1
Aaron Judge hit a two-run homer, and Gleyber Torres added a solo homer as New York beat visiting Texas. Judge became the fifth Yankee to reach 20 homers this year while Torres tied Gary Sanchez for the team lead with his 34th as New York won for the eighth time in 10 games. The Yankees also improved to 19-0-3 in their past 21 home games since dropping two of three April 12-14 to the Chicago White Sox. Rougned Odor homered in the ninth inning for Texas, which scored both runs of its final two games of the series.

GIANTS 9, CARDINALS 8
Kevin Pillar hit a two-run homer in the eighth inning to rally San Francisco to a victory at St. Louis. The Cardinals erased 4-0 and 7-4 deficits in the see-saw marathon, but the Giants persisted while pounding out 15 hits. Tyler Rogers (1-0), the fourth of six Giants pitchers, earned the victory. Closer Will Smith got the final four outs to earn his 31st save. Giants starter Madison Bumgarner allowed six runs in five-plus innings. Brandon Crawford hit a three-run homer for the Giants and Mike Yastrzemski hit a solo shot. Pillar also had an RBI single. Paul Goldschmidt had a double, a triple and four RBIs to pace the Cardinals.

RED SOX 8, TWINS 2
Mookie Betts slugged a pair of first-pitch home runs and had four hits and five RBIs to lead Boston past visiting Minnesota. Betts had his second four-hit game of the year and matched his season high for RBIs, as Boston won for the fifth time in its past seven games. Eduardo Rodriguez (17-5) earned the victory with seven shutout innings, allowing five hits and four walks and striking out eight. Eddie Rosario hit a two-run homer for the Twins, who lost for just the second time in their last 11 games.

INDIANS 8, WHITE SOX 6
Rookie Oscar Mercado had an RBI single among his three hits and made a diving catch with the bases loaded in the ninth inning as host Cleveland held on for a victory over Chicago. Franssu Royes belted a two-run homer and rookie Yu Chang ripped a two-run single for the Indians, who scored in six of the first seven innings to build an 8-2 lead. Jose Abreu launched a two-run homer in the eighth inning and Tim Anderson did the same in the ninth for the White Sox, who have lost eight of their past nine games.

ROYALS 8, TIGERS 4
Jorge Soler homered for the second con-secutive night, bashing his 40th of the sea-son, as host Kansas City defeated Detroit. The Royals are no longer the only team in the majors without a player ever to hit 40 home runs in a year. One night after break- ing the club’s single-season homer record, Soler caromed one off the Royals Hall of Fame beyond the left field wall. The exit ve-locity off his bat was 115 mph. Hunter Dozier and Alex Gordon each had three hits for Kansas City. Jakob Junis (9-12) allowed four runs on seven hits in seven-plus innings, and Ian Kennedy pitched a perfect ninth for his 26th save in 30 chances.

DIAMONDBACKS 4, PADRES 1
Ketel Marte’s grand slam broke a scoreless tie in the seventh inning, and Zac Gallen gave up only one hit in seven shutout innings as Ari-zona defeated San Diego in Phoenix. Marte has 30 homers, and he is hitting a major-league-best .386 with 13 homers and 38 RBIs since June 15. He also had two singles and leads the NL in hits (173) and multiple-hit games (55). Gallen (3-4) lost his no-batter when Manny Machado lined a hard single to right field with one out in the seventh inning. He struck out eight and walked one. — Reuters
Alpine skiing great Hirscher quits on top of the world

SALZBURG: Marcel Hirscher said on Wednesday he was no longer “ready to pay the price” after calling time on an illustrious alpine skiing career that saw him win a record eighth consecutive overall World Cup title this year. “Today is the day when I end my active career,” the 30-year-old Austrian told a packed press conference in the city of Salzburg.

The world’s most decorated and Olympic champion said he made the decision two weeks ago, saying he had noticed after the season’s end that it was taking him longer than before to recover and considering himself lucky to be healthy and ending his career without any serious injuries. “I always wanted to stop while still winning races... I’m not ready anymore to pay the price. I have always put in my full commitment and effort,” he said, looking calm and casual in a white T-shirt.

But he admitted making the decision to call it quits hadn’t been easy, adding “the last two weeks were full of turbulence”. “It is a life that one stops from one day to the next... I had never dared to dream I would win so much,” he said. Hirscher already has two more overall World Cup titles than the second most successful skier in history, fellow Austrian Annemarie Moser-Proell, who won six globes. She is followed by Marc Girardelli of Luxembourg with five, and American Lindsey Vonn and Austrian Hermann Maier both with four. Earlier this year Vonn retired aged 34, as did her close friend Aksel Lund Svindal, at 36.

‘Record no one will ever break’
Vonn congratulated Hirscher on his “amazing family. He married and had a son last year.

Leclerc to be empowered for Ferrari’s Monza home race

MONZA: Charles Leclerc will be propelled by an upgraded Ferrari power unit and his own raw emotions, this weekend when he bids to claim a second career victory at the Italian Grand Prix. The 21-year-old Monegasque’s maiden Formula One triumph was shrouded in tragedy at last weekend’s Belgian Grand Prix following the death of his close friend Anthoine Hubert.

For Leclerc and his team-mate four-time champion German Sebastian Vettel, the race in the old royal park at Monza offers another opportunity to show their cars’ superior power and straight-line speed against champions Mercedes.

“It’s time for our home Grand Prix and there can be no better way to come back for now. Born in Annaberg-Lungoetz, near Salzburg, Hirscher started to ski at the age of two, taught by his father, who has been by his side and coached him throughout his career. His family spent summer seasons in an Alpine hut in the mountains around Salzburg, according to a media interview with his father. The World Cup season starts again with the first race in Austria’s Soelden from October 25. — AFP

90 years of Scuderia Ferrari

After a season so far in which Ferrari have won only once in 13 outings, with Mercedes triumphing 10 times and Red Bull twice, Binotto knows his team must deliver a near-flawless performance again to resist the overall excellence and race pace of Mercedes’ defending five-time champion Lewis Hamilton.

“We saw in Belgium that, in order to win, we must do everything to perfection and our aim is to do exactly that in Monza too,” he said. “There will be no room for error. Our home race is always important, but that is especially true this time as we are celebrating 90 years of Scuderia Ferrari.”

“Racing in front of our home fans is always an extra boost and further motivation to do well. Apart from anything else, it’s an incentive for our young junior athletes,” former chancellor Sebastian Kurz said on Twitter.

‘Bye Marcel’
Austrian papers had been running front-page headlines for days on Hirscher’s expected retirement. “Bye Marcel!” the Oesterreich tabloid front page read Wednesday, and “Thank you Marcel!” said the Kronen tabloid on Saturday. Hirscher had spoken before about calling it quits — as early as 2014, in fact — and more recently had said that he wants to spend more time with his

Tokyo organizers to test fake snow for Olympics

TOKYO: Tokyo 2020 Olympic chiefs have already rolled out everything from misting stations to flowerbeds to heat the heat at next year’s games, and now they want to let it snow. Organizers confirmed yesterday that they plan to test the use of artificial snow at a canoe event later this month as they look for novel ways to keep spectators and athletes cool during Tokyo’s notoriously steamy summer months.

“Artificial snow will be sprayed over spectator seating,” some of which may be in direct sunlight, during a canoeing event on September 15 that will serve as a test for the Olympics, a spokesman for the Tokyo 2020 organizers said.

“We haven’t decided definitively that we will use this system next year for the Olympics, but we want to test it to see how effective it is,” she said. “We’re open to trying all potentially useful ideas,” she added, when asked about possible criticism of the environmental side-effects of the method.

Public broadcaster NHK said the test would use small snow-making machines to produce about a ton of snow per day, and that officials from the organizing committee would attend in spectator stands to judge the technique’s effectiveness. Olympic organizers have been on the offensive over concerns that holding the Games during summer months when Tokyo regularly reaches 35 degrees centigrade with 80 per cent humidity will be unsafe.

They have already tested measures including misting stations, air-conditioned cooling tents and even rows of potted flowers along the routes of queues — thought to psychologically cool spectators. — AFP
Shah steers Afghanistan with a historic ton against Bangladesh

CHITTAGONG: Batsman Rahmat Shah yesterday became the first Afghanistan cricketer to score a Test century, helping the minnows start strongly against Bangladesh on the opening day of the one-off match. Shah made 102 and put on a crucial 120-run fourth-wicket stand with Ax-ghar Afghan, batting on 88, to counter the Bangladesh spin attack at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong.

Afghanistan were 271 for five at stumps with Afghanistan fought their way back into the contest after being in trouble at 77 for three at lunch. “It is a proud moment for me. I am the first person who has the first half century (in a Test) for the country and now the century,” Shah told reporters after the opening day’s play. “I had the dream to become the first Test centurion for Afghanistan. So naturally I was very upset when I got out scoring 98 against Ireland. Today I got the chance and scored the century,” he said. Taj-ul Islam and Nayeem Hasan took two wickets each to hurt Afghanistan after the tourists elected to bat first in just their third five-day match.

His celebration though was shortlived as Hasan got the batsman, who hit 10 fours and two sixes in his 187-ball knock, out on the next ball. Hasan struck again with his off spin three balls later in the same over, rattling the stumps of Mohammad Nabi for nought as Afghanistan slipped to 197 for five. Afghan, who survived a scare on 42 by TV umpire after being given leg before out off Mehidy Hasan, struck three fours and two sixes so far in his second Test fifty.

In the first session Taijul bowled opener Ib-rahim Janat for nine with his left-arm spin and became the fastest Bangladesh bowler to reach 100 Test wickets. Taijul, who finished the day with four for 57 on 77, also became the third Bangladesh bowler after Shafiqul Islam and Mohammad Rafique to achieve such a feat in the longer format in his 25th match. All-rounder Mominul chipped in when he forced Hashmatullah Shahidi to give a catch to Soumya Sarkar at slip for 14 in his first over. Bangladesh fielded an all-spin attack without picking a single pace bowler while Afghanistan handed a Test debut to Ibrahim, Qais Ahmad and Zahir Khan. Afghanistan skipper Rashid became the youngest ever Test captain at the age of 20 years 380 days with the toos, overtaking the record of Zimbabwe’s Tatenda Taibu, who made his debut as Test captain just eight days older than Rashid in 2004.

Standing ovation
Afghanistan registered their first Test victory against Ireland early this year with Shah scoring two fifties in the game including a 98 in the first innings. The top-order batsman extended his prolific run of form as he reached his hundred with a boundary off Hasan, raising his bat to a standing ovation from the crowd and the dressing room.

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A long way to go:
Hosts China stung by World Cup exit

SHANGHAI: The knives were out in China yesterday after the basketball World Cup hosts failed to reach the second round, triggering criticism normally reserved for the country’s woeful football squad. Basketball is hugely popular in the Philippines but the national team — the joint-shortest at the competition — have lost all three of their matches. They were drubbed 108-62 and 126-67 by Italy and title-contenders Serbia respectively before narrowly succumbing to already eliminated Angola on Wednesday.

Though not expected to go deep into the tournament, China’s performance was seen as a disappointment, especially since they had been drawn in one of the easiest preliminary groups. They managed only one win — against lowly Ivory Coast — in their three group games, underlining the challenge faced by Yao, who took over in 2017 as head of Chinese basketball with plans to revive that nation’s fortunes. “We have certain advantages in Asia, but when faced with strong European and American teams, we are always at a disadvantage,” said the influential Beijing Youth Daily. “If Chinese basketball wants to (compete with Europe and the United States) there is still a long way to go.”

Yao, now 38, led China to some of their best showings in global competitions and his NBA success helped fuel basketball’s popularity in China and raised hopes of a new era which have been dashed. The young Chinese men’s basketball team failed to play at the level that they should have, on both defense and offense,” said the national team’s official social media account.

Pressure rises
Comments on Weibo, China’s popular answer to Twitter, ranged from disappointed to savage, with some comparing them to the huge nation’s perennially underachieving football team. “Seeing men’s basketball perform like this, I can understand the men’s football now,” said one posting. “Eliminated at home, it stung.” Another added: “Please have this group of people return their national team uniforms, make a public self-criticism, and give their report to Yao Ming, the fans and the national team.”

China, ranked 30th in the world, had placed their hopes largely on the shoulders of a towering front court of three seven-footer veterans Yi Jianlian and relative newcomers Zhou Qi and Wang Zhelin, but the trio failed to dominate. Basketball and football are China’s most popular sports, but while China dominate on the court regionally, winning Asian Games gold in Jakarta a year ago, they struggles against the world’s best and have not discovered a successor to trailblazer Yao.

Former Houston Rockets star Yao took over as head of the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) two years ago and raised hopes with plans to reform an entrenched state development system that he says badly needs an overhaul. Pressure for re- sults may now increase after the demoralizing showing on home soil, especially if China performs poorly in Olympic classification contests that are up next. Under this year’s World Cup format, China’s tournament is not over and they will need to rally in the classification round — they face South Korea today — with Tokyo 2020 Olympic qualifying in play. — AFP
All Blacks’ treble quest hinges on solving playmaker puzzle

WELLINGTON: The All Blacks are confident they can win an unprecedented third straight Rugby World Cup in Japan, even if they have to shift one of the team’s star players from his favored position to do so. No one in the current New Zealand squad can match the individual acumen of Beauden Barrett, to a world Rugby player of the year.

Barrett, 28, earned his awards for excelling at fly-half, coordinating the All Blacks in attack and splitting opposition defenses with his deft kicking. His prowess in the number 10 jersey was the reason the Auckland Blues broke the bank to lure him away from Wellington Hurricanes for the 2020 Super Rugby season. However, the All Blacks believe the key to winning their third consecutive World Cup, and fourth overall, is moving Barrett to full-back to field dual playmakers — one at fly-half and the other at full-back — providing extra attacking options.

**Take the risk**

Barrett initially stayed as pivot, with Damien McKenzie at full-back. The experiment produced mixed results in late 2018 before it was abruptly halted when McKenzie blew a cruciate ligament, ruling him out of the World Cup. Hansen turned to Plan B, pushing Barrett to full-back in favour of Mo’unga at fly-half. Barrett filled in as full-back in a couple of occasions early in his Test career and Hansen said he gave the player no choice about returning to 15. “I didn’t ask him his opinion... when I said ‘you’re playing full-back’, he said ‘yes no worries’. That’s about how it went,” he said. “Playing a prized asset such as Barrett out of position has raised eyebrows, particularly since it forces the highly respected Ben Smith — a World Cup winner — onto the wing. Putting Beauden Barrett at 15, to me, is absolutely ridiculous. He’s the best 10 in the world,”

Australian legend David Campese said during the Rugby Championship. “I know what they’re trying to do... but to drop Ben Smith... (he is) one of the best fullbacks in the world and has been for many years.”

The Mo’unga-Barrett pairing made a mixed debut in a 16-16 draw with South Africa, followed by a 47-26 mauling by Australia in Perth. They finally clicked in a 36-0 win over the Wallabies in Auckland and Hansen will hope they can maintain that form during the big matches in Japan.

The coach is moving on after the tournament and anything less than an All Blacks’ win in Japan will tarnish a legacy that includes victory in the 2015 tournament. But Hansen has shown no nerves about tinkering with the All Blacks’ backline so close to rugby’s global showpiece, expressing confidence that Barrett and Mo’unga will successfully adapt to his vision and get the job done.

“At some point, you want all your good players on the park. Both of them are world class,” he said. “I’ve often said if the reward’s worth the risk, then take the risk.” — AFP

**Italy still plotting WC pool escape**

ITALY: Conor O’Shea’s Italy face a herculean task to get to the World Cup. The only Six Nations side to have failed to do so, will play the All Blacks and two-time former winners the Springboks after meeting Namibia and Canada.

The 13th-ranked Italians can be expected to win their opening two matches against 31st-ranked Namibia and Canada, two places above the Africans. But unless they can pull off a huge shock over either of the former world champions, as Japan did against South Africa four years ago, then a ninth consecutive pool exit looks likely. “We want to make history and actually get results for ourselves,” insists O’Shea. “It’s a defeat that must help us understand where to continue working to achieve the goals we have set for the World Cup.”

**’Play our cards’**

Iconic captain Sergio Parisse, and fellow veteran Leonardo Chieco, back from a cruciate ligament injury, will lead the Azzurri in a largely youthful squad with 23 tournament debutants. “The World Cup was not today (against France) and it will not be in Newcastle next Friday, but from September 22 against Namibia,” said 140-times capped Parisse before his fourth world tournament. “We certainly suffered in physical duels, and we weren’t as good at exploiting key moments when we had the advantage. “But we have to learn from this, and then go and play our cards at the World Cup.”

Italy arrive in Japan on September 8 to kick off their campaign against Namibia in Osaka on September 22. “There’s lots still to do, lots of changes still need to be made to allow us to fulfill our potential, but boy, we have a good group of players,” said former Italy full-back O’Shea. “This last year for me has been the turning point for Italian rugby.”

**Patchell gets nod to start against Irish**

CARDIFF: Rhys Patchell’s impressive second-half performance in the 22-17 defeat to Ireland last Saturday has earned the fly-half the starting spot for Wales’s final World Cup Test against the same opponents on Saturday. The 26-year-old transformed the Welsh when he came on for the second period as they came back from 22-3 down to pull to within five points, Patchell scoring a try to boot.

That gave him the edge over Jarrod Evans as backup to fly-half Dan Biggar — who himself was second pick behind Gareth Anscombe until the latter suffered a knee injury last month. Patchell teams up again with scrum-half Tomos Williams, who also came on for the second-half against the Irish. The full-backs are relatively raw in terms of Test rugby but will have the experienced centre partnership of Jonathan Davies and Hadleigh Parkes on side them. Wales head coach Warren Gatland has recalled several of his fringe line players — having given some fringe players the chance to book their ticket to Japan in the Test last Saturday in Cardiff. The likes of full-back Leigh Halfpenny, who only returned to Test rugby after a long absence in the victory over England last month, try machine George North, No8 Ross Moriarty and Justin Tipuric will line-up. The side will be captained by veteran lock Alun Wyn Jones, who skippered them to the Six Nations Grand Slam earlier this year sealing it with a dominant performance over the Irish in Cardiff.

Galland, who brings the curtain down on his 12 year tenure which has yielded three Grand Slams before the World Cup, said Saturday permitted some players to put pressure on the incumbents for a starting spot in their first game in Japan against Georgia. “This is our final preparation match so it is important we get the opportunity for players to put pressure on the incumbents for a starting spot in their first game in Japan against Georgia. “It is important we hit the ground running and give the players enough time on the field. Saturday is the first time these players would have taken to the field as members of the RWC squad, it has been a big week and it is a big opportunity for players to put their hand up and secure spots for the starting XV in Japan.” — AFP
**Favorite Nadal into US Open semis as Berrettini wins thriller**

**NEW YORK:** Rafael Nadal will play Italy’s Matteo Berrettini in the US Open semi-finals after the 18-time Grand Slam champion defeated Argentine 20th seed Diego Schwartzman 6-4, 7-5, 6-2. Second seed Nadal — a winner at Flushing Meadows in 2010, 2013 and 2017 — beat a spirited Schwartzman for the eighth time in as many meetings in a nearly three-hour match that finished early Thursday morning.

Schwartzman put up firm resistance against Nadal and twice fought back from double-break deficits in the first two sets, but the Spaniard found another gear at crucial moments to secure an eighth semi-final berth in New York. “Straight sets but big challenges especially after the first two sets, having 4-0 and 5-1 and losing both breaks in a row, but I know how good he is when he’s confident,” Nadal said. “I’m so happy how I accepted the situation and challenge and kept going, point after point. Here I am in the semi-finals. I’m super happy, it means everything.”

Nadal, who was forced to retire during last year’s semi-final against Juan Martin del Potro, played down concerns over his left forearm as he received treatment early in the third set. “Physically I am fine. Today was a very heavy day, big humidity out there. I’m this kind of player who sweats a little, but sometimes under these conditions it’s tough,” he said. Nadal is the only former major champion left in the men’s field following the elimination of Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic, leaving him as the clear frontrunner in his pursuit of a 19th major title.

Schwartzman, who stands a mere 5ft 7in (1.70m), was bidding to become the shortest Grand Slam semi-finalist since 5-foot-6 Harold Solomon at Roland Garros in 1980. “He’s like a lion in the middle of the jungle. He’s a fighter,” Schwartzman said. Schwartzman added: “I knew he’s got to play the important moments every single time. I played eight times, and every important moment he played better than me.”

Berrettini, the 24th seed, became the first Italian man to reach the US Open semi-finals in 42 years. He matched Corrado Barazzutti’s run to the last four in 1977 after outlasting 13th-seeded Frenchman Gael Monfils 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) in three hours and 57 minutes. The 23-year-old Berrettini joined Barazzutti, 1976 Roland Garros champion Adriano Panatta and Marco Cecchinato as just the fourth Italian to advance to a men’s Grand Slam semi-final in singles.

“What a great fight. I think it was one of the best matches I maybe ever saw — I was playing but I also saw, I’m really happy I don’t know what to say,” Berrettini said. The first-time Slam quarter-finalist blew a 5-2 lead in the final set and four match points before finally seeing off Monfils in a thriller at Arthur Ashe Stadium. “I was lucky. I had match points and he didn’t have it — it’s better when you have them. I’m really proud of myself, I was always focusing on the next point.”

A nervous Berrettini double-faulted on his first match point at 5-3 before a resolute Monfils fought off two more on his serve to send the deciding set into a tie-break. Monfils coughed up a costly pair of double faults in the breaker — and 11 in total — as Berrettini surged 5-2 ahead, the Frenchman rescuing a fourth match point before a booming serve from the Italian clinched a memorable win. “Right now I don’t remember any points, just the match point. I remember also my double fault I must be honest,” Berrettini said.

Defeat for Monfils prolonged France’s wait for a men’s grand slam singles champion. “That is Bencic’s deepest Slam run, surpassing her 2014 US Open victory to match Margaret Court’s all-time record, in the other semi-final. Bencic, seeded 13th, has battled back from 2017 left wrist surgery and other injuries that slowed her career for most of two seasons, winning her third WTA title in February at Dubai. “She likes to be very aggressive,” Andreescu said. “She has a very good serve. She moves pretty well, too.”

**Bencic hopes to end 20-year Slam drought for Swiss women**

**NEW YORK:** No Swiss woman has won a Grand Slam singles title since Martina Hingis captured the 1999 Australian Open, but Belinda Bencic hopes to end that two-decade drought at the US Open. And with Swiss legend Roger Federer and his three-time Grand Slam-winning countryman Stan Wawrinka ousted in the men’s quarters, Bencic has extra motivation entering Thursday’s semi-finals at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

“This is not a good thing. I’m not happy about this actually," Bencic said of the Federer and Wawrinka losses. "I’m kind of surprised, like I think everyone is. It would be really nice if the boys could also make it to semi-finals but I’m happy I can kind of do it for them and don’t let them down." This year’s showdown at Flushing Meadows is the 83rd Slam since Hingis won the last of her five major singles titles.

Bencic will face Canadian teen 15th seed Bianca Andreescu, a fellow Slam semi-finalist since Yannick Noah won the French Open in 1983. “I know how to bounce back, I’ve had some tough ones here before,” said Monfils, who was beaten by Roger Federer in the 2014 quarter-finals after holding two match points. “It was tough, I was just competing as much as I could but there was a big lack of serve today.” “I’m going to take the positive from these two weeks,” he added. —AFP

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**I’ll bounce back, says Monfils after sore US Open loss**

**NEW YORK:** Gael Monfils said he wouldn’t dwell on his agonizing US Open quarter-final loss to Matteo Berrettini on Wednesday that prolonged France’s 36-year wait for a men’s Grand Slam singles champion. The 33-year-old Monfils saved four match points against Italian 24th seed Berrettini before losing 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) in an entertaining four-hour battle at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Monfils fell short in his bid to reach a second US Open semi-final, having also missed out in 2014 after squandering two match points in the last eight against Roger Federer. “I had tough ones in my career like that. Actually I have a tough one here in match point with Roger. I know how to bounce back,” Monfils said. “Actually I played very good after that quarter that I lost in 2014 with Roger. I’ve got to take the positive of this almost two weeks and keep working hard and get back for the Asia swing.”

Monfils was the last of 14 French representatives left in the men’s draw at Flushing Meadows but was hindered by serving troubles that resulted in 17 double faults — two of which came in the fifth set tie-breaker — and 17 in total as Berrettini surged 5-2 ahead, the Frenchman rescuing a fourth match point before a booming serve from the Italian clinched a memorable win. “Right now I don’t remember any points, just the match point. I remember also my double fault I must be honest,” Berrettini said.

Defeat for Monfils prolonged France’s 36-year wait for a men’s Grand Slam singles champion. “That would be pretty awesome,” said Andreescu. “If it happens, then I think I can pave way for many other athletes, the next generation, not only for Canadian tennis but I think for many people.”

Ukraine’s fifth-seeded Elina Svitolina meets Serena Williams, seeking her 24th Slam title to match Margaret Court’s all-time record, in the other semi-final. Bencic, seeded 13th, has battled back from 2017 left wrist surgery and other injuries that slowed her career for most of two seasons, winning her third WTA title in February at Dubai. “She likes to be very aggressive,” Andreescu said. “She has a very good serve. She moves pretty well, too.”

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**Step by step**

The is Bencic’s deepest Slam run, surpassing her 2014 US Open debut last-eight appearance, but it comes after having had to battle adversity. “It’s there like a dream always. Even when you are playing bad, you want to come back to this feeling. I think that’s the motivation enough to keep going,” Bencic said.

“ar for sure being number one in the world or winning a Grand Slam is always a dream. But I think it’s still a long way to that. Of course, I think you can see it there. “The work and staying in the moment is more important right now. Just taking it step by step.” —AFP

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**'Great fight'**

“Great fight” was the last of 14 French representatives left in the men’s draw at Flushing Meadows but was hindered by serving troubles that resulted in 17 double faults — two of which came in the fifth set tie-breaker — and 17 in total as Berrettini surged 5-2 ahead, the Frenchman rescuing a fourth match point before a booming serve from the Italian clinched a memorable win. “Right now I don’t remember any points, just the match point. I remember also my double fault I must be honest,” Berrettini said.
Dest mulling national future amid US-Dutch tug-of-war

LOS ANGELES: Ajax teenager Sergino Dest said Wednesday he has yet to decide on his international future as he prepares to make his senior debut for the United States this week. The 18-year-old fullback, the son of an American father and Dutch mother, has been called up to the United States squad for friendlies against Mexico and Uruguay.

However, talking to reporters on Wednesday, Dest revealed he had been approached by officials from the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) about a possible international career for the Netherlands. Dest, who played for the United States at this year’s FIFA Under-20 World Cup, is still free to choose his international future as he has yet to play in a competitive senior fixture.

“Yes, they said something to me. It was not like the first team yet. It was the under-23s. They want to have a meeting with me. I’m keeping the options open,” he said. Dest was drafted into the US squad after impressing at the Under-20 World Cup and in Ajax’s opening games of the Eredivisie. “Sergino is a guy we’ve been tracking, watching his progress with Ajax in making his way up to the first team,” US coach Gregg Berhalter told reporters.

“We’re excited by him and that he can play in both fullback positions. He’s got an excellent offensive skillset and he fits into the profile of player that we’re looking for for our fullbacks. He can come inside or stay wide. I’m really intrigued with how he plays at Ajax. It’s really interesting watching him play,” Dest is expected to feature in one or both of the United States friendlies against Mexico on Friday and Uruguay on Saturday.

Bale ‘raring to go’ for Wales after Madrid drama

LONDON: Gareth Bale says he feels more settled after a turbulent period at Real Madrid and is “raring to go” as Wales prepare to take on Azerbaijan in a Euro 2020 qualifier today. Bale looked set to leave Real in a big-money move to China in the transfer window, but then the Spanish giants to pull the plug at the last moment.

The 30-year-old ended a scoring drought stretching back to March with two goals in the 2-2 La Liga draw at Villarreal on Sunday before being sent off in stoppage time. “The transfer window has closed,” Bale said on Thursday. “I don’t think mentally it affected me but I had not played for four to five weeks. It was nice to be back on the score-sheet (for Real Madrid) and now I am fit and raring to go.”

Real teammate Thibaut Courtois suggested in an interview earlier this week that Bale was often isolated from the rest of the squad and was called “the golfer” due to his passion for the sport. But Bale said he was happy with the monitor, adding: “I am a golfer. People make a lot of it, but I enjoy it and it keeps me calm on the pitch.” The Wales forward said not being picked by Harry Redknapp at Spurs “for a year” was a harder time in his career.

“I just kept my head down and worked hard in training,” he said. “If you want answers you might need to ask Real Madrid.”

Wales trail group leaders Hungary by six points, with a game in hand, and are three points adrift of Croatia and Slovakia in the race for a top-two spot. Wales boss Ryan Giggs said he was pleased with Bale’s contribution on Sunday and said: “When he scores he tends to get on a roll.”

Giggs revealed that Ben Woodburn is likely to be missing against Azerbaijan due to illness but confirmed that the rest of his squad are fit and available, including Daniel James. Manchester United’s new signing from Swansea has scored three goals in four appearances for the club so far this season. Former United winger Giggs has not been surprised by James’s start to life at Old Trafford. “He’s at the right club — a club which loves wingers,” Giggs said.

“We’ve all seen what he’s capable of in the last eight or nine months and he’s going to get better and better.” — AFP

Germany set to shrug off Sane absence ahead of Dutch derby

BERLIN: Joachim Loew’s resurgent Germany face their first test without Manchester City winger Leroy Sane when they renew their rivalry with neighbours the Netherlands today’s Euro 2020 qualifier in Hamburg. Sane, 23, is one of several German players missing through injury after he tore knee ligaments during Germany’s Community Shield win over Liverpool last month.

The twinkle-toed winger has been a key part of the national team’s recovery from their World Cup debacle last year, scoring in five of Germany’s last six games. Two of those goals have come against Friday’s opponents the Netherlands, who Germany have faced three times since last October and lost on a resumption of one of international football’s biggest rivalries.

Yet Sane’s team mates insisted this week that they would be able to compensate for his absence.

“Leroy creates a lot of space and is very important for the team, but we have a lot of quality to replace him,” said Borussia Dortmund player Marco Reus on media availability. “But I don’t know for the future.”

Dest, who made his senior debut for Ajax last month, would not be drawn on whether he would be ready to commit to the United States by the time of the CONCACAF Nations League game against Cuba on October 11. Once Dest plays a competitive game, his international allegiance will be set, “I don’t know yet,” Dest said. “I can’t make that decision.”

The teenager meanwhile added that Dutch officials had approached him about playing for the nation’s under-23 side.

“Yes, they said something to me. It was not like the first team yet. It was the under-23s. They want to have a meeting with me. I’m keeping the options open,” he said. Dest was drafted into the US squad after impressing at the Under-20 World Cup and in Ajax’s opening games of the Eredivisie. “Sergino is a guy we’ve been tracking, watching his progress with Ajax in making his way up to the first team,” US coach Gregg Berhalter told reporters.

“We’re excited by him and that he can play in both fullback positions. He’s got an excellent offensive skillset and he fits into the profile of player that we’re looking for for our fullbacks. He can come inside or stay wide. I’m really intrigued with how he plays at Ajax. It’s really interesting watching him play,” Dest is expected to feature in one or both of the United States friendlies against Mexico on Friday and Uruguay on September 10. — AFP

Dest mulling national future amid US-Dutch tug-of-war

Los Angeles: Ajax teenager Sergino Dest said Wednesday he has yet to decide on his international future as he prepares to make his senior debut for the United States this week. The 18-year-old fullback, the son of an American father and Dutch mother, has been called up to the United States squad for friendlies against Mexico and Uruguay.

However, talking to reporters on Wednesday, Dest revealed he had been approached by officials from the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) about a possible international career for the Netherlands. Dest, who played for the United States at this year’s FIFA Under-20 World Cup, is still free to choose his international future as he has yet to play in a competitive senior fixture.

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Favorite Nadal into the US Open semis

NEW YORK: Rafael Nadal of Spain reacts after winning against Diego Schwartzman of Argentina during their Men’s Singles Quarter-finals match at the 2019 US Open at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. — AFP

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