Philippines lifts deployment ban, except for domestic helpers

Coronavirus death toll hits 563

Rafa Nadal Academy inaugurated in Kuwait

Kuwait drills emergency response
Local

By Muna Al-Fuzai
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Visa traders

I usually receive via email inquiries or complaints about the visa and residence system in Kuwait. I do not have the answers, because this issue in Kuwait is left to the sponsor. The sponsor decides the fate of the worker and agrees or refuses and sometimes bargains until the worker feels helpless and is forced to accept the conditions or complain to the authorities.

I believe that the Public Authority for Manpower is trying to end fraud by residency traders by applying international labor standards and administrative development to enforce employment laws. In fact in recent years, the files of such companies have been closed, because Kuwait has signed many agreements on protecting employees and preserving labor rights. So it is time for such complaints to end.

I know well that the residency departments of the interior ministry are also doing their part, but unfortunately, Kuwait’s history of humanitarian and charitable work is being damaged by residency traders, who harm the expatriate workforce and Kuwait’s international reputation. I think government intervention in this matter is necessary to fight these saboteurs who are harming us as a community.

The number of expats in Kuwait, according to official statistics, has reached more than three million. Most of them have employment contracts, but there are also some who sold everything they own in their countries in order to obtain a visa to enter Kuwait, only to find themselves victims of residency traders and becoming hunted by security men. I know that it is natural that security forces campaign against expats who do not have valid residence permits, not allow them to stay here and end their presence by sending them back home. But does this end the problem for good?

What about those who brought them here, who get away scot-free, looking for other expatriates to sell them the illusion? Also, obtaining a work visa in Kuwait is not easy and requires relationships and money. The misfortune here is that the owners of these companies get a lot of money. There are those who have paid thousands of dinars to obtain a visa to enter Kuwait, in addition to a large amount of money to renew their residency for one or two years! I think these expats did not violate the labor law by their own will, but they were exploited. Sometimes they have valid status, but without real work or business relations with the company that brought them to Kuwait, except on paper or when a problem occurs.

The problem here is that the owners of the companies defend themselves by saying that they do not force anyone to pay in exchange for entering the country, and this is an agreement that takes place between two parties by mutual consent - that I bring you to Kuwait and guarantee your residency. But, bringing people without real work is not beneficial to any expatriate, because it is likely that they will not find a job.

I have a few tips for new expats. There is a hotline and an email to receive complaints linked with the Public Authority for Manpower for urgent complaints from foreign workers specialized in resolving labor disputes. An expatriate can file a complaint if they don’t receive their financial dues, want their passport, want to transfer their residence or cancel the residence for travel or any other complaint.

The interior ministry has developed its visa process with the Kuwait e-visa website. It is available in both Arabic and English and I hope everyone reviews this site before coming to Kuwait to learn about the laws and legislations here. But this may not be easy for uneducated laborers, so embassies should direct anyone who wants to come to Kuwait to check this site to know what they must know before they take up any offer.

LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait launches Online Shopping Portal & App

LuLu Hypermarket, the region’s leading retailer, announced the launch of its online shopping portal and shopping app for Kuwait. The online portal and mobile app were announced by Mr. Ashraf Ali M.A., Executive Director of LuLu Group International along with our chief guest Mr. Bader Al Otaibi, Head of Department Municipality, Mr Fahad Al-Nassar Shalik, Department of Municipality & Rashed Saad Al-Hajeri, Expert Consumer protection, in the presence of Mr Stuart Davidge, LuLu Group Operation Manager & top LuLu management in Kuwait, special invites and shoppers at the hypermarket’s Euqais outlet on 3rd February.

The new online initiative complements the many iconic brick-and-mortar LuLu Hypermarkets located strategically around Kuwait, and provides customers with a cutting-edge online shopping experience 24x7. With the tagline of ‘Shop Online. We deliver’, the new LuLu online shopping and app offer online customers a seamless shopping experience, while retaining the brand’s commitment to quality, affordability and customer service excellence that are hallmarks of LuLu hypermarkets. The website can be accessed through luluhypermarket.com, while the shopping app is available for free download from both, Google’s Play Store and Apple’s App Store.

In addition to the services offered by LuLu Hypermarkets stores around the country, the best-in-class online shopping and mobile app allows customers to shop for over 20,000 products right from the convenience of their homes and have purchases delivered to their door step. Among the products available at the online shopping and through the shopping app are groceries, fresh food and lifestyle products such as fashion wear, as well as electronics and home appliances and so much more. Moreover, online shoppers also get access to all the excellent deals, promotions and discounts regularly offered by the hypermarket at its stores.
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Art on a wire

Sculptor transforms medium of wire into works of art

By Faten Omar

Many artists use interesting materials to create. Wire - the tough can slim hardness of a string - hardly seems like a creative medium and yet, manipulated in the right way, it can be. In 3000 BC, ancient Egyptians were using various materials including wires in their sculptures and pieces of jewelry. Various artists have now taken the concept to a whole new level. Khaled Hamdan, 28, a road and bridge engineer, has found wires to be an interesting material for his artwork. Kuwait Times spoke with the Jordanian artist to learn more about this art and how he embarked on this path.

Kuwait Times: Can you tell us about your journey as an artist - when did you start working with wires?
Khaled Hamdan: When I saw wire artworks by Khaled Nasrallah displayed in a cafe in Jordan. I loved the idea and started to make random pieces, learning by myself and hoping to turn a piece into a 3D form. In 2014, I worked on my first piece - a motorcycle - and it was not that good. Piece after piece, I began to master the art.

KT: What initially drew you to the material and how does it compare to other mediums that you have worked with?
Hamdan: Originally, I’m a cartoonist and calligrapher, and when I saw this kind of art, I thought converting my drawings into tangible shapes would be something unique. I chose wire art because it gives you freedom in shaping. I found the wires unique materials, where the artist can easily shape, twist, wrap, braid and coil.

KT: How do most of your pieces come about? How long does it take?
Hamdan: The pieces that I like to do over and over again are motorcycles, because of their cool and detailed design. Also, I shape faces and random shapes and write names with wire in dream catchers. Small pieces usually take up to one hour and the largest one took me 10 hours to make.

KT: Do the people of Kuwait show interest in your work?
Hamdan: People of Kuwait liked my art when I participated in the Boulevard exhibition and had a booth in Kuwait City twice. People are attracted to this kind of art. They said this is the first time they’ve seen such art here in Kuwait.
KT: Can you talk us through creating one of your sculptures, from inception to realization, and what challenges you face during the process?
Hamdan: In the beginning, I turn my idea of the piece into a drawing, as it will be easier to shape later. After drawing and designing it, I determine the required dimensions and sizes accurately, particularly if the shape is under fixed standards and sizes with scale (such as bicycles). Then I start to shape it with wires and spray it with customized colors. One of the most challenging things I face is trying to match the shape with the original form.

KT: Do you take customized orders? What is the strangest order you have done?
Hamdan: I take customized orders on my Instagram account @theartology. But the orders are delivered after a week because it is hard to work on them while working full-time as an engineer. Average prices range between KD 1 to 20. The strangest order was for a woman who ordered her signature on wire artwork.

KT: Who are the artists that influenced your work?
Hamdan: Amjad Rasmi is an Arab artist who inspired me in the field of art.

KT: What is your future plan in the field of wire art?
Hamdan: My future plan is to support and develop art, especially for children, by organizing educational art workshops in schools. Practicing art is like practicing sports. It is a responsibility that should not be neglected - it must be developed and improved. Art should be a part of our lives. Hopefully, one day there will be more acceptance and appreciation of handmade art in Kuwait.
KUWAIT: Patronized by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) carried out the ‘Shamel 6’ drill titled ‘the joint command for managing crises and catastrophes’ in Arifjan, southeast of Kuwait City yesterday. The exercise was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, ministers, MPs, Governors, senior officials of the ministries of defense and interior, the Kuwait National Guard, and KFSD, as well as ranking officials of the state, the Diwan of the Prime Minister, and officials of international and regional organizations specialized in the realm of tackling repercussions of crises and catastrophes. KFSD Director General Lt Gen Khaled Rakan Al-Mekrad addressed the attendees affirming in part the government’s keenness on setting up a fully integrated civil-military system for optimum fashion of coping with crises and emergencies. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Firefighters, rescuers, emergency medical personnel and others joined forces to participate in the crisis management drill. — KUNA photos
Kuwait FM receives Bahraini, Libyan Ambassadors’ credentials

VIENNA: Kuwait Ambassador to Romania Talal Al-Hajri said Wednesday he discussed with a senior Romanian police officer the latest developments of the issue of the Kuwaiti national who’s been missing in the European country for over four years. The acting inspector general of Prahova County police directorate reaffirmed the keenness of the Romanian authorities on following up the efforts to determine the fate of Mohammad Al-Baghli, the ambassador said. Kuwait is in contact with the Romanian authorities to know what happened to Baghli, a Kuwaiti businessman who mysteriously went missing in the country more than four years ago, he added. — KUNA

Romania follows up issue of missing Kuwaiti

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday received credentials of the new Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Al-Malki, and new Libyan Ambassador to Kuwait Suleiman Lesahi. Sheikh Dr Ahmad, during the receptions held at the ministry headquarters, wished the envoys success in their service in the country, hoping that the solid and historic relations between Kuwait and their respective countries would be cemented further. The meetings were attended by Ambassador Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah, the Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Dhari Ajran Al-Ajran, the Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocol Affairs, Counselor Ahmad Abdulrahman Al-Shraim, the Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister for Affairs of the Foreign Minister’s Bureau, and a number of senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah received president of the Kuwaiti Bar Association Sharyan Marzuq Al-Sharyan. He also hosted attorney Abdurahman Al-Tahous, the deputy president of the association. Sheikh Dr Ahmad, during the meeting, expressed good wishes for attorney Tahous for his appointment as member of the International Bar Association, as Representative of the State of Kuwait. In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Ahmad received General Secretary of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) Abbas Ali Al-Naqi on the occasion of approaching end of his tenure in the organization. The Foreign Minister praised Naqi’s efforts in boosting Arabs’ cooperation. — KUNA

Amir congratulates Queen Elizabeth II

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of congratulations to Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom on the anniversary of her accession to the throne. His Highness the Amir wished Queen Elizabeth II good health, and the United Kingdom everlasting progress and prosperity, lauding the exceptional and historic bilateral ties, and wishing they would see further growth and development. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar congratulatory cables. — KUNA

Kuwait, Jordan discuss regional, int’l events

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received at his office yesterday his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Al-Safadi, on the occasion of the latter’s visit to the country. During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral relations on all levels, as well as latest regional and international updates. The meeting was attended by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Khaled Al-Jarallah, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Arab World Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Office of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Ambassador Aziz Al-Daifani, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the State of Kuwait Ambassador Saqr Abu Shattal and other senior officials.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah had received the visiting Jordanian Foreign Minister at Seif Palace on Wednesday. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and ways to bolster them in various fields, including tackling developments in the region and international arena. The meeting was also attended by Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah, Khaled Al-Jarallah, Aziz Al-Daifani, as well as Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Fahad Ahmad Al-Awadhi. Safadi and his delegation arrived to Kuwait on Wednesday, where he was received at Kuwait International Airport by senior Kuwaiti officials led by Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with the new Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Al-Malki. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives credentials of the new Libyan Ambassador to Kuwait Suleiman Lesahi.

Kuwait’s Ambassador Talal Al-Hajri with the senior Romanian police officer.

Kuwaiti Ambassador Talal Al-Hajri meets with the senior Romanian police officer.
Deployment ban on Filipino skilled, semi-skilled workers lifted; domestic helper ban remains

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) Governing Board has approved a partial lifting of the deployment ban for Filipino workers seeking employment in Kuwait. This means all skilled, semi-skilled and professional workers may now return to work in Kuwait.

This includes workers who were temporarily stopped at the airport in Manila and were barred by immigration authorities from leaving for work in Kuwait. “We lifted the ban for professionals, skilled and semi-skilled workers, meaning they can now be deployed to work in Kuwait if they wish to come back, they can now come; new and returning,” said Labor and Employment Secretary Silvestre Bello III during an interview with the local reporters in Manila.

One reporter asked if domestic labor are now able to return. Secretary Bello answered, “Domestic helpers still cannot come, and this includes returning housemaids. We lifted the ban because the Kuwaiti government finally listened and agreed on the proposed harmonized contract of employment. This is a measure that would provide effective and sufficient protection to our overseas workers. The harmonized contract covers those that are mentioned by President Duterte,” he told reporters.

The Philippine government has imposed a total deployment ban of Filipino workers to Kuwait from January 15, 2020 following the death and re-autopsy of the body of Jeanelyn Villavende’s body did not match the autopsy done in Kuwait. In Kuwait, Bello has assured of Kuwaiti officials’ unequivocal support and cooperation with regards to the issue of mistreated workers. Bello met with Kuwaiti Finance Minister and Acting Minister for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel, Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Fahad Al-Afasi and Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh. Villavende’s employer has been charged with her death and they have pleaded not guilty. More than 60 percent of 250,000 Filipinos in Kuwait work in the domestic labor sector.

Kuwait still looking for other countries to recruit domestic helpers

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait is eyeing more countries to start allowing workers to come to Kuwait from in order to work as domestic helpers in addition to India, Sri Lanka and Eritrea, which are the only three remaining countries that export domestic workers to Kuwait following the Philippines’ ban last month. Eritrea’s market had joined India’s; and Sri Lanka’s in sending domestic helpers to Kuwait in November 2019. Finance Minister and Acting Minister for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel revealed.

Meanwhile, the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) proposed other markets that include Nepal and Vietnam, in addition to Ethiopia and Indonesia which both used to send domestic helpers to Kuwait before authorities in each country banned this practice a number of years ago. The authority had written to the Foreign Ministry asking it to sign memorandum of understandings to bring in domestic helpers from Ethiopia, Guinea, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh and Kenya, Aqeel said. However, the minister explained that Vietnam did not show willingness to allow its national to seek jobs in Kuwait as domestic helpers, while Indonesia remains adamant on agreeing on a new mechanism for domestic helpers’ recruitment before it lifts its ban.

In the meantime, Aqeel revealed that PAM crackdowns uncovered a number of violations committed in some domestic helpers’ recruitment offices, and suspended the licenses of 66 offices for three months as a result. The violations also include failure to deliver the domestic helper to the employer within 24 hours after arrival.

Expat engineers

In other news, expatriate engineers whose college degrees are not approved by the Kuwait’s engineering society could face problems in the near future as local authorities prepare to embark in a mission to verify the authenticity of degrees of the country’s foreign engineers. In this regard, informed sources at PAM revealed that the authority will start next month checking university degrees of expatriate workers who have engineering-related jobs in Kuwait, noting that the operation will be done in cooperation with Kuwait Society of Engineers (KSE).

“Those whose certificates are not officially approved at KSE will not have their work license approved by PAM,” the sources warned, noting that a worker in this case would be considered in violation of labor regulations. Furthermore, the sources indicated that engineers “of all specialties” will have to pass tests taken at KSE before they wish to issue a work permit from PAM with the job title matching their engineering skill.

Ministry bans sheep, goats exports

By Meesal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued a decision yesterday to ban the export of domestic and imported sheep and goats starting March 1, 2020, and another decision to ban the re-export of cardamom and coffee for three months. The two decisions were made following inspection tours at local markets, the ministry said, explaining that they would help the ministry have more control over the market and avoid price manipulations.

“The crackdowns revealed that some suppliers were storing cardamom and coffee for re-exporting to neighboring countries where they can sell their products for higher prices compared to Kuwait,” the sources explained, noting that this practice has created a shortage of the two items in the local market.
Coronavirus death toll hits 563

**From cruise liners to supply chains, China virus hurts**

**SHANGHAI:** China’s fast-moving coronavirus spread among passengers of a quarantined Japanese cruise liner yesterday and dragged down production at more global businesses, as scientists across the world searched for a vaccine. The death toll from the virus in mainland China jumped by 73 to 563, with more than 28,000 confirmed infections inside the workshop of the world and its second-largest economy. Moored off Japan, about 3,700 people on Carnival’s Diamond Princess face testing and quarantine for at least two weeks on the ship, which has 20 virus cases.

Japan now has 45 virus cases. Gay Courter, a 75-year-old American novelist on board, said he hoped the US government would take the Americans off: “It’s better for us to travel while healthy and also, if we get sick, to be treated in American hospitals,” he said.

In Hong Kong, another cruise ship with 3,600 passengers and crew was quarantined for a second day pending testing after three cases on board. Taiwan, which has 13 cases, banned international cruise ships from docking.

In China, cities have been shut off, flights cancelled and factories closed, shutting supply lines crucial to the world economy. Companies including Hyundai Motor, Tesla, Ford, PSA Peugeot Citroen, Nissan, Airbus, Adidas and Foxconn are taking hits. Financial analysts have cut China’s growth outlook, with ratings agency Moody’s signalling risks for auto sales and output. Nintendo Co Ltd said yesterday delays to production and shipping of its Switch console and other goods to the Japan market were “unavoidable” due to the coronavirus.

Honda Motor Co was considering keeping operations suspended for longer than planned at its three plants in Wuhan, the epicentre of the virus, Japan’s Nikkei newspaper reported.

Indonesia said it stands to lose $4 billion in earnings from tourism if travel from China is disrupted for the whole year.

Chinese-ruled Hong Kong, hit by months of sometimes violent anti-China, pro-democracy unrest, said the coronavirus was hurting its economy and urged banks to adopt a “sympathetic stance” with borrowers.

But global stocks extended their recovery, cheered by record closes on Wall Street and China’s announcement of a tariff cut on some imports from the United States, which analysts saw as a move to boost confidence. China, which has bristled at being ostracized over the virus, was considering delaying an annual meeting of its highest legislative body, the National People’s Congress, from March 5, sources said.

The virus is also stirring animosity in the Philippines and Hong Kong, have both involved deaths outside mainland China, in the Philippines and Hong Kong, have both involved visits to Wuhan, where more than 400 people have died.

Nearly 260 cases have been reported in 31 countries and regions outside mainland China, according to a Reuters tally. More than two dozen airlines have suspended or restricted flights to China and hundreds of foreigners have been evacuated from Wuhan and placed in quarantine. The virus is also stirring animosity in the decades-old dispute between self-ruled Taiwan and China, with the island complaining that China is providing the WHO with wrong information about its cases.

That triggered a rush, specifically for Kaletra, also known as Aluvia, which is drugmaker Abbvie’s off-patent version of lopinavir/ritonavir and the only version approved for sale in China.

Devy, a 38-year-old freelancer in Shandong province, said he was among hundreds who had contacted people with HIV to ask for medicine. “When you are left alone, seeing the blur shadow of death far away, I think no one can feel calm,” Devy told Reuters.

Hundreds of experts will gather in Geneva on Feb. 11-12 to try to speed research into drugs and vaccines, the WHO said, adding that a multinational WHO-led team would also visit China. National officials said 3,694 cases were reported throughout China on Wednesday, the first day in more than a week to see a fall in new daily cases.

Two deaths outside mainland China, in the Philippines and Hong Kong, have both involved visits to Wuhan, where more than 400 people have died.

Health officials in the United States and China want to get a vaccine to initial human testing within months, but drugmakers have cautioned they have a long way to go. “There are no known effective therapeutics,” WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said, when asked about reports of “breakthroughs” that boosted markets on Wednesday. China’s National Health Commission said the HIV drug lopinavir/ritonavir could be used for coronavirus patients, without specifying how.

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**YOKOHAMA:** The Diamond Princess cruise ship, with over 3,700 people quarantined onboard due to fears of the new coronavirus, is seen through a fence while anchored at the Daikoku Pier Cruise Terminal in Yokohama port yesterday. — AFP
Friday Times
Friday, February 7, 2020

International

Israeli-Palestinian violence rises after Trump peace plan

Unrest spreads amid Palestinian anger at Trump plan

JERUSALEM: At least two Palestinians were killed and 15 Israelis were hurt yesterday in a string of incidents in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, where violence has risen after the US announcement of its Middle East peace plan. In the West Bank, Israeli troops shot dead two Palestinians one during violent clashes, authorities said. In Jerusalem, a car ran down Israeli soldiers and a gunman wounded a policeman in suspected Palestinian attacks.

Long-simmering Palestinian unrest has been stoked by anger at US President Donald Trump's Middle East plan, which was embraced by Israel and rejected by the Palestinians when it was announced last week. The plan would give Israel most of what it has sought during decades of conflict, including the disputed holy city of Jerusalem and nearly all the occupied land on which it has built settlements.

At the entrance to Jerusalem's walled Old City, a gunman shot at a border policeman, lightly wounding him, Israeli police said. Police opened fire on the assailant and killed him. The shooting took place not far from a popular nightlife venue where a few hours earlier, a car rammed into Israeli soldiers who were sightseeing after coming to the city to be sworn in after basic training. One soldier was badly injured and another sustained moderate injuries, the Magen David Adom ambulance service said. Twelve others were lightly injured.

Police said they were treating the car-ramming incident, which took place near the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, as a terrorist attack. The driver was still at large, police said, "It is just a matter of time - and not much time - until we get our hands on the attacker. Terrorism will not defeat us, we will win." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement. In the West Bank city of Jenin, a 19-year-old man was shot dead by troops while throwing rocks at them, Palestinians said.

An Israeli military spokesman said soldiers came to Jenin to demolish the home of a Palestinian who was involved in the 2018 killing of a Jewish settler. Troops opened fire at Palestinians who shot and threw bombs at them in Jenin, the spokesman said. Palestinian authorities said another Palestinian man, a police officer, had been killed at a Jenin police station by Israeli gunfire. Israeli officials did not comment and it was unclear whether that incident was directly linked to the clashes in the West Bank city.

On Wednesday, Israeli troops shot dead a 17-year-old Palestinian elsewhere in the West Bank, saying he had thrown a firebomb at them during a violent protest against Trump's plan. He was the first fatality since the plan was announced. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned Israel for the deaths, linking them to what Trump has billed as the "deal of the century". The Palestinians, who have long shunned the Trump administration, accusing it of bias towards Israel, say the plan falls far short of their demands for a viable independent state and other rights.

Israel supports the Trump plan, which would give it much of what it has sought for decades. Some Arab nations oppose it, while the European Union has also rejected parts of it. "The deal of the century caused such escalation and tension by trying to impose fake facts on the ground," Abbas' spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said. "We have repeatedly warned that any deal that doesn't answer the minimum of Palestinian rights and that doesn't aim to make a just and lasting peace will definitely lead to the tension we are witnessing today." The Israel-Gaza border has also been shaken by several days of violence.

Palestinians have launched mortar fire, rockets and balloon-borne explosives into Israel, causing panic but no serious casualties. Israel has carried out nightly air strikes against sites belonging to Gaza's ruling Hamas Islamists. Hamas praised the rising violence. "The spreading resistance and clashes by our people in the West Bank and their resistance in the heart of occupied Jerusalem is an active response against the destructive Trump deal," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said. — Reuters

Woman spared prison for bringing dog into mosque

JAKARTA: A Christian woman charged with blasphemy has escaped jail for bringing a dog into a mosque, the latest religious case to headline headlines in Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation. The case of Suzeethe Margareth, 52, sparked outrage last summer when a Bogor video emerged showing her in a mosque in Bogor, near the capital Jakarta, wearing shoes and letting her dog run loose.

Dogs are considered impure in Islam, and wearing shoes is forbidden in a mosque. A Bogor court ruled Wednesday that Margareth was guilty, but decided not to impose a prison term because she has paranoid schizophrenia. Prosecutors had demanded a nine-month jail term. But Margareth testified that she went into the mosque because she was being chased and heard voices in her head saying her husband was getting married there. Her lawyer welcomed the decision, saying her condition was clear from the way she spoke.

But mosque representative Ruslan A Suhady slammed the mental health defence. People will "usually roam on roads naked. This woman wore neat clothes," he said. The dog involved in the incident reportedly died soon after being hit by a car. This is the latest in a string of controversial blasphemy cases in Indonesia, where rights groups have long campaigned against laws they say are frequently misused to target religious minorities. Blasphemy convictions can result in up to five years in prison. — AFP

Saudi to punish residents who flout China travel ban

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has banned all travel by its citizens or resident foreigners to virus-hit China and introduced penalties for any breach, state media announced yesterday. "Trips to China by citizens or (foreign) residents are suspended in accordance with the preventive health measures the kingdom has adopted against the virus," the official SPA news agency said.

Expatriates who flout the ban face being barred from returning to the kingdom. China's coronavirus crisis has deepened with the death toll soaring to 563 yesterday, as thousands of people trapped on quarantined cruise ships add to the global panic about the epidemic. More than 28,000 people have now been infected across China as authorities struggle to contain the outbreak despite compelling millions to stay indoors in a growing number of cities.

Two dozen countries have confirmed cases of the respiratory disease which emerged from a market selling exotic animals in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. Saudi Arabia is not among them, although the neighbouring United Arab Emirates has reported five confirmed cases, all among Chinese arrivals from Wuhan. Elsewhere in the Gulf, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman have advised their citizens against all travel to China but without any compulsion. — AFP
Israel’s air strikes kill 12 pro-Iran fighters in Syria
Syria clashes test Erdogan-Putin relations

BEIRUT: Israeli air strikes killed 12 pro-Iran fighters in Syria yesterday, a monitor said, the latest in a spate of raids Israel has said targeted Iranian ambitions to develop a military presence on its doorstep. Israel has pledged to prevent its main enemy from entrenching itself militarily in Syria, where it is backing President Bashar al-Assad’s government alongside Russia and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

The pre-dawn raids killed seven foreign fighters in the Kisweh area south of Damascus, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Iranian and pro-Iran foreign fighters were present in the area, the Britain-based war monitor said, but the nationality of the dead was not immediately clear. Five Syrian members of a pro-Iranian group were also killed in the Ezra area of the southern province of Daraa, Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said.

A Syrian army source quoted by state news agency SANA said air defenses responded to two waves of Israeli strikes after midnight that targeted the Damascus area and then positions in Daraa and the adjacent province of Quneitra.

“The attack wounded eight fighters,” the source said, without elaborating on where they had been stationed or their nationality. AFP correspondents in Damascus heard loud explosions around 1:15 am. State television broadcast images showing explosions in the sky. An Israeli army spokesman declined to comment on the strikes when contacted by AFP. Israel has carried out repeated strikes in Syria since the war erupted in 2011, mainly targeting government forces and their Iranian and Hezbollah allies. Israel’s political leadership has spoken publicly of the bombing campaign, although the army rarely comments on individual strikes.

Will not save Idlib

Last month, Damascus accused the Israeli air force of carrying out an attack on the T4 airbase in central Syria, which the Observatory said killed at least three Iran-backed militants. In December, the Observatory said Israeli air strikes killed three foreigners fighting alongside government forces south of the capital. The previous month, the Israeli army claimed responsibility for a wave of air strikes against Syrian military sites and Iranian forces that killed 23 people including 16 foreigners.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said positions of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards foreign operations arm were among the targets. The war in Syria has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011 with the brutal repression of pro-democracy protests. The reported Israeli strikes come as government forces press a blistering offensive against Syria’s last major rebel bastion, in the Idlib region in the northwest.

Erdogan-Putin relations

Meanwhile, deadly clashes between Syrian and Turkish forces are again testing the delicate relationship between President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, though they have become masters at managing their competing interests. Once bitter rivals, Erdogan and Putin grew far closer after the establishment of the Russian-ledSWG foreign operations arm in Syria’s Idlib province following an air strike by pro-regime forces. — AFP

Iraqi protesters defiant as they bury 7 killed in overnight clash

NAJAF: Iraqi anti-government protesters yesterday vowed to push on with their wave of rallies as they buried seven fellow activists killed overnight in violence blamed on supporters of a powerful cleric. Loyalists of Shiite Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr—a militant-turned-politician with a cult-like following—had raided a protest camp in Iraq’s shrine city of Najaf late Wednesday. Seven anti-government demonstrators were killed by bullets to the head or chest, medics in the city said, and dozens more were wounded. In the melee, tents where protesters had slept for weeks were burned down.

It marked the bloodiest episode yet in escalating tensions between the bulk of the demonstrators and Sadr, who had initially backed the rallies but split with the movement suddenly last weekend. Sadr then endorsed the protests, who have taken up chants targeting the cleric. — AFP

Libya ‘den of mercenaries’, say war-weary citizens

TRIPOLI: After 10 months of fighting that has torn their country apart, exhausted Libyans voice deep fears and say their fate is no longer in their own hands. The oil-rich North African country has been mired in chaos since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising that killed longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi, with two rival administrations vying for power. The conflict deepened last April when military strongman Khalifa Haftar, who controls much of Libya’s south and east, launched an assault to seize Tripoli, the base of the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

A fragile ceasefire, brokered by Moscow and Ankara, was established on January 12. And at an international summit in Berlin a week later, world leaders agreed to end all foreign interference in Libya and to uphold a weapons embargo. But on the streets of Libya, war-weary citizens are increasingly hopeless, telling AFP that their resource-rich country has become a plaything of foreign powers. The fighting has drawn in a range of foreign combatants, among them reportedly Russian mercenaries, Sudanese militiamen for hire and members of pro-Turkish Syrian units. Mohammod Hafiz al-Barouni, a student from Tripoli, charged that foreign players had been sending weapons and fighters into Libya “without fear or shame”. After 10 months of fighting, the capital and its suburbs have become a den of mercenaries where arms are flooding in, in broad daylight”, he said.

Soure Bengharisa, a civil servant, complained that “since the fall of Gaddafi, Libyans have allowed foreigners to meddle in their affairs, and now they can’t get rid of them”. Libyan politicians were partly to blame because they are “incapable of dialogue in their own country,” he said while shopping in a vegetable market in Janzour, west of the capital.

“Yet they run to foreign capitals where they have specific agendas dictated to them.” The UN Security Council has been plagued by divisions over Libya and has been unable to adopt any resolution on the conflict for the past 10 months. Salem al-Mahmudi, a vendor, said the international community had “not managed to tame” the countries that support eastern commander Haftar or Fayez al-Sarraj’s Tripoli-based GNA. Those countries were exploiting the truce to dispatch new military reinforcements ahead of a “great battle” in Tripoli, Mahmudi said. Haftar has the backing of Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia, among others, while the GNA is mainly supported by Qatar and Turkey. — AFP

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Rise comes amid global warnings of rising attacks on Jews

LONDON: The number of anti-Semitic incidents logged in Britain last year hit record levels yet again amid accusations the opposition Labor Party had failed to tackle the issue within its ranks, a Jewish advisory body said yesterday. The Community Security Trust (CST), which advises Britain's estimated 280,000 Jews on security matters, said there had been 1,085 incidents in 2019, a rise of 7% and the fourth consecutive year the figure had reached a new high. CST chief executive David Delew said the record came as no surprise and the organization believed the real number was likely to be far higher.

"It is clear that both social media and mainstream politics are places where anti-Semitism and racism need to be driven out, if things are to improve in the future," he said. World leaders warned last month of a growing tide of anti-Semitic sentiment, driven both by far-right white supremacists and those from the far-left, as they commemorated victims of the Holocaust in World War Two. In Britain, the CST said there was an increase in incidents in months when Labour's problems with anti-Semitism were in the news. Ever since veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn, an ardent supporter of Palestinian rights, became leader in 2015, the party has faced accusations that it has failed to stem anti-Semitism among some members. Corbyn, who is stepping down as leader in April, has said anti-Semitism is "vile and wrong" but the party is now under investigation by Britain's Equality and Human Rights Commission. Last February, a number of Labour lawmakers left the party citing the issue as a reason, while ahead of December's national election, Britain's chief rabbi said Corbyn was unfit to be prime minister.

Of the total number of incidents, 224 were connected to Labor, said the CST, which has collated such data since 1979. "It is hard to precisely disaggregate the impact of the continuing Labor anti-Semitism controversy upon CST's statistics, but it clearly has an important bearing," the report said. The charity said the main reason for the overall increase in incidents was a sharp rise in online anti-Semitism.

But there were also 157 assaults - a 27% increase on 2018 - with almost 50% of these occurring in just three areas of the country - Barnet and Hackney in London and Salford in northern England which are home to some of the largest Jewish communities. A rise of intolerance after Britons voted in the 2016 referendum to leave the European Union and the Brexit discourse since, which brought nationalism and immigration to the fore, had also led an atmosphere where people might have felt able to express their "hatred of others," the report said. — Reuters

Lodi: Two rail workers were killed and about 30 people injured yesterday when a high-speed train derailed before dawn near Milan in northern Italy, authorities said. The crash occurred just after 5:30 am near the town of Lodi, about 40 kilometers south of Milan. "It was a serious accident that had a tragic end with the death of two rail workers," said a senior railway official. Lodi Prefect Marcello Diera told reporters that the train had derailed about 50 kilometers from Milan, had consist of three rail cars and had hit a three-wheeled freight wagon on a parallel track before going off the rails and striking the passenger train. Italian media reported that work had been done on the nearby railway building several dozen meters away.

"Every stage of the SCC's judicial process is tainted with human rights abuses, from the denial of access to a lawyer, to incommunicado detention, to convictions based solely on so-called 'confessions' extracted through torture." Saudi authorities were not reaching out for rehabilitation and the kingdom insists that its judicial system is independent. Amnesty said its report was based on examination of court documents, government statements and national laws in a review of eight trials of 68 Shiite Muslims accused of taking part in protests and 27 people accused of campaigning for human rights. "It said the "grossly unfair" trials before the court saw harsh sentences, including the death penalty, being handed out on the basis of vague charges such as "disobeying the ruler" and "inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations". Under the rule of the powerful Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has launched ambitious economic and social reforms, allowing women to drive and for sports and entertainment events to be staged in the kingdom.

However, the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018 and the sweeping crackdown on dissent have tarnished the kingdom's reputation. Amnesty said that virtually all Saudi Arabian "independent voices", including human rights advocates, writers, and religious clerics are now behind bars. It cited in particular the case of Mohammad Al-Otaibi, who was sentenced to 14 years in jail for founding the Union of Women's Rights, economic and social reforms, allowing women to drive and for sports and entertainment events to be staged in the kingdom.

Dubai: A secretive criminal court in Saudi Arabia is being used to silence critical voices including clerics and rights activists, in the name of the fight against terrorism, Amnesty International said yesterday. The kingdom is frequently criticized by human rights advocates who accuse it of violently repressing opponents and activists, including feminists and the kingdom's Shiite minority.

"Its Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) was established in 2008 to handle terrorism-related cases but has been widely used to try political prisoners. "The Saudi Arabian government exploits the SCC to create a false aura of legality around its abuse of the counter-terror law to silence its critics," said Heba Morayef, Amnesty's regional director.

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WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump was acquitted in the US Senate on Wednesday following a historic impeachment trial that shed a harsh light on America's divisions, without ever shaking the loyalty of his vice president.

In a political triumph for the president, the Senate voted 52 to 48 to acquit Trump on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, far short of the two-thirds majority required for conviction. “Two-thirds of the senators present not having found Donald John Trump guilty, he is hereby acquitted,” said Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, who presided over the trial.

But the Senate verdict was never truly in question since the House of Representatives formally impeached Trump in December, and it has now cleared a major hurdle for the president to fully plunge into his campaign for re-election this fall.

Responding to the result, Trump announced on Twitter that he would deliver a formal statement from the White House “to discuss our Country’s VICTORY on the Impeachment Hoax!” The president had earlier tweeted a “victory” image of the Senate with the words “Forever impeached” superimposed.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said Trump was “delighted” with the acquittal and was looking forward to moving on to the campaign. “We have a lot of work to do,” she said.

The elusive tax returns

Trump is the first US president since Richard Nixon not to have made his tax returns public, claiming they are under audit by the Internal Revenue Service. In October 2016, The New York Times revealed that Trump reported over $1 billion in business losses in 1985 - potentially allowing him to avoid paying income tax for two decades.

The White House stonewalling, a tactic which led to the obstruction charge. Concerned about the political risk for the party, Pelosi rejected a call early last year to impeach Trump on evidence compiled by then-special counsel Robert Mueller that he had obstructed the Russia election meddling investigation. But her concerns melted after new allegations surfaced in August that Trump had pressured Ukraine for help in his 2020 campaign.

In the trial, Trump's defense was not seen as undermining the facts compiled by Schiff's probe, and several Republican senators acknowledged he did wrong. But his lawyers and Senate defendants argued, essentially, that Trump's behavior was not egregious enough for impeachment and removal.

— Agencies

Breaking with Republicans, Romney votes ‘guilty’ in impeachment trial

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— Agencies

From sex scandals to impeachment: The unsinkable Trump

WASHINGTON: Impeached for abuse of power, President Donald Trump’s acquittal by the US Senate on Wednesday, one month before the presidential election, a decade-old recording is released on which Trump is heard talking about women in extremely crude terms. The audio confirming “Access Hollywood” tape features Trump - then the billionaire host of the hit reality show “The Apprentice” - boasting that his celebrity gave him license to grope women with impunity. “When you’re a star, you can do it,” he said. “You can do anything.”

As prominent Republicans voted their disgust, the scandal appeared set to derail Trump’s White House bid - as pundits widely predicted it would cost him the women’s vote.

They were proven wrong. Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton to win the presidency the following December, ultimately garnering 53 percent support among white women.

On August 12, 2017, white supremacist, neo-Nazis and anti-Semitic groups gathered, called to make America great again, following the death of a counterprotester in Charlottesville, Virginia for a rally. Counter-protesters flooded to the city and clashes broke out.

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— Agencies
**US astronaut returns to Earth after longest mission by woman**

Koch stays almost 11 months aboard, shatters spaceflight record for female astronauts

ALMATY: NASA's Christina Koch returned to Earth safely yesterday after shattering the spaceflight record for female astronauts with a stay of almost 11 months aboard the International Space Station.

Koch touched down at 0912 GMT on the Kazakh steppe after 328 days in space, along with Luca Parmitano of the European Space Agency and Alexander Skvortsov of the Russian space agency.

Koch was shown seated and smiling broadly after being extracted from the Soyuz descent module in the Roscosmos space agency's video footage from the landing site.

"I am so overwhelmed and happy right now," said Koch, who blasted off on March 14 last year. Parmitano pumped his fists in the air after being lifted into his chair while Skvortsov was shown eating an apple.

Local Kazakhs on horseback were among those to witness the capsule landing in the snow-covered steppe as support crews gathered around the three astronauts, NASA commentator Rob Navias said.

"I've never seen this," Navias exclaimed, reporting the men stopped to chat with engineering personnel. Koch, a 41-year-old Michigan-born engineer, on December 28 last year beat the previous record for a single spaceflight by a woman of 289 days, set by NASA veteran Peggy Whitson in 2016–17.

Koch called three-time flyer Whitson, now 60, "a heroine of mine" and a "mentor" in the space program after she surpassed the record. She also spoke of her desire to "inspire the next generation of explorers." Koch also made history as one half of the first-ever all-woman spacewalk along with NASA counterpart Jessica Meir—her classmate from NASA training—in October last year.

The spacewalk was initially postponed because the space station did not have two suits of the right size for women, leading to allegations of sexism. Ahead of the three-and-a-half hour journey back to Earth, Koch told NBC on Tuesday that she would "miss microgravity". "It's really fun to be in a place where you can just bounce around between the ceiling and the floor whenever you want," she said, smiling as she twisted her body around the ISS. She will now head to NASA headquarters in Houston, via the Kazakh city of Karaganda and Cologne in Germany, where she will undergo medical testing.

Koch's medical data will be especially valuable to NASA scientists as the agency draws up plans for a long-duration manned mission to Mars.

**Make space for women**

Koch's return comes after an advert for a skincare brand ran during an intermission in the American football Super Bowl with a call to "make space for women". The advert featured NASA astronaut Nicole Stott and saw the company promise to donate up to $500,000 to the non-profit Women Who Code, which works with young women seeking careers in tech and scientific fields.

The first woman in space was Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova whose spaceflight in 1963 is still the only solo mission into orbit by a woman. Russia has sent only one woman to the ISS since expeditions began in 2000 — Yelena Serova whose mission launched in 2014.

Both Tereshkova and Serova are now law-makers in the Russian parliament, where they represent the ruling United Russia party. Unlike Koch, whose ISS stay was extended, Parmitano and Skvortsov were rounding off regular half-year missions. Parmitano handed over command of the ISS to Roscosmos' Oleg Skripochka on Tuesday. The 43-year-old Russian posted regular shots of the Earth while aboard, highlighting the plight of the Amazon rainforest and describing the Alps as "like a spinal column, never bending to time". Four male cosmonauts have spent a year or longer in space as part of a single mission with Russian Valery Polyakov's 437 days the overall record. Scott Kelly holds the record for a NASA astronaut, posting 340 days at the ISS before he returned home in 2016. — AFP

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**Child safety groups urge Facebook to halt plans for encryption**

More than 100 child protection organizations yesterday urged Facebook to halt plans for strong encryption of all its platforms, saying that would allow predators to operate freely.

The social network is working to extend end-to-end encryption across its messaging applications, including Facebook Messenger and Instagram.

The groups said they were concerned that stronger encryption of online exchanges would facilitate the sharing of child pornography. "We urge you to recognize and accept that an increased risk of child abuse being facilitated on or by Facebook is not a reasonable trade-off to make," the groups led by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children said in an open letter to Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

"Children should not be put in harm’s way either as a result of commercial decisions or design choices," rights groups have complained Facebook's move to stronger encryption but the governments of countries such as the United States, Britain and Australia have called on the social network to allow authorities to circumvent encryption to better fight extremism, child pornography and other crimes. The child protection groups said they recognized users have a legitimate interest in ensuring their data is protected. "However, as you yourself have stated, Facebook has a responsibility to work with law enforcement and to prevent the use of your sites and services for sexual abuse," their letter to Zuckerberg said.

The groups urged Facebook not to go ahead with its encryption plans until safeguards were in place to ensure children's safety. Facebook already encrypts WhatsApp exchanges from end to end meaning only the sender and recipient can read the messages.

"Strong encryption is critically important to keep everyone safe from hackers and criminals," said David Miles, Facebook's head of safety for Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

"The rollout of end-to-end encryption is a long-term project, protecting children online is critically important to this effort and we are committed to building strong safety measures into our plans," Miles said Facebook was already working with law enforcement, government and technology companies to keep children safe online. — AFP

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**Guaido meets Trump but overshadowed by impeachment**

WASHINGTON: Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido on Wednesday visited the White House like a head of state, but President Donald Trump's impeachment drama overshadowed the moment.

Guaido, who with US support has been seeking, for more than a year to topple leftist president Nicolas Maduro, pulled up to the White House in a black SUV as Trump gave a thumbs-up sign to the cameras, in front of Marine sentries stationed at the doors. But the White House abruptly cancelled a press availability in the Oval Office, which had been scheduled to take place shortly before the Senate voted against removing Trump from office.

While Trump's acquittal had been widely expected, he was deprived of a complete party-line vote when Republican Senator Mitt Romney revealed he would vote to convict the president. Despite Washington's focus on impeachment, which stemmed from Trump's pressure on Ukraine to dig up dirt on a political rival, Guaido appeared buoyed by the US support. Writing on Twitter after meeting earlier in the day with Vice President Mike Pence, Guaido said he was working together with the United States "for the freedom of Venezuela."

"We appreciate the firm and clear fight from the US government together with the Venezuelan people and our region," Guaido tweeted. In a brief statement, the White House said the meeting "was a historic discussion about how we can work together with our partners in the region to achieve a democratic transition in Venezuela." Guaido, a 36-year-old engineer turned politician, is considered interim president by the United States and most other Western and Latin American nations. — AFP
DENPASER: Thousands of Chinese tourists stranded in Bali after Indonesia suspended flights over coronavirus fears offered flights.

Indonesia warns of $4bn hit to tourism if virus disruption extended

Wishnutama Kusubandio, Indonesia's minister of tourism and creative economy, warned that the tourism sector was at risk of losing up to $4 billion due to a possible coronavirus epidemic.

He said Indonesia had agreed to repatriate thousands of Chinese tourists from the Southeast Asian archipelago country at risk, but the number has fallen from about 6,000arto at least 5,000 Chinese tourists were in Bali, the main tourist destination, Wishnutama Kusubandio told a news conference.

“With the negative trend seen in tourists from other countries, the loss would be even more significant. We will lose $4 billion,” the minister said. He added that 17 foreign tourists had been refused entry to Indonesia due to the coronavirus outbreak.

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A day earlier it said about 5,000 Chinese tourists were in Bali, the centerpoint of Indonesia’s tourism industry. The consulate did not respond to requests for further comment yesterday. A day earlier it said at least 5,000 Chinese tourists were in Bali, the centerpoint of Indonesia’s tourism industry.

Refused entry

Many of the marooned tourists are from the stricken city and surrounding Hubei province, the consulate said, but it added their return would be voluntary. “Passengers’ temperatures will be measured before boarding,” the notice said. “Those with novel coronavirus symptoms will not be allowed to board the plane.”

It was not immediately clear how many holidaymakers would take up the offer or who would pay for their tickets.

“The Chinese consulate general has offered repatriation to the mainland, but no one has agreed to fly back home,” Bali’s vice-governor, Tjokorda Oka Artha Ardana Sukawati, told Indonesia’s MetroTV.

Last month, China confirmed over 2,700 cases of coronavirus which the World Health Organization declared a global health emergency.

The minister said they had refused entry to 17 foreign tourists who had recently been in China, including visitors from Russia, Brazil, New Zealand, Morocco and Britain. Indonesia has yet to report a confirmed case of the virus, which emerged in a Chinese marketplace at the end of last year. Tourism minister Wishnutama Kusubandio warned his country stood to lose up to $4 billion this year if travel from China and elsewhere was disrupted.

Bali is also expected to unveil details of a plan to temporarily ban some livestock imports from China due to the coronavirus.

Indonesia stands to lose $4 billion in earnings from tourism if its worst-case scenario materializes and travel from China is disrupted for the whole year by a virus epidemic, the tourism minister said yesterday. The main tourist destination, the holiday island of Bali, had already seen around 10,000 cancellations by the end of last month, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council.

“We have two million (Chinese) visitors last year with an average spend of $4,100 per arrival,” Widiyastuti Kusubandio told a news conference.

“With the negative trend seen in tourists from other countries, the loss would be even more significant. We will lose $4 billion.” The minister said he was extrapolating numbers for the whole year, despite uncertainties surrounding the virus, because bookings for summer holidays, which have usually started to trickle in by now, have been low.

The government has encouraged airlines to discount fares for routes to Bali, the tourist island of Bintan south of Singapore and Manado city in North Sulawesi to attract visitors from outside China, said Adita Irawati, a transport ministry official. Jakarta is also expected to unveil details of a plan to temporarily ban some livestock imports from China due to the coronavirus.

Frida

Frida

Frida

Australia receives bushfire reprieve with floods, battens down for cyclone

SYDNEY/MELBOURNE: Many Australians were experiencing a bittersweet break from the threat of bushfires yesterday, with flooding rains delaying some parts of the eastern states and miners preparing for a tropical cyclone to hit the country’s iron ore heartland over the weekend.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) issued severe thunderstorm warnings for the southeast of Queensland state and a flood alert for more than 20 areas in New South Wales (NSW) after the start of heavy rainfall that is expected to continue for several days.

Warm, moist air feeding in from the east was bringing the rain, BOM forecaster Mike Funnell told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. “We are expecting those larger totals and heavier rainfall to come into the northeast coast of NSW and then sort of track slowly southwards,” he said.

Cricket Australia said a bushfire fundraising match which was set to be played in Sydney on Saturday had to be rescheduled for Melbourne on Sunday because of the rain. Miners Rio Tinto and BHP Group said they were monitoring the situation and making preparations ahead tomorrow, when a tropical low off the coast of Western Australia is forecast to develop into a category three cyclone that was set to make landfall in the Pilbara area.

With strong winds and heavy seas predicted, both Port Walcott (Cape Lambert) and Dampier ports are being cleared, as this impacts the ability to safely moor vessels, Rio said. — Reuters

False virus cure claims infect the internet

HONG KONG: Gargle salt water, use herbal eyedrops, steam-clean a face mask—false claims about how to combat a deadly coronavirus epidemic emerging out of China are flooding the internet.

Social media giants have promoted their strategies to combat misinformation related to the epidemic, which has claimed more than 560 lives in China and spread to 24 countries. Twitter, which reported 15 million coronavirus-related tweets in January, said it had suspended auto-suggest search results that would likely produce untrustworthy content. Facebook also said it was targeting false claims aimed at discouraging treatment or taking inappropriate precautions with the respiratory virus.

“This includes claims related to false cures or prevention methods—like drinking bleach cures the coronavirus or claims that create confusion about health resources that are available,” Kang-Xing Jin, Facebook’s head of health, said in a statement. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also launched a campaign to discredit specific claims, such as that sesame oil and mouthwash can effectively kill the virus.

Yet the misinformation continues to pollute social media platforms and messaging apps. Here is a selection of the false claims that AFP, which has a specialized fact-checking team, has debunked in recent days:

Boiling fresh garlic

A claim that the coronavirus can be cured overnight if sufferers drink freshly boiled garlic water was shared across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in Pakistan.

“There is no scientific evidence to substantiate the claim that garlic boiled water cures the novel coronavirus nor is there any proper medical research available on the subject,” said Dr Wasim Khawaja, an expert at the Pakistani Institute of Medical Sciences, for an AFP fact-check report.

Antibiotic eye drop

In the Philippines, videos viewed millions of claims the virus can be cured with an eye drop made of sap from a local shrub that is commonly used to treat fever and stomach issues. One 11-minute video, claiming the tinospora crispa plant is an effective “antibiotic” for the virus, was viewed more than 1.5 million times on Facebook.

There has been no medical evidence to back this claim.

Steaming face masks

A video of a purported doctor advising people to steam disposable surgical face masks to reuse them was viewed hundreds of thousands of times in multiple Chinese-language posts on Facebook, Weibo and Youku. In Hong Kong, the video was viewed almost 900,000 times within a day after a lawyer shared it on Facebook.

The WHO, the Hong Kong Red Cross and the Hong Kong Centre for Health Protection have all issued warnings against steaming—or reusing at all—single-use masks. — AFP
Kejriwal symbolizes the ‘power of common man’

NEW DELHI: A diminutive former tax inspector is in the cross-hairs of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party as it battles to take back power in Delhi state elections tomorrow.

Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of the sprawling capital of 20 million since 2015, is standing for re-election—much to the chagrin of Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is reeling from protests and a faltering economy. Despite being swept to a second term in national elections last year, the BJP has not run Delhi since 1998 and it has campaigned heavily to try and unseat Kejriwal, who has been giving Modi a run for his money in appealing to the city's poor.

Many ordinary voters see Kejriwal, 51, a co-founder of the Common Man Party, as “one of them”, political strategist Amitabh Tiwari told AFP. “He symbolizes the power of the common man—that the common man can also contest and win elections.” The stakes are high for the BJP after it lost control of Maharashtra state, whose capital is Mumbai, late last year. Economic growth is its slowest in six years, unemployment is high, inflation is accelerating and India has seen weeks of at-times violent demonstrations over a new citizenship law.

The law, making it easier for non-Muslim persecuted minorities to become Indian, has stoked suspicion that Modi wants to turn offensively secular India into a Hindu nation, something he denies.

“A poor showing in the capital this weekend would be another blow to the party—and galvanize an opposition demoralized by last year's national election defeat,” the analyst says. “If Kejriwal wins, he will have “shown a way of beating Modi”, Mohan Guruswamy from the Centre for Policy Alternatives think-tank said.

“Geographically Delhi might not be big, but politically it is big. A defeat will be highly symbolic.” Kejriwal's popularity in Delhi's teeming slums rivals that of Modi, 69, the son of a tea-seller who has carved out an image as a man of the people. “Before Kejriwal came to power, most of our money went on electricity bills and we didn't receive proper water supply,” said slum-dweller and mother-of-five Safa Khan, who survives on the meagre salary of her ragpicker husband. “Now, both these problems have been solved. We hope that... Kejriwal comes back to power. It'll be great for us.”

Popular heroes Kejriwal and Modi have much in common. Both swept away years of government by the grand old party of Indian politics, Congress, promising a new style free of corruption and the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Their parties are mass movements centered on their personalities, both have been the subject of films, both have doled out freebies to voters—and promises from both have fallen short.

The difference though is that Modi's politics carry a heavy dose of Hindutva—hegemony for India's majority Hindus—whereas Kejriwal don’t, analysts say. “The BJP is using its identity-based appeals, political polarization to win elections,” political scientist Neelanjan Sircar from Ashoka University told AFP.

“The strategy is quite clear in that sense, but it’s very a dangerous game. These are not wounds that heal easily.” Indeed in the Delhi election campaign the BJP’s tone has become ever shriller, with some members implying Kejriwal is a “terrorist” backing Muslim-majority arch-enemy Pakistan. The party also has sought to turn the election into a referendum on a women’s sit-in protest against the citizenship law that has snarled traffic for weeks. The heightened rhetoric has sowed doubt in the poll outcome, with analysts saying it is not clear if voters will be drawn to the BJP’s dog whistling.

“That is what is going to be tested,” Guruswamy said. “In the last five years, the economy has tanked and yet Prime Minister Modi has been re-elected, so he thinks that slogan engineering will get them in.” —AFP

India’s divisive protests could help BJP in poll

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party this week face their first electoral test since deadly anti-government protests erupted nearly two months ago, with the divisive turmoil likely to win them votes at polls in the capital. Modi’s Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a bigger majority in a general election in May, but it has lost a string of state elections since then.

The protests, in which at least 25 people have been killed, erupted across the country in mid-December, after the BJP passed a new citizenship law critics say violates India’s secular constitution and discriminates against minority Muslims. New Delhi is due to hold its elections tomorrow with tension high after three incidents of gunfire at or near protest sites in four days. In two of the shootings, people shouted Hindu-nationalist slogans. Protest organizers have stepped up security as a result, and blame the BJP for inflaming the tension. The party denied doing so. Without a well-known leader in the capital, analysts say the BJP has intensified a policy of campaigning on Modi’s personal appeal, rather than on development issues.

“Rightly or wrongly, they are largely seen as Muslim protesters. There is a polarization between Hindus and Muslims that could help his party secure the Hindu vote... Kejriwal’s do not,” said Sircar. Analysts say the BJP has inched closer to turning the election into a referendum on a women’s sit-in protest against the citizenship law that has snarled traffic for weeks. The heightened rhetoric has sowed doubt in the poll outcome, with analysts saying it is not clear if voters will be drawn to the BJP’s dog whistling.

“That is what is going to be tested,” Guruswamy said. “In the last five years, the economy has tanked and yet Prime Minister Modi has been re-elected, so he thinks that slogan engineering will get them in.” —AFP

World food prices rise for 4th month running, cereal outlook up: UN

ROME: World food prices rose for the fourth month running in January, boosted by jumps in quotations for vegetable oils, sugar and wheat, the United Nations food agency said yesterday.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) food price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oils, vegetables, dairy products, meat and sugar, averaged 98.5 points in last month, up 0.7 percent on the previous month. FAO also predicted that cereal production would hit a new record in 2019 and come in some 2.3 percent higher than the 2018 crop. The FAO cereal price index climbed 2.8 percent month-on-month in January to record its highest value since May 2018, with the prices of all major cereals rising, led by wheat.

The vegetable oil index jumped 7.0 percent last month to reach a three-year high and the sugar price index climbed 5.5 percent, while the dairy index was up 0.9 percent. By contrast the meat price index fell 4.0 percent, ending 11 consecutive months of increases, with the price quotations for all meat categories heading lower, “pressured by reduced purchases, especially from China and the Far East,” FAO said. FAO also issued a new forecast for world cereal production, predicting a record high of 2.715 billion tons this year. “This month’s forecast remains nearly unchanged from December, as downward revisions made for wheat and rice production are offset by upward adjustments for maize and barley,” FAO said. —Reuters
Malaysia’s PM-in-waiting, Anwar says he is ready to wait for 6 more months

Anwar says willing to bury the hatchet with Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia’s Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday he was ready to wait for six more months beyond the initially agreed May deadline to take over as prime minister from Mahathir Mohamad, and that he had enough support in parliament to do so.

Mahathir led the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition, or Alliance of Hope, to a stunning victory in a general election in May 2018, joining hands with former enemies including Anwar to bring down Najib Razak, who is facing multiple charges of corruption mostly linked to the looting of sovereign fund 1MDB.

Mahathir had promised to hand over to the premiership to Anwar within two years of the general election result, but later said he would stay on until at least November to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in November. The 94-year-old also said Anwar would have to secure parliamentary majority to become prime minister.

“You’ve waited 20 years, extending six months doesn’t actually matter,” Anwar told Reuters at his private office, expressing confidence that the coalition allies would stand behind him, as they did for Mahathir. “If there’s a request to go back to parliament, of course it can be done, but PH has the majority right now. Even those who are not in PH some would support the PM of the day. I also have been given that assurance. They support Mahathir as the PM, and they will continue to support me when I assume the premiership.”

Anwar had served as deputy prime minister and finance minister during Mahathir’s first 22-year stint in office, but was sacked in 1998 after falling out with Mahathir’s “Old Man” over how to defend the economy against the Asian Financial Crisis. Going into opposition, Anwar quickly drew support from a large section of Malay Muslims, the multi-cultural country’s dominant ethnic group, to form the Reformasi movement, before being jailed a year later on corruption and sodomy charges that he denied. He was released on a royal pardon soon after Najib lost power in the 2018 election.

In total, Anwar had spent close to 10 years in prison as a result of the two convictions.

But controversy continued to dog the 72-year-old, after a former aide last year accused him of trying to force him to have sex in September 2018. The solicitor-general last month ruled out pressing charges against Anwar over the allegations, which the politician described as “politics at its worst”.

Same-sex acts are illegal in Muslim-majority Malaysia, and carry penalties of up to 20 years in jail if convicted. “Of course I have many political foes. The corrupt few will do whatever it takes to ensure that I do not assume office,” said Anwar, dressed in a casual blue chequered-shirt.

Buried hatchet

The protracted feud between Mahathir and Anwar, the country’s two most charismatic politicians, has dominated Malaysian politics for decades. Since his release, Anwar has stayed out of government, biding his time while his wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail has served as deputy prime minister to Mahathir. Anwar said he was ready to move on from the bitter past, and that he would be willing to carve out space for Mahathir to continue to contribute after he takes over as prime minister.

“Well, presence in a way… would certainly help boost the general confidence and give some sort of semblance of stability and order,” Anwar said, using Mahathir’s honorary. “There will be no real drastic policy difference. There would be different emphasis, of course, but on a personal basis, I certainly welcome very much his presence and contribution in any way.”

He would, however, look to mend souried ties with India after Mahathir’s criticism of New Delhi’s two recent policies led to a massive fall in palm oil trade between the countries. One thing that will not change is Malaysia’s demand for reparations from Goldman Sachs over its role in the multibillion-dollar scandal at state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), Anwar said.

He repeated Mahathir’s position that the US bank’s initial settlement offer of over $1 billion was too small, but declined to say how much he felt was sufficient compensation. “Certainly the amount has to be substantial, because we’re looking not only at the loss of dollars, but the loss of reputation, investments, and the perception about Malaysia,” Anwar said. Goldman has said it is discussions with authorities on a possible resolution of investigations relating to 1MDB.

US contractor kidnapped in Afghanistan

KABUL: A US security contractor has been kidnapped in eastern Afghanistan, an official confirmed yesterday, the latest instance of a foreigner being taken in the war-torn country where kidnappings are common. An Afghan security official with knowledge of the incident told AFP the former US Navy member had been working in Afghanistan as a contractor when he was abducted last week in eastern Khost province, near the Pakistani border.

There was no indication whether a militant group or a criminal organization was behind the kidnapping, while the Taliban told AFP they had “no information” about the matter. Afghanistan’s former intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh was quick to blame the insurgents, saying on Twitter the abduction had been orchestrated by the Taliban and their Pakistani backers.

Kidnapping must end & without ransom.

Pakistani has long been accused of backing the Taliban but has repeatedly denied supporting the group.

The US State Department said it was aware of reports of the kidnapping, but declined to comment further. The incident comes after the Taliban in November handed two Western hostages over to US forces in southern Afghanistan, three years after they were abducted, in a swap for three high-ranking insurgent prisoners.

The exchange of American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks for the militants-including Anas Haqqani, brother to the Taliban’s deputy leader – was widely believed to be instrumental in kick-starting stalled talks between the two sides. The Taliban later described the exchange as “a step forward in good-will and confidence-building measures that can aid the peace process”, — AFP

Nobel laureate Yunus facing over 100 lawsuits

DHAKA: Bangladeshi Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus is facing more than 100 lawsuits from disgruntled employees at the telecoms unit of his poverty-busting microfinance Grameen Bank, lawyers said yesterday. The cases filed against him and other senior managers in a Dacca court relate to claims from Grameen Telecom (GT) employees for a share of profits, their lawyer Jafurul Hasan Sharif said.

Yunus has faced mounting legal problems in recent years. In 2011 he was sacked as head of Grameen Bank in a move his supporters said was orchestrated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

“According to Bangladesh’s Worker’s Profit Participation law, Yunus’s Grameen Telecom was bound to share a share of profits, their lawyer Jafurul Hasan Sharif said.

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Famed Egyptian actress Nadia Lotfi dies at 83
See Page 20
Hatidze, the Macedonian beekeeper charming Hollywood

Veteran Egyptian actress Nadia Lotfi died Tuesday. Egyptian media reported the actress was admitted into the intensive care unit in Maadi hospital in Cairo earlier this week and died at the age of 83 in Cairo following recent illness. Nadia Lotfi, who picked up her stage name after a character from one of the novels of Egyptian author Ihsan Abdel Qudoos, is popular for tackling women’s issues.

Lotfi, whose real name is Paola Mohammad, was known for her role in Shady Abdel Salam’s classic, Al-Mouinia (The Mummy). Lotfi took several daring roles in films directed by Egypt’s leading film makers and based on scripts by the country’s most prominent authors through the 1970s before retiring. Lotfi made her silver screen debut in 1958 at the age of 24. She starred in the movie “Sultan” alongside renowned late actors Fareed Shawqi and Roshdi Abaza. She was most famous for her political activism and support for the Palestinian cause and Women’s Lib issues. —AFP/Arab News

US has lost its ‘moral leadership,’ actor Harrison Ford says

Harrison Ford, in Mexico City on Wednesday to promote his latest film, decried the collapse of US “moral leadership” on issues such as improving the environment and immigration policy. “We need moral leadership. We’ve lost some of our credibility and we are anxious to regain it,” the Hollywood star told reporters. Ford was in town to talk about his starring role in “The Call of the Wild,” an adventure film set in Alaska in the 1890s and based on a novel by US author Jack London.

Relaxed and smiling, the veteran actor also touched on his iconic Hollywood roles in the “Star Wars,” “Indiana Jones” and “Blade Runner” movies. A fifth “Indiana Jones” movie, starring as the swashbuckling archaeologist with the unusual first name, is also in the works. “To do another ‘Indiana Jones’ movie, it seems like a good idea, if we had a good script and I believe we are very close to have the script that we really want, so I am excited about the idea,” he said.

Speaking on the day the US senator acquitted President Donald Trump on impeachment charges of abusing his office and obstructing Congress, Ford got sidetracked talking about politics. “We need a complete reform of our immigration policies,” said Ford, 77. “Cracking down on migrants has been a primary focus of Trump’s administration. ‘We need to invite people into the country, and not to keep them out. This is the history and America depends on immigration,” Ford said. Yet “despite the lack of commitment from the United States government, efforts are being made” towards immigration reform and improving the environment, he said. He was especially impressed with Swedish teenage environmental activist Greta Thunberg. “I admire her role representing to young people, her courage. Also, I admire her capacity to express herself. It seems young people have a leadership role in environmental activism. —AFP

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KirK Douglas, one of the last superstars of Hollywood’s golden age of cinema who was renowned for his intense, muscular performances in “Spartacus” and “Paths of Glory,” died Wednesday aged 103. The US leading man, producer and director came to prominence in the late 1940s and never lost his popularity, taking on nearly 100 movies over a six-decade career that endured beyond a severe stroke in his later years. His death at his family home in Beverly Hills was confirmed by his son Michael, the Oscar-winning actor and filmmaker. “It is with tremendous sadness that his son Michael and I announce that Kirk Douglas left us today at the age of 103,” Michael Douglas said in a statement posted to Facebook.

“To the world he was a legend, an actor from the golden age of movies who lived well into his golden years.” Tributes poured in from across Hollywood and around the world on social media, with many declaring “I am Spartacus!” in a nod to Douglas’s legendary role as a rebellious Roman slave. Director Steven Spielberg said Douglas “retained his movie star charisma right to the end,” while actor Danny DeVito tweeted: “103 years on this earth. That’s got a nice ring to it Great hanging with you man.”

“Seinfeld” star Jason Alexander praised Douglas as “an absolute legend of a star and human” and added that “we could use a true Spartacus.” The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which awards the Oscars, tweeted: “Goodbye to a Hollywood legend.”

‘A true Spartacus’: Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas dead at 103

Douglas was known throughout his life for his fierce rebellious streak. In his early movie days he would clash with studio heads over his choice of roles, before ultimately splitting off to form his own production company, Bryna—one of the first major post-war stars to do so. “It was pretty rare then,” Variety senior vice president Tim Gray told AFP. “Kirk Douglas was not unlike his title character in “Spartacus,” Douglas was known throughout his life for his fierce rebellious streak. In his early movie days he would clash with studio heads over his choice of roles, before ultimately splitting off to form his own production company, Bryna—one of the first major post-war stars to do so. “It was pretty rare then,” Variety senior vice president Tim Gray told AFP. “Kirk Douglas was very stubborn but he wasn’t self-indulgent—he wasn’t a party boy wasting people’s time showing up late, things like that.”

Douglas also defied more established directors by teaming up with a young Stanley Kubrick for both “Paths of Glory” and “Spartacus.” And on “Spartacus.” Douglas hired Dalton Trumbo—one of the “Hollywood Ten” blacklisted as a suspected communist under the McCarthy era—to write the screenplay. Unlike many producers during the time, Douglas refused to hide this fact, instead using Trumbo’s real name in the credits. Gabriele Carteris, head of Hollywood’s actors union, Wednesday praised Douglas as “a powerful voice who helped end the blacklist in our industry,” as well as “an extraordinary actor.”

Nonetheless Douglas missed out on taking home the trophy on each of his three Oscar nominations, the last for his performance in the 1956 film “Lust for Life,” and never won a competitive Academy Award. He was instead granted an honorary lifetime achievement statuette by the Academy in 1996 — just months after his stroke—“for 50 years as a creative and moral force in the motion picture community.”

Douglas, born Issur Danielovitch to Jewish-Russian immigrants in upstate New York in 1916, began as a stage actor before serving in the US Navy during the Second World War. He graduated to movies when “Casablanca” producer Hal Wallis signed him in 1946, and he became a star for his portrayal of a double-crossing and womanizing boxer in 1949’s “Champion.”

His subsequent roles would often mirror his real-world, larger-than-life persona, including Oscar-nominated turns as a ruthless movie producer in “The Bad and the Beautiful” and tortured artist Vincent Van Gogh in “Lust for Life.” Douglas told The New York Times in a 1984 interview that he had “always been attracted to characters who are part scoundrel,” adding: “I don’t find virtue photogenic.”

Life well lived

In his personal life, Douglas married twice, with the second to Anne Buydens in 1954—enduring over 65 years. Douglas himself would admit to a colorful life as a ladies’ man including affairs in his memoirs, but always carefully controlled his image. “He was Mr Hollywood, he was always part of the scene—he would always attend functions,” said Gray. “The public saw him as this larger than life actor but he could also be very subtle.” Douglas is survived by Buydens, 100, and three of his sons. A fourth child, Eric, died of a drug overdose in his 40s, in 2004. Douglas’s son Michael praised Kirk’s “commitment to justice and the causes he believed in” which “set a standard for all of us to aspire.” He added: “Kirk’s life was well lived, and he leaves a legacy in film that will endure for generations to come.” —AFP
Sewing machines hum and steam comes off irons as thousands of workers, mostly Asian and Latino migrants, make clothes in the few surviving workshops of New York's threatened garment district. In the weeks leading up to New York Fashion Week, the factories are abuzz with activity as they get high-quality garments ready for the catwalk, but for how much longer? The small neighborhood, nestled amid skyscrapers close to Times Square, has lost 95 percent of its workforce since its heyday in the 1950s, when it employed hundreds of thousands of people.

“It was part of the soul, the texture, the heart of New York,” says Robert D. Parmet, professor of history at the City University of New York. “It was a marvelous economic driver and cultural anchor in N.Y.C. “Although the location of that industry has shifted it still is a significant part of who we are as a city and will be, we hope, for many more years,” he added. Advocates of the garment district were outraged when Mayor Bill de Blasio’s city government eliminated zoning rules that had forced landlords to provide space for clothing manufacturers in 2018. He also invested millions in a new garment-producing campus in Brooklyn. Brewer and Johnson led a fightback, forcing de Blasio’s administration to offer tax cuts to property owners who rent to garment manufacturers.—AFP

Despite the absentees, there are certainly enough big names to keep fashionistas happy. Marc Jacobs, Michael Kors, Carolina Herrera, Vera Wang and Oscar de la Renta are all present. And Rag & Bone, whose show is set to feature AI-generated content, is back at New York Fashion Week for the first time since 2016. There is also a host of promising young designers that buyers will be keeping an eye on. Vogue magazine has tipped Kee Kim, Olivia Cheng, Tia Adeola’s and Kenneth Nicholson to shine.

What you need to know about New York Fashion Week

New York Fashion Week started yesterday, kicking off this year’s catwalk season. Here is everything you need to know about the autumn-winter 2020 shows.

Oscars clash

The 92nd Academy Awards take place on Sunday, hang in the middle of Fashion Week, far from ideal scheduling for an event trying to recover from several overwhelming seasons. Designers pour when celebrities sit front row at their shows, but actors and actresses are more likely to be in Los Angeles enjoying Hollywood’s biggest party of the year than in New York. Scott Stadlenberg and Margaretta Moseley of LA have opted to showcase their 2020 fall collections in LA instead of the Big Apple, as they try to tap into an Oscar buzz.

Even Tom Ford—chairman of the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA), which helps run Fashion Week—has plumbed for heading out west. “There is an excitement in LA on that particular weekend and the relationship between film and fashion is a strong one,” Ford, 58, told Women’s Wear Daily website recently.

Notable absentees

Several other famous designers are skipping New York too, despite organizers sticking to a reduced five-day schedule, introduced for September’s spring 2020 showpiece, in the hope of attracting big names. Some commentators had suggested that New York Fashion Week was hot again after the return of high-profile stars such as Tommy Hilfiger last autumn. However, the momentum appears to have lost steam with loads of top designers choosing to unveil their new collections at London, Paris or Milan instead. Ralph Lauren, Hilfiger, Jeremy Scott, Kerby Jean-Raymond of Pyer Moss, who produced one of the standout shows in September, and Tomo Koizumi are among those missing this week. Rihanna’s Savage X Fenty lingerie collection is also taking a runway break.

Headline grabbers

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Other up-and-coming designers to watch include Sies Marjan, Eckhaus Latta, Meros, Gabriela Hearst and Brandon Maxwell. New York diversified in recent years and this season’s lineup includes Sukeina’s Senegalese creator Omar Salam, Grenadian designer Fe Noel, LaQuan Smith and Christopher John Rogers.

Coronavirus fears

In recent seasons, New York Fashion Week has opened its doors to Chinese designers, who have attracted buyers and social media influencers from China, as it tries tap the lucrative market. But a cloud hangs over their involvement this year due to the deadly coronavirus. The CFDA says it has no information about possible show cancellations and Chinese fashion houses such as Muzin and Sheguang Hu have said their parades would go ahead. But if it’s moving feast after Chinese fashion houses Angela Chen, Ricostru and Hui canceled runway appearances at Milan Fashion Week because of the virus, they said they could not take part in Italy as factory closures have stopped them from finishing collections in time for the event, which begins on February 18 and runs to February 24. Around 1,000 Chinese buyers, journalists, stylists and other industry staff are also going to miss the event, Italian officials have said.—AFP
Thespians battle prejudice and poverty in wartime Mali

Once the play is over and theatre-goers have gone home, Awa Bagayogo, an actor in Mali’s capital Bamako, breaks into tears. It’s one of the smallest and often-maligned numbers of actors in the conservative West African country, and she and her friends stage plays about topics like migration while outside the capital, a jihadist conflict rages. Staging plays in Bamako, though, means coping not only with Mali’s daily struggles, but also with family resistance, social prejudice about acting, and a lack of funding. For most, only the love of their art keeps actors motivated.

“We want to tell the stories of our lives, the lives of young people,” says Bagayogo. “We have to be able to stage what we think.” Mali is struggling to put down a jihadist revolt which first broke out when rebels captured the north of the country in 2012—just when Bagayogo began dreaming of becoming an actor. The conflict has since killed thousands of people, and spread to the centre of the country as well as to neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger.

Bagayogo, 23, a dramatic arts graduate, says that she is motivated by “passion,” which was first kindled by watching her favorite film actors. Mali has a strong tradition of indigenous theatre known as “koteba,” but poverty and war mean few students now opt for theatre. Bamako has two drama schools which produce about ten graduates every year. They are often viewed with suspicion. “There are a lot of problems, but we stick together, like a family,” says Bagayogo, sitting with the nine other actors in her performance.

Battling prejudice
The main barrier, according to the actors, is how Malians perceive their profession. “Families are against it,” says Aly Badra Dembele, 20, a student at the National Arts Academy of Bamako, adding that the older generation thinks theatre is a waste of time.

“A lot of people think actors are thugs,” he says. One of Dembele’s friends, who declined to be named, pays a high price for his passion. His parents forbade him from appearing on stage for years, dismissing plays as “degrading.” And he and his uncle, with whom he lives in Bamako, no longer speak.

“We’re there for him,” says another of his friends, who declined to be named, adding that actors need to stick together. Dembele, the more optimistic of the troupe, says there’s no point to being an actor in Mali unless “you give it everything.”

But others were more dispassionate, pointing out getting a theatre company job in Mali, as in other sectors, often depends on family contacts. The profession is poorly paid, too. All have other jobs on the side. Some work as masons, for example, and others have internships with the customs agency. “We have to eat,” Dembele says.

“The adventure”
Theatre has always been prolific in Mali because of its important place in the culture of the country’s largest ethnic group, the Bambara. But traditional performances are giving way to plays with contemporary social themes, often financed by the government, international organisations and NGOs. Although it received no funding, Bagayogo’s troupe recently staged a play about migrating to Europe—a perilous journey across desert and sea which they simply call “the adventure.” Many Malians dream of migrating because of poor job prospects and war at home. Performed in an open-air night club, the play also featured in one of Mali’s few theatre festivals in December, called “Les Praticables” after the French term for modular stage.

Walt Disney Co results lifted by ‘Star Wars,’ ‘Frozen’

Walt Disney Co. on Tuesday delivered better-than-expected results in the past quarter, fueled by box office hits from its latest “Star Wars” and “Frozen” films and a strong response to its new Disney+ streaming service. Profits in the three months leading up to December 28 dipped 24 percent from a year prior to $2.1 billion, while revenues surged 36 percent to $21 billion. “We had a strong first quarter,” highlighted by the launch of Disney+, which has exceeded even our greatest expectations,” said chairman and chief executive Bob Iger.

Iger said on an earnings call that “our hearts go out to all those affected by this devastating coronavirus outbreak” in China, where the entertainment colossus has closed its theme parks in Hong Kong and Shanghai as a health precaution. The financial hit to Disney’s revenue will depend on how long the parks remain closed, and could be more than $1.35 billion if they remain shuttered for two months, chief financial officer Christine McCarthy estimated on an earnings call.

“The current closure is taking place during the quarter in which we typically see strong attendance and occupancy levels due to the timing of the Chinese New Year holiday,” McCarthy said. The earnings report showed that 26.5 million paying subscribers had signed up for the freshly-launched Disney+ by the end of last year, and Iger told analysts that figure reached 28.6 million this week. Disney, which is the leading force in Hollywood and operates major theme parks and television operations, has been betting heavily on its move to streaming as it takes on rivals such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. “It is a very unique product,” Iger said of Disney+. “There is obviously more competition coming into this space, but there isn’t any competition that is like our product.”

Going international
Disney+ will go international next month, launching in Britain, France, Germany, Spain and other parts of Western Europe on March 24. The streaming television service will launch in India less than a week later, timed for the start of the Premier league cricket season there, according to Iger. Disney is intent on building up its original streaming content, taking advantage of beloved franchises such as “Star Wars” and the Marvel superhero movies. The hit “Mandalorian” series—a spin-off itself—is likely to lead to spin-offs starring popular characters, Iger said. These same characters and actors from the Marvel cinematic universe, along with events from these new shows, will factor into future Marvel films as we integrate storytelling across these platforms,” Iger said. “We also have the highly-anticipated return of ‘The Mandalorian’ in October.” — AFP
In the arid West African country of Mauritania, the way of life of the traditional group of hunters known as the Nemadi is slowly disappearing. Experts say the small ethnic group of black Mauritanians, also known as N’Madi, now numbers in the hundreds at most, their livelihoods hit by repeated droughts and declining game. Those that are left mostly scour the desert for ostriches, oryxes and white antelope to hunt.

In January, AFP travelled for five days between the desert hamlets of Tichitt and Aratane in central Mauritania, guided by three Nemadi: Ahmadou, his son Ahmed and a third man named Cheih. All three, dressed in tunic-like robes, have abandoned their traditional way of life to become camel herders. More and more Nemadi have given up their old ways since the great drought in the Sahel region in the 1970s. True hunter-gathers are now few and far between. In Loudeyatt, one of the nomadic Nemadi’s campsites, a dozen tents are home to about 50 people, and a few bleating goats. There is also a French-language school, although it has few supplies.

The Nemadi have few physical possessions and traditionally, no livestock. They are marginalized in wider Mauritanian society for their poverty, according to experts. But some, such as Ahmadou, now own camels, a traditional symbol of wealth in Mauritanian society. —AFP
Frida
Ahmed (20), from the small Nemadi (hunters) tribe in Eastern Mauritania, pulls water out of one of the few water wells along the caravan route.

Ahmed (20), from the small Nemadi (hunters) tribe in Eastern Mauritania, is seen leading a camel.

A woman and her children are seen at the Touijinit Camp.

Ahmadou (57), from the small Nemadi (hunters) tribe in Eastern Mauritania, stops to pray in the desert.

Cheih, from the small Nemadi (hunters) tribe in Eastern Mauritania is seen with a camel.

Ahmed (20), from the small Nemadi (hunters) tribe in Eastern Mauritania, fills put a bucket at one of the few water wells.

Ahmadou (57), from the small Nemadi (hunters) tribe in Eastern Mauritania walks east as he leads a camel caravan.
Known as 'Setsubun' (the division of the season), February 3rd traditionally marks the last day of winter in old Japanese lunar calendar. Its most famous ritual is "mame-maki" (bean-throwing), in which people throw toasted soybeans around their houses while shouting “Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi!” (Ogres stay out, good luck come in!) to drive evil spirits and pray for good luck. Usually, the father or the eldest man in the family wears a red mask as a demon, and the rest of the family members throw the beans to him.

After mame-maki, people eat the same number of beans as their own age to wish for good health and happiness during that year. Originating from Chinese folk beliefs, the bean-throwing tradition was introduced to Japan in the 8th century and gained its popularity in the Muromachi period (1336-1573). “Mame-maki” rituals can be also observed major temples and shrines throughout Japan, where high-profile celebrities toss beans from the stage to the crowds. People rush and knock each other over in an attempt to catch the beans. — KUNA
A permanent interactive museum has recently opened for public in Florence, includes the most prominent creations of renowned artist Leonardo Da Vinci, not only in the field of art but in science and technology among others. The museum, which is located between Galleria dell’Accademia and Museum of Opera of Saint Maria of Fiore, in one of the ancient palaces, built in 1513, features invention models, designs and reproduced art of Leonardo Da Vinci, plus a bookshop. It displays more than 50 life-size machines, modeled after Da Vinci’s designs executed by skilled craftsmen, identical to the original details, accompanied by numerous explanatory panels in Italian, French, English, Spanish and Russian that accompany you during the entire exhibition.

The unique environment of the Leonardo da Vinci museum involves your visit in a direct, interactive, extraordinary experience of sharing and learning. Inside the Museum, there are numerous explanatory panels in Italian, French, English, and Spanish and Russian, that accompany you during the entire exhibition, in addition of rental audio guide service. In addition to the real interactions with his inventions, visitors can admire and compare, in a unique context, high-resolution reproductions of Da Vinci’s main pictorial works from the Mona Lisa to the Last Supper and the Annunciation to the Lady with the Ermine.

The exhibition, which uses virtual and augmented reality techniques, displays the “ideal city” project planned by Da Vinci to establish a comfortable, spacious city characterized by rational and functional architecture, organized roads, buildings with high walls, strong, and public squares. Leonardo da Vinci was born in 1452 in Florence, Italy, and was educated in the studio of the renowned Italian painter Andrea del Verrocchio. Much of his earlier working life was spent in the service of Ludovico il Moro in Milan, and he later worked in Rome, Bologna and Venice. He spent his last three years in France, where he died in 1519. — KUNA
Golden Age canals lined by tilting gabled buildings are the backdrop for Amsterdam’s treasure-packed museums, vintage-filled shops and hyper-creative drinking, dining and design scenes.

Rijksmuseum

The Rijksmuseum is among the world’s finest art museums, packing in works by local heroes Rembrandt, Vermeer and Van Gogh as well as other masterpieces in the 8000 works on display over 1.5km of galleries. To avoid the biggest crowds, come before 10am or after 3pm. Start on the 2nd floor in the Gallery of Honor with the astounding Golden Age works. Prebooking tickets online provides fast-track entry. Intimate paintings by Vermeer and De Hooch allow insight into everyday life in the 17th century, while Rembrandt’s The Night Watch (1642) takes pride of place. Initially named Company of Frans Banning Cocq (the militia’s leader), The Night Watch title was bestowed years later due to a layer of grime that gave the impression it was an evening scene. Other must-sees are the Delftware (blue-and-white pottery), intricately detailed dollhouses and the Asian Pavilion. The sculpture-studded gardens around the exterior are free to visit and the Rijks restaurant has a Michelin star. There is also a cafe inside the museum serving light lunches. I Amsterdam and Museumkaart cardholders get in free with no need to queue at the ticket office.
It's a moving experience to visit this museum, which traces Van Gogh’s life and development via the world’s largest collection of his work, both familiar paintings and wonderful little-known pieces. It’s fascinating to see his work change from tentative beginnings to giddily bright sunflowers, and on to his frenzy of creative brilliance towards the end of his life. There are also paintings by contemporaries Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Monet and Bernard.

While you can try your luck for tickets at the entrance, it’s highly recommended to book online and choose a time slot to avoid missing out, as tickets can sell out a few days in advance. I Amsterdam cardholders must reserve online at the I Amsterdam website (www.iamsterdam.com). The museum gets packed and the best times to visit to try to avoid the crowds are before 11am and after 3pm.

Bike & Boat Travel

Two-wheeling is a way of life here. It’s how Amsterdammers commute to work, go to the shop, and meet a date for dinner. Abundant bike-hire shops make it easy to gear up and take a spin. If locals aren’t on a bike, they may well be on the water. With its canals and massive harbor, this city reclaimed from the sea offers countless opportunities to drift. Hop aboard a canal boat (preferably an open-air one) or one of the free ferries behind Centraal Station, or rent your own for a wind-in-your-hair ride.

Royal Palace

Opened as a town hall in 1655, this resplendent building became a palace in the 19th century. The interiors gleam, especially the marble work - at its best in a floor inlaid with maps of the world in the great burgerzaal (citizens’ hall) at the heart of the building. Pick up a free audioguide at the desk when you enter; it explains everything you’ll see in vivid detail. King Willem-Alexander uses the palace only for ceremonies; check for periodic closures.

When it was designed by architect Jacob van Campen, the opulent structure showcased Amsterdam’s wealth in a way that rivaled the grandest European buildings of the time. Most of the palace’s rooms spread over the 1st floor; highlights include 51 chandeliers, damasks, gilded clocks, and rich paintings by Ferdinand Bol and Jacob de Wit.
Urban Explorations

Amsterdam’s canal-woven core is laced by atmospheric narrow lanes. You never know what you’ll find: a tiny hidden garden; a boutique selling witty, stylized Dutch-designed homewares and fashion; a jewel-box-like jenever (Dutch gin) distillery; a flower stall filled with tulips in a rainbow of hues; an old monastery-turned-classical-music-venue; an ultra-niche restaurant such as an all-avocado specialist or one reinventing age-old Dutch classics. Fringing the centre, post-industrial buildings in up-and-coming neighborhoods now house creative enterprises, from art galleries to craft breweries and cutting-edge tech start-ups, as well as some of Europe’s hottest clubs.

Admiring Art

You can’t walk a kilometer without bumping into a masterpiece in the city. The Van Gogh Museum hangs the world’s largest collection by tortured native son Vincent. A few blocks away, Vermeers, Rembrandts and other Golden Age treasures fill the glorious Rijksmuseum. The Museum het Rembrandthuis offers more of Rembrandt via his etching-packed studio, while the Stedelijk Museum counts Matisses and Mondrians among its modern stock. And for blockbuster displays, the Hermitage Amsterdam delivers: the outpost of Russia’s State Hermitage Museum sifts through its three-million-piece home trove to mount mega exhibitions.

Feel Gezellig

Amsterdam is famously gezellig, a Dutch quality that translates roughly as ‘convivial’ or ‘cozy’. It’s more easily experienced than defined. There’s a sense of time stopping, an intimacy of the here-and-now that leaves your troubles behind, at least until tomorrow. The easiest place to encounter this feeling is a bruin cafe (brown cafe; traditional drinking establishment). Named for their wood paneling and walls once stained by smoke, brown cafes have gezelligheid (coziness) on tap, along with good drink. You can also feel gezellig lingering after dinner in snug restaurants while the candles burn low.

Vondelpark

A private park for the wealthy until 1953, Vondelpark now occupies a special place in Amsterdam’s heart. It’s a magical escape, but also supplies a busy social scene, encompassing cycle ways, pristine lawns, ponds with swans, quaint cafes, footbridges and winding footpaths. On a sunny day, an open-air party atmosphere ensues when tourists, lovers, cyclists, in-line skaters, pram-pushing parents, cartwheeling children, football-kicking teenagers, spliff-sharing friends and champagne-swilling picnickers all come out to play. The Vondelpark receives over 12 million visitors per year, so it’s rarely tranquil, but always a lot of fun.

Museum het Rembrandthuis

This evocative museum is housed in Rembrandt’s former home, where the master painter spent his most successful years, working on major commissions such as The Night Watch and running the Netherlands’ largest painting studio. It wasn’t to last, however: his work fell out of fashion, he had some expensive relationship problems and bankruptcy came a-knocking. The inventory drawn up when he had to leave the house is the reason that curators have been able to re-furnish the building so faithfully. The museum owns a large collection of Rembrandt’s etchings and there is a small selection of these on display in the Print Room. You can also watch an etching demonstration and visit Rembrandt’s studio, which looks as if he’s just popped out. Queues are not as extensive here as at some of Amsterdam’s other attractions, but you may book ahead online or get free entry with the I Amsterdam City Card or Museumkaart. — www.lonelyplanet.com
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Show Title</th>
<th>Network/Channel</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00:00</td>
<td>The Daily Show With Trevor Noah</td>
<td>Comedy Central</td>
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<tr>
<td>01:00</td>
<td>Broad City</td>
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<tr>
<td>02:00</td>
<td>Lip Sync Battle</td>
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<td>03:00</td>
<td>Fool's Gold</td>
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<td>E! News</td>
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<td>07:00</td>
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<td>Modern Marvelian</td>
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<td>10:00</td>
<td>World News</td>
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<td>11:00</td>
<td>NBC Nightly News</td>
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<td>12:00</td>
<td>CNN News</td>
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<td>13:00</td>
<td>The Weather Channel</td>
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<tr>
<td>23:00</td>
<td>The Daily Show With Trevor Noah</td>
<td>Comedy Central</td>
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**TV Listings**

- **Friday, February 7, 2020**
- **Network/Channel:** Various networks and channels are listed with show titles.
- **Time:** Each show is listed with its specific time slot.
- **Show Titles:** Include a variety of programs such as news, weather, and entertainment shows.

For more details, please refer to the full TV listings.
Aries (March 21-April 19)

Your way is the only way today. Others may not show great appreciation for this overly independent side of you. You may be dealing with some personal issues today. This may find you at odds with others. This is a very sensitive matter and others can not understand what you refuse to share. Your independence can be a blessing and a curse. You may feel as if no one is there for you when you need them most. This comes from you always putting on a strong front. Everyone needs a shoulder to cry on once in a while. Let your guard down and let others help you for a change.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

This is a time you desire peace and harmony in your world. Make peace with your past. This is a great day to reach out and mend fences with those you have had differences with in the past. This is a great day in the workplace for you. It is your time to shine. Know that all you do will be noticed. You may be asked to represent your company in some way. Your communication skills are on point today and you will be a huge success.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You may find yourself tense and anxious about a situation you have found yourself in. You may feel under pressure and feel somewhat anxious. This may lead to you mentally checking out. You may use this as a coping mechanism for the stress you are under. An out of body feeling in a dreamy state may be the way your mind chooses to handle this conflict. Others may not be fond of this side of you and this could result in conflict with someone close to you. You will find your way and through your ability to get to the root of your problems, this too will be solved. Scorpio: You may find a negative result from the escape you take from reality as it may cause an opportunity you have been hoping for to pass you by.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

This is a time you desire peace and harmony in your world. Make peace with your past. This is a great day to reach out and mend fences with those you have had differences with in the past. This is a great day in the workplace for you. It is your time to shine. Know that all you do will be noticed. You may be asked to represent your company in some way. Your communication skills are on point today and you will be a huge success.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Look for a rainbow today. Something good is happening in your life. It may lead to something important in your career or personal life. Even if the pleasure you derive from it is not permanent, you can find pleasure in the moment. You're getting a break. Do not disappoint it by projecting the future. If you take a "live today" attitude, the future will take care of itself—and you.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

All that is dear to your heart takes priority today. You need to love and be loved. Take a chance today. You may receive a great reward. Love is a huge factor in your life today. You are learning to love yourself and pay close attention to the needs and want of those close to you. Getting in touch with your emotions and the emotions of those around you will cause you others to be drawn to you. Capricorn, others will value your opinions and sense of independence. You are becoming someone others look up to.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

A friend will seek your advice today. What she really wants is your approval for what she has decided to do. If you tell her what to do, it may lead to a rift in your friendship. You can give your opinion, but make it clear that she has to make the decision for herself. You might offer some options and point out the possible consequences of each. That means she takes responsibility for her actions. Regardless of how her decision turns out, your friendship will be strengthened. You are a rock in the lives of many.

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You may be faced with a career opportunity that goes against what you value. You have always prided yourself for clearly seeing things in life in black and white. There is no room for a grey area. If an opportunity presents itself to you, it seems to go to true, it is probably best. Be sure you are able to lay your head down at night and sleep peacefully. You know right from wrong and this is a time for you to make the right choice. Actions have consequences and these consequences will have a lasting effect on your world. Do what satisfies your soul.
Classifieds
Friday, February 7, 2020

STATE OF KUWAIT
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm and Clouds will increase gradually with light variable wind changing to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 08 - 35 km/h with a chance for scattered rain later on.

BY NIGHT: Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

WEATHER WARNING

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<tr>
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<th>MAX. EXP.</th>
<th>MIN. REC.</th>
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<tr>
<td>KUWAIT CITY</td>
<td>23 °C</td>
<td>13 °C</td>
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<tr>
<td>KUWAIT AIRPORT</td>
<td>25 °C</td>
<td>08 °C</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABDALY</td>
<td>24 °C</td>
<td>06 °C</td>
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<tr>
<td>BUBYAN</td>
<td>20 °C</td>
<td>09 °C</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAHRA</td>
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4 DAYS FORECAST

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<th>MIN.</th>
<th>Wind Direction</th>
<th>Wind Speed</th>
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<td>14 °C</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>12 - 40 km/h</td>
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<td>02/08</td>
<td>Warm + chance for raising dust</td>
<td>25 °C</td>
<td>11 °C</td>
<td>SW-NW</td>
<td>12 - 40 km/h</td>
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<td>Sunday</td>
<td>02/09</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>19 °C</td>
<td>06 °C</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>15 - 40 km/h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>02/10</td>
<td>A significant decrease in temperature with a chance for rising dust</td>
<td>11 °C</td>
<td>02 °C</td>
<td>NW</td>
<td>20 - 45 km/h</td>
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PRAYER TIMES

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<tr>
<td>Fajr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunrise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zahr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asr</td>
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<td>Sunset</td>
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RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

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<th>MIN. Temp.</th>
<th>MAX. RH</th>
<th>MIN. RH</th>
<th>MAX. Wind</th>
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<td>07 °C</td>
<td>79 %</td>
<td>30 %</td>
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<td>28 km/h</td>
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Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988
Ooredoo reports revenue of KD 633.5 million for FY 2019

Dividend of 50 fils per share recommended


Financial highlights:
- Consolidated customer base decreased by 3 percent to 26.1 million in 2019, compared to 27.0 million in 2018.
- In local currency terms Tunisia and Maldives recorded good growth in revenue. However, revenues in KD were impacted due to 10 percent depreciation of the Tunisian Dinar and 2 percent depreciation in the Algerian dinar. Consequently, consolidated revenue decreased by 5 percent to KD 633.5 million for 2019, compared to KD 665.0 million for the same period in 2018.
- EBITDA increased by 7 percent in 2019 to KD 232.6 million, compared to KD 217.1 million in 2018, supported by the implementation of IFRS 16, a new accounting standard, in addition to operational efficiencies.
- Net profit attributable to NMTC was KD 30.1 million for 2019, compared to KD 29.7 million for the same period in 2018. Net profit growth was supported by good performances in Kuwait, Tunisia and Maldives.
- The consolidated earnings per share was 60 fils for 2019, compared to 59 fils per share earned for the same period last year. The Board of directors recommends a dividend payment of 50 fils per share, subject to shareholder approval at the General Assembly scheduled for 10 March 2020.

Sheikh Saud Bin Nasser Al-Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors commented: “In 2019, we leveraged our strong digital capabilities to deliver unparalleled user experiences to our customers as we deployed the infrastructure for the next generation of connectivity. Ooredoo Kuwait (NMTC) reported a steady set of results with net profit for the year increasing by 1 percent to KD 30 million and EBITDA increasing 7 percent to KD 233 million. Our financial performance is testament to our continued investment into the implementation of our digital transformation strategy. Strong revenue performances in the Maldives and Tunisia, in local currency terms, were offset by intense price competition in Kuwait and challenging macroeconomic environments in Algeria and Tunisia, where the local currency depreciated 2 percent and 10 percent respectively, against the Kuwaiti Dinar. Consequently, NMTC reported revenues of KD 634 million in 2019 compared to KD 665 million in the previous year.

Our consolidated customer base at the end of 2019 was a healthy 26 million, as we focused on serving the needs of an increasingly sophisticated and digitally savvy user base with the launch of a number of new services that simplified our user experience while providing a greater degree of flexibility and control.

In Kuwait, the implementation of our digital transformation agenda, harnessing the latest technologies to drive efficiency as well as the positive impact from the implementation of IFRS 16 contributed to a 32 percent increase in EBITDA. In Tunisia, revenues increased 7 percent in local currency terms, as the company intensified its focus on increasing smartphone penetration and driving data usage.

Our performance in Algeria continues to be impacted by challenging economic conditions, intense price competition and currency depreciation. In Palestine we continued to grow our user base, which was up 3 percent to 1.3 million and focus on cost optimization, resulting in a 13 percent increase in EBITDA to KD 9.0 million.

“In the Maldives we reported strong results across the board, with EBITDA increasing 12 percent to KD 22 million, supported by a 5 percent increase in revenues to KD 40 million.”

Review of operations
The Group’s operational performance can be summarized as follows:

Ooredoo - Kuwait
Ooredoo’s customer base in Kuwait increased to 2.6 million in 2019, up by 12 percent compared to 2018. Revenues for 2019 were KD 231.3 million, a decrease of 4 percent compared to KD 240.9 million in 2018. EBITDA was strong, increasing 32 percent to KD 72.4 million in 2019, compared to KD 55.0 million in 2018. The increase of 32 percent reflected good operational efficiencies across the business as well as a positive impact of the new IFRS 16 accounting standard.

Ooredoo - Tunisia
Ooredoo’s customer base in Tunisia increased by 1 percent to reach 9.2 million customers in 2019, compared to the previous year. The Tunisian Dinar depreciated by 10 percent year on year, leading to a decrease in revenues from KD 126.6 million in 2018 to KD 123.1 million in 2019. In local currency terms, revenues were up by 6.8 percent. EBITDA was KD 56.0 million in 2019 compared to KD 49.3 million in 2018.

Ooredoo - Algeria
Business in Algeria was negatively impacted by the devaluation of the Algerian dinar, intense price competition and a weak economic environment. Customer base declined by 9 percent to 12.6 million in 2019, compared to 2018. Revenues also decreased to KD 208.7 million in 2019, compared to KD 228.9 million in the previous year. EBITDA was KD 72.4 million in 2019, down from KD 85.3 million in 2018. Algerian dinar depreciated by 2 percent year on year.

Ooredoo - Palestine
Ooredoo Palestine customer numbers increased by 3 percent to 1.3 million compared to previous year. Revenue slightly decreased to KD 30.2 million, compared to KD 30.3 million in 2018. EBITDA was strong, increasing 13 percent to KD 9.0 million in 2019 compared to KD 8.0 million in 2018, driven by operational efficiencies across the business and the implementation of IFRS 16.

Ooredoo - Maldives
Ooredoo Maldives reported a 5 percent increase in revenues to KD 40.2 million in 2019, compared to KD 38.2 million in 2018. EBITDA was increased to KD 22.1 million in 2019, an increase of 12 percent compared to KD 19.7 million in 2018. Ooredoo Maldives now serves a total of 405k customers.

Post period Ooredoo Maldives was issued a 15 year telecommunications license, encompassing mobile, fixed and internet services, starting as of Feb 1, 2020.
Stocks climb further after China slashes US levies, Trump win

Investors look beyond virus, bullish on growth outlook

LONDON: Stock markets rose further yesterday after China's move to slash levies on US imports soothed concerns about the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

Investors cheered China's announcement that it would halve levies on $75 billion (68 billion euros) worth of US imports after the two last month signed their mini trade deal that dangled down a long-running and painful trade war. Investors were already on a roll with another surge on Wall Street where the S&P 500 and Nasdaq chalked up new record highs Wednesday after figures showed private firms added a forecast-smashing 291,000 new jobs last month, marking the biggest gain since December 2018.

Wall Street closed just ahead of US President Donald Trump defeating the gravest threat yet to his three-year-old presidency, winning acquittal in the Senate on impeachment charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. In Europe yesterday, "stock markets... pushed higher by the announcement that China will halve the tariffs it imposes on $75 billion worth of US imports", said CMC Markets analyst David Madden.

"The cut on levies will be introduced on 14 February—the day the US will reduce tariffs on $20 billion worth of Chinese imports," Madden added. "The move by Beijing is a nice way to take the pressure off the Chinese economy in light of the coronavirus situation."

Equities gained ground also on optimism that the deadly virus, which has spread to more than 20 countries, can be contained and the economic impact limited.

After last week's big share price losses, and a near eight-per cent drop for Shanghai's main stocks index on Monday, observers said traders have been coming back on relatively low valuations, with reasonably healthy earnings reports also providing much-needed support.

Analysts generally have expressed confidence the illness will be largely contained to China and the economic harm will not be lasting. Huge cash injections by the Chinese central bank into the country's financial markets have also soothed investor concerns.

"The markets are not only holding up, but they're going up," added ASXCorp analyst Stephen Innes.

And to suggest risk appetite continues to 'creep' back in favor might be the biggest understatement of the week as equity markets just burst higher," Innes said that while the World Health Organization has played down reports that a cure might soon be developed, "any progress on treatment may also be a comfort to investors that the longer-term secondary effects of the outbreak are contained".

Markets were also looking ahead to today's key non-farm payrolls data in the US that will provide a clearer snapshot of the world's top economy, dealers said. Meanwhile after his political triumph Wednesday, Trump can "fully concentrate on his (presidential) election campaign and he probably has a good chance to win a second term", noted ING analyst Stephen Innes.

"The anticipation of a Trump win should continue boosting demand in US equities. In commodities, oil prices also extended a rebound as investors bet on OPEC and other major producers led by Russia cutting output on fears the virus slashes crude demand. Observers said Kingpin Saudi Arabia was looking for a reduction of half a million barrels a day, with some reports saying twice that amount was possible. — AFP

Qatar Airways bids to acquire RwandaAir stake

DOHA: Qatar Airways is negotiating to acquire 49 percent of RwandaAir, the national carrier of the central African nation, to cater for growing passenger demand in Africa, it said Wednesday.

"It is a 49 percent stake that we are negotiating for in RwandaAir," the CEO of Qatar Airways, Baker al-Baker, told a press conference on the sidelines of an international aviation conference in Doha.

"The attraction of Kigali is its location, the stability of the country and the very favorable business environment that exists in that country," Baker said. With a small fleet of 12 aircraft, including two Airbus A330 and six Boeing 737, RwandaAir flies to 27 destinations across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. "In Africa, there is big demand for air travel and today Africa is very poorly connected so we always look at opportunities in our field for investment," Baker said.

Qatar's sovereign wealth fund is financing the expansion of Kigali Airport to raise its 10 million passengers a year, the Qatari official said. One of the world's fastest growing airlines, Qatar Airways has a fleet of 250 modern aircraft and flies to 160 destinations.

The state-owned airline has been hit by an embargo slapped on Qatar since June 2017 by neighboring Gulf countries. In the fiscal year to March 2019, it posted a loss of $639 million, in addition to a loss of $69 million the previous year.

Despite the embargo, Qatar Airways has been trying to expand its foothold internationally. In January last year, it acquired a five-percent stake in China Southern Airlines, one of the Asian giant's three big carriers. Qatar Airways also owns a 20-percent stake in International Airlines Group, which holds British Airways under its umbrella, as well as shares in LATAM Airlines Group, Italy's Meridiana and Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific. Baker also said Qatar Airways was still interested in investing in IndiGo, India's largest budget airline. — AFP

Malaysian PM downplays AirAsia probe

KUALA LUMPUR: Receiving money to "offset" buying planes and equipment did not necessarily constitute bribery, Malaysia's prime minister said yesterday, days after AirAsia boss Tony Fernandes stepped aside temporarily in the wake of a $4 billion Airbus graft scandal.

AirAsia founder and CEO Fernandes and company executive chairman Kamarudin Meranun deny allegations of misconduct, but have stepped aside after Airbus last week settled a court case in Europe which alleged the planemaker paid bribes to win contracts. Airbus agreed to pay $4 billion in fines to regulators to settle the case, but the scandal was further illuminated by Britain's Serious Fraud Office (SFO) releasing the names of several airlines allegedly involved—including AirAsia and its long-haul unit AirAsia X.

AirAsia said Fernandes and Kamarudin would step aside temporarily while the issue is investigated further. Asked about the case, Malaysia Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said he was not in a position to make any decision about it, but added: "Usually when the government purchases anything, we always ask for an 'offset'." If we get something for buying at a high price tag, why shouldn't we accept it?" he said at a press conference. "If the money that we receive goes into our pocket, then that is bribery. But if the money is for a specific reason, it is an 'offset', not bribery."

A French court last week said Airbus had agreed to pay 3.6 billion euros ($4 billion) in fines to Britain, France and the United States to settle corruption inquiries sparked by suspicious sales.

Court documents on the British NFO website said EADS France SAS—which was later renamed Airbus Group SAS—paid $50 million as sponsorship for Formula One team owned by [two unnamed AirAsia executives]. "Key decision-makers" in AirAsia and AirAsia X allegedly rewarded the firm with an order of 180 aircraft from Airbus, it said.

AirAsia is Airbus' biggest customer, but Fernandes and Kamarudin have denied their former Formula One team was involved in any bribery scandal. — AFP
China to halve tariffs on $75bn of US imports

Officials look to calm markets unnerved by deadly virus outbreak

BEIJING: China yesterday said it would halve tariffs on $75 billion-worth of US imports as part of its trade truce with Washington and as officials look to calm markets unnerved by the deadly virus outbreak. The State Council Tariff Commission said the reductions would come in a month after Beijing and Washington signed a deal to dial down a long-running trade war that has hit the global economy. It also comes a day after Donald Trump hailed relations between the superpowers as the “best” ever in his State of the Union address, with observers saying Beijing was likely keen to get moving on the next phase of talks toward a wider agreement.

Levies of five and 10 percent on more than 1,700 items—imposed in September—will be cut from February 14, the same day Washington is expected to halve tariffs on $120 billion worth of Chinese goods. Products affected include fresh seafood, poultry and soybeans as well as tungsten lamps for scientific and medical purposes, and some types of aircraft.

The move is aimed at “promoting the healthy and stable development of China-US economic and trade relations”, the Commission said in a statement.

“...to alleviate economic and trade friction, and expand cooperation in these areas, China has also made relevant adjustments,” it added, referring to the US cuts. “We hope to work with the US towards the ultimate elimination of all increased tariffs.”

The Commission also said it “hopes that both parties will be able to abide by their agreement, strive to implement its relevant content, (and) boost market confidence”. Other retaliatory tariffs, however, remain in place.

The two in January signed a partial deal that eased tensions in their bruising trade war, with Beijing agreeing to buy an additional $200 billion in US goods over the next two years. As part of the phase one deal, the US said it would halve its tariffs on $120 billion of Chinese goods to 7.5 percent, while Donald Trump called off additional levies that would have taken effect last December.

Yesterday’s announcement comes as China grapples with a shortage of resources as it struggles to combat the coronavirus, which has claimed more than 560 lives and infected more than 28,000. On Tuesday, a top US trade official said the virus outbreak would delay Beijing’s plans to buy goods from the US under the phase one deal. But Washington expects “minimal impact” from the virus on the US economy. China’s outbreak has caused Beijing to impose travel restrictions across cities, with millions of consumers staying home during its otherwise busy Lunar New Year holiday. The crisis is expected to hammer China’s already stuttering economy, as companies and factories delay the resumption of operations. Over the weekend, Beijing announced that US imports that can be used in its fight against the deadly virus will also be exempted from retaliatory tariffs imposed in the trade war.

“Sweet carrot”

AxiCorp chief market strategist Stephen Innes said the tariffs cut was a “small but rather a sweet carrot to dangle”. “In the wake of the coronavirus economic turmoil, it’s not much of a stretch to assume China is eager to start the negotiations,” he said.

Moody’s Analytics economist Xu Xiaochun told AFP a reduction in tariffs “makes sense” as China is expected to import more US goods as part of the phase one deal.

But the timing might be more than a coincidence. “Perhaps it has got to do with market sentiment,” he said, noting that the Shanghai Composite and Shenzhen Composite indexes fell Monday when markets reopened after the recent holiday and reacted for the first time to the outbreak.—AFP
Business

Britain eyes early free trade pact with Australia after leaving EU

Britain takes 3% of Australia’s goods and services

SYDNEY/LONDON: British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab hopes a free trade deal with Australia will be one of the first such pacts to be secured, now that Britain has left the European Union, he said yesterday.

After formally leaving the EU on Jan. 31, Britain entered a transition period that allows it to negotiate future ties with Brussels and begin talks with other major economies, such as the United States and Japan. “We have a trade relationship already worth 17 billion pounds, but we have the potential to do so much more,” Raab told reporters in the Australian capital of Canberra. The figure is equivalent to $22 billion.

“Australia hopefully will be part of that first wave of high priority deals that we are pursuing,” added Raab, speaking after he met Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne.

Neither Raab nor Payne gave any timetable for the start of free trade talks. Australia is in the midst of talks with the EU for a trade deal, but Payne said the talks with Brussels would not slow the progress of a British deal. Although Australia has strong ties with Britain as a former colony, the trading relationship has waned significantly over the last 50 years.

Britain now takes just 3 percent of Australia’s exports, while China takes nearly 40 percent. Britain’s entry into the Common Market in 1973 was widely considered a betrayal in Australia, upending decades of tradition and a host of tariff deals. Supporters of Britain’s exit have argued, however, that “family ties” with Commonwealth members, such as Australia, could compensate for the partial loss of Europe’s 444 million customers.

During his two-day visit to Australia, Raab will also meet Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Trade Minister Simon Birmingham. Talks are expected to focus on trade, but Britain’s decision to allot a limited role for Chinese telecoms giant Huawei in building its 5G network could also be discussed.

The world’s biggest producer of telecoms equipment faces intense scrutiny in the West over its relationship with the Chinese government and accusations of enabling state espionage, with the United States urging allies not to use its technology.

Although no evidence has been produced publicly and Huawei has denied the claims, the accusations have prompted several Western countries, including Australia, to curb the firm’s access to their markets. In January, Britain said high-risk vendors would be excluded from the sensitive core of networks, and there would be a 35 percent cap on their involvement in the non-sensitive parts.

EU trade chief Hogan returns to Washington as auto tariffs loom

BRUSSELS: European Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan returned to Washington yesterday for talks with US counterpart Robert Lighthizer designed to improve transatlantic ties as the threat of auto tariffs looms. Hogan first visited the United States as EU trade chief three weeks ago, declaring at the time that the European Union’s bid to reset EU-US economic relations had got off to a good start.

However, US President Donald Trump said after meeting European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen in Davos a week later that he would impose tariffs on imports of cars from the European Union if no trade deal were struck. Hogan had been due to address a conference on the digital economy in Brussels yesterday morning, but abruptly changed his plans.

A European Commission spokesman said Hogan would hold talks in Washington with a number of US administration officials, including Lighthizer. “These meetings are part of the regular bilateral contacts being held at technical and political level in the framework of the discussions for a positive bilateral transatlantic trade agenda, launched by the European Union and the United States in July 2018,” the spokesman said.

In July 2018, Trump agreed to hold off on imposing car tariffs while Washington and Brussels discussed ways to improve economic ties. The EU has since agreed to boost imports of soybeans, liquefied natural gas and beef from the United States.

Societe Generale profit slumps, abandons target

PARIS: Net profit slumped at Societe Generale last year as it paid the price of restructuring efforts and the French bank dropped yesterday a key profit target. The 21 percent fall in net earnings to 3.25 billion euros ($3.58 billion) was less than the 3.43 billion euros consensus forecast of analysts surveyed by financial news firm Bloomberg.

Meanwhile net banking income—a measure of what a bank is earning from lending operations after paying interest to depositors—dipped 2.1 percent to 24.7 billion euros.

Moreover, the bank abandoned the target it had set of attaining a return on tangible equity (ROTE) of 9 to 10 percent by the end of 2020. Instead, it said it now only aims to improve the indicator which stood at 7.6 percent at the end of 2019. ROTE was at 9.7 percent in 2018.

Last year the bank began a deep restructuring of its Global Banking and Investor Solutions unit to focus on its most profitable areas, pledging to sell off billions of assets. This weighed on earnings as the bank took 409 million in charges as it carried out the plan, and the selling-off of operations translated into a reduction of revenues. But it helped Societe Generale increase over the year its CET1 ratio—a key measure of the capital it can call upon in case of a crisis—from 10.9 to 12.7 percent.

Meanwhile the bank was able to cut costs and activity remained solid in many of its business lines, but the ultra-low interest rates in the eurozone continued to weigh on its traditional retail banking operations in France. The bank’s chief executive Frederic Oudea highlighted the “considerable progress” the bank achieved in restructuring in 2019.

Fourth quarter results were encouraging, with operating and net earnings both rising from the same period in 2018 when exceptional items are removed.

“We are therefore entering 2020 with confidence, with a more compact business model based on leadership positions in high added-value businesses and a presence in buoyant geographical regions,” he said in an earnings statement. Societe Generale shares climbed 1.3 percent in early trading, with the blue-chip CAC 40 index in Paris rising 0.7 percent. — AFP

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India’s RBI keeps interest rates on hold as inflation skyrockets

Govt budget raises little hope for a revival of economy

MUMBAI: India’s central bank kept interest rates on hold yesterday due to soaring inflation, even as the government’s annual budget announcement last week raised little hope of an economic turnaround.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said the benchmark repo rate—the level at which it lends to commercial banks—would remain unchanged at 4.5 percent, a nine-year low. Inflation in Asia’s third-largest economy surged to 7.36 percent in December, far above the four percent target set by the bank’s monetary policy committee (MPC), and driven up by a rise in the price of onions and other essential items. “The outlook for inflation is highly uncertain at this juncture. On the other hand, the economic activity remains subdued... Given the evolving growth inflation dynamics, MPC felt it appropriate to maintain status quo,” the central bank said in a statement.

A survey of analysts by Bloomberg predicted the central bank would avoid cutting rates. The bank added that the outbreak of coronavirus in China had also affected global growth prospects.

Analysts had hoped Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman’s budget announcement last Saturday would help kickstart the economy, but the absence of any major reforms dashed those expectations. The government instead elected to relax its fiscal deficit target for the current financial year to 3.8 percent of GDP from a previous 3.3 percent in order to accommodate increased spending.

The central bank raised its growth projections for financial year 2020-21 to 6.0 percent from a December estimate of 5.0 percent, in line with New Delhi’s belief that a recovery remains imminent.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s right-wing government has been trying desperately to revive the economy, which has flagged for several quarters, with per capita consumption falling sharply below the 7.0 percent level recorded a year earlier.

That is well below the level needed to provide the jobs sought by 1.2 million entrants to the labour market every month, posing a major headache for Modi.

RBI governor Shaktikanta Das—a Modi ally—cut interest rates five times in a row starting in February 2019, bringing them down by 135 basis points. But India’s banks, saddled with bad loans, have failed to pass on these benefits to consumers. — AFP

US warns energy firms like Rosneft, Chevron over ties to Maduro

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration is ramping up pressure against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro’s government, and energy companies with ties to it, from Russia’s Rosneft to US-based Chevron Corp, should “tread cautiously,” a senior administration official said on Wednesday.

The comments came in response to a question about possible sanctions against Rosneft on a call with reporters ahead of a White House meeting between Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido and US President Donald Trump. “Everything is an option as regards creating pressure, whether it’s towards Russian entities that are supporting Maduro or others,” the official said. “So, absolutely, that remains on the table,” the official said, emphasizing that the administration was “concerned” by more than just Rosneft’s behavior.

“Whether it’s Rosneft, whether it’s Reliance, whether it’s Repsol, whether it’s Chevron here in the United States, I would tread cautiously towards their activities in Venezuela that are in support, directly or indirectly, of the Maduro dictatorship because... we’re halfway through our maximum pressure campaign,” he added. Rosneft, India’s Reliance Industries, Spain’s Repsol and Chevron did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

But some company executives were surprised by the tone of the remarks, since the US government has not taken action since it threatened oil firms dealing with Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A., or PDVSA, in August, sources told Reuters. Rosneft, Reliance, Repsol and Chevron have emerged as the main business partners for PDVSA since the United States imposed the steepest sanctions yet on the state-owned Venezuelan company last year.

Most of them share oilfields with PDVSA in Venezuela, and they also act as intermediaries for sales of Venezuelan oil to markets such as Asia. In 2019, Rosneft was the main receiver of Venezuelan oil, followed by China National Petroleum Corp - which suspended direct purchases from PDVSA, Cuba’s Cubametales and Reliance, according to PDVSA’s internal documents and Retinut Eikon data.

Washington imposed a first round of sanctions on PDVSA a year ago, depriving the state-run firm of its main market, the United States. In August, it announced new sanctions targeting non-US firms buying Venezuelan oil.

Very significant consequences

The official also warned against any interference by the Maduro government in Guaido’s trip back to Venezuela. “Any harm that may be caused on Juan Guaido on his return to Venezuela will have very significant consequences,” the official said. Guaido, president of the opposition-held National Assembly, is recognized as Venezuela’s rightful president by dozens of countries including the United States.

According to his profile on Wikipedia, “He was a guest at Tuesday’s State of the Union address, when Trump, a Republican, praised him as a “very brave man who carries with him the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all Venezuelans.” Guaido received a standing ovation from Democratic and Republican members of the US Congress.

The senior administration official also described “good momentum” since Maduro’s party failed to wrest control of the national assembly from Guaido last month, and said there would be some “impactful measures” within the next 30 days to further cripple Maduro’s rule. The only possible topic up for negotiation with Maduro’s government was a discussion of “certain guarantees” upon his exit, the person added. — Reuters

Eurozone demand slump hits German industrial orders

FRANKFURT: New orders at German industrial firms slid in December, official data showed yesterday, driven entirely by plunging demand from the country’s eurozone neighbors.

Overall, new business for manufacturing firms fell back 2.1 percent month-on-month in seasonally-adjusted figures, statistics authority Destatis said, disappointing analysts who had foreseen a 0.6 percent lift. A breakdown of the data showed that while domestic orders rose by 1.4 percent and those from non-eurozone countries gained 2.1 percent, eurozone demand tumbled 13.9 percent.

“Incoming orders have progressed more weakly in the past months, marked by developments in the capital goods sector,” the economy ministry in Berlin said in a statement, adding that volatile large orders for items such as aircraft had had a particularly large impact in December.

Looking forward, while “confidence among businesses has recently improved, overall the outlook for industrial growth remains muted,” the ministry added. Looking at sector-by-sector figures, makers of capital goods and consumer goods both reported falls of almost four percent in new orders in December, while producer goods makers added 1.4 percent.

Compared to December 2019, the volume of new industrial orders was 8.7 percent lower. “2019 was not only the worst year for industrial orders since 2008, it was also the first time since 2002 that German order books shrank for two years in a row,” ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski said. — AFP
Ibaka sparks Raptors over Pacers for 12th straight win

LOS ANGELES: Spanish center Serge Ibaka scored a season-high 30 points and powered the defending NBA champion Toronto Raptors to a club-record 12th consecutive triumph on Wednesday by beating Indiana 115-118. The 30-year-old Congo-born big man sank a go-ahead 3-pointer with 30 seconds remaining to cap a game-ending 11-0 Raptors run as the Raptors rallied from a 19-point third-quarter deficit. "The key is we keep our composure during the game. We just didn't give up. We kept digging and digging," Ibaka said.

"We have the mindset of 'Don't give up.' We don't point the fingers when things go bad. We stay together and I think that's what makes us special." Raptors guard Kyle Lowry scored 32 points, passed out 10 assists and grabbed eight rebounds while Cameroonian star Pascal Siakam added 25 points and nine rebounds for the reigning NBA champions. Toronto, which trailed 69-50 early in the third quarter, improved the third-best record in the NBA to 37-14.

Ibaka, who won his first NBA title with Oklahoma City last year in his 10th league campaign, was bolstered by Raptors coach Nick Nurse, who kept firing 3-pointers even though he was only 1-for-7 from beyond the arc until hitting the de-buzzer. Jayson Tatum netted 33 points and grabbed eight rebounds to lead the Boston Celtics over visiting Orlando 116-100. Frenchman Evan Fournier led the Magic with 26 points. Atlanta All-Star guard Trae Young scored 30 points and passed off 11 assists to power the Atlanta Hawks over host Minnesota 127-120, dealing the Timberwolves a 13th consecutive defeat.

German guard Dennis Schroder scored 30 points off the bench to power Oklahoma City over visiting Cleveland 109-103. Andre Drummond scored 31 points and grabbed 19 rebounds while Reggie Jackson added 25 points to lead Detroit over visiting Phoenix 116-108. Brooklyn's Caris Levert had 23 points and eight assists in the Nets' 129-88 rout of visiting Golden State.

Chiefs celebrate Super Bowl title with parade, rally

WASHINGTON: Kansas City Chiefs players and coaches celebrated their Super Bowl victory over San Francisco with supporters on Wednesday with a two-mile downtown parade and pep rally. "This is the most beautiful scene I've ever witnessed in my life," Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce said. "I love this city to death. I promise you from here to the end, I cherish every moment with y'all and I promise you everybody here feels the exact same way.

The Chiefs won their first Super Bowl title in 50 years on Sunday by rallying in the fourth quarter to defeat the San Francisco 49ers 31-20. Kelce, whose older brother Jason gave a popular speech two years ago when the Philadelphia Eagles celebrated their Super Bowl triumph over New England, drew huge cheers for his emotional speech.

"I'm wearing about half the beers I've been trying to drink," Kelce said. "It has been a long time coming. We had to fight for our right to party." Chiefs coach Andy Reid, who captured his first NFL crown, was praised by Kelce for waiting 21 years for the victory.

"That's how long this has been turning for my guy Andy Reid...and what did we do? We unleashed a can of whoopass on everybody," Kelce said. Reid told the crowd that they should prepare for a similar jubilant bash in 2021. "Next year, we're coming right back here," Reid said. "One more time baby."—AFP

Hair-raising barbs and Blues blows: 5 Super Rugby talking points

WELLINGTON: Wellington Hurricanes travel to Buenos Aires to face the Jaguars this weekend after a drubbing in Cape Town, while the Auckland Blues have a mini-injury crisis just a week into the new campaign. Here are five talking points ahead of this weekend's second round of the Super Rugby 2020 season:

Stormers in eye of a Hurricane

The Wellington Hurricanes have reminded Western Stormers about people in a "glass house" not throwing stones, after the South African side's coach John Dobson raised hackles by saying the Hurricanes had indulged in hair-pulling and cheap shots in Cape Town last weekend. The Stormers crushed the Cane 27-0 in a match that included two yellow cards for the visitors and an off-the-ball tackle that left World Cup winning Springboks captain Siya Kolisi with a torn knee ligament.

"Pieter-Steph (du Toit) went through quite a hard time (and) there was one movement where Seabelo Senatla's hair is pulled twice. We weren't happy with that game at all, lots of stuff happened on the field," said Dobson. But Hurricanes assistant coach Chris Gribbs hit back in Buenos Aires, where his side play the Jaguars next. "It's a pretty big glass house there to be honest," he said. "There are a few chips that we've looked at..."

Rebels pack pays the price

Melbourne Rebels coach Dave Wessels has reshaped his forwards pack ahead of facing the ACT Brumbies this weekend after admitting his team "let each other down" in their shock opening 36-27 defeat to Japan's Sunwolves in Fukuoka. Wessels complained the Rebels were "a good team that played badly". "We feel like we have let each other down to be honest and that's a good thing, maybe we didn't have enough of that last week," he defiantly added that "Super Rugby is not won in round one" as he axed two-thirds of his front row, with Matt Gibbon coming in for Fereti Sa'aga and Ruan Smith taking over from Jermaine Alixey while experienced former Brumbies and Waratahs flanker Michael Wells takes over at number seven from Rob Leota.

Rare win, Sunwolves style

Japan's Sunwolves sit atop the Australian conference after one week of their farewell season in Super Rugby, but a quirk of the fixture list means their multicultural squad will lose the chance to keep the momentum going this week as they have a bye. It's pity for the hastily-cobbled together squad who fielded only three Japanese players in the starting side as they shocked the fancied the Melbourne Rebels 36-27 in Fukuoka last weekend. They made up the numbers with a committed band of nomads from Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Tonga and Georgia who had trained together for less than a month. "We only assembled four weeks ago," said Australian-born Jake Schatz, captain of the perennial strugglers who recorded only two wins in the whole of the 2019 campaign among a total of eight wins since joining in 2016.—AFP
McDowell eyes another Pebble Beach victory after the Saudi title

SAN FRANCISCO: Ten years after winning his only major title at Pebble Beach, Graeme McDowell returns to the seaside California layout coming off a victory in Saudi Arabia and hungry for more. The 40-year-old from Northern Ireland, who won the 2010 US Open at Pebble Beach, seeks his first victory on US soil since 2013 this week at the Pebble Beach Pro-Am, played over three Northern California courses.

“It’s a fun week, but at the same time I’m here to try and continue to play well,” McDowell said. “Feel like the game is certainly trending in the right direction and obviously would love to have a nice week this week.”

McDowell won last week’s Saudi International title, defeating defending champion Dustin Johnson by two strokes to capture his first European Tour title since 2010. He has said he made mistakes, but that he was “not at fault.” “This is a serious situation. Educators, athletes, associations, we all need to face the problem and find a solution together,” said Maracineanu.

Tony Estanguet, the head of the Paris 2024 Olympics organizing committee, said they would guarantee a safe game for children. “It is time to draw conclusions from what has been happening. It is serious, it is shocking and it puts the whole system at risk,” Estanguet told reporters.

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PARIS: French Sports minister Roxana Maracineanu yesterday urged abuse victims to speak up after a series of rape and sexual aggression allegations in figure skating. French prosecutors launched a preliminary investigation on Tuesday into former figure skating coach Gilles Beyer for the alleged rape of a minor and sexual aggression.

Former figure skater Sarah Abitbol, a bronze medalist with partner Stephane Bernadis at the 2000 world championships, recently published a book in which she said Beyer had raped her multiple times from 1990 to 1992. In a statement to Agence France Presse, Beyer admitted to “inappropriate” relationships with Abitbol. He could not be reached for comment.

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Double Olympic champion Judoka Teddy Riner, former skater Nathalie Pechalat and four-times X Games gold medalist Ophelie David were among those to sign the letter. Estanguet promised measures would be taken ahead of Paris 2024. “We will commit to having a safe event,” he said. “We will check that every person who has access to athletes will go through a thorough background check to make sure they have no record or that they’re not a liability. ‘It will allow us to guarantee the safety of the athletes.”—Reuters

Canizares sets pace at pioneering Australia golf tournament

GEELONG: Spain’s Alejandro Canizares blitzed a nine-under-par 63 to top the leaderboard among the men yesterday while in-form Swede Madelene Sagstrom shared the women’s spoils at an innovative tournament in Australia. The Vic Open is the only event in the world with male and female fields teeing off, in alternate groups, on the same course and for equal prize money. It has been running as a dual event for seven years. But the tournament took on added significance last year with the European Tour and the US-based LPGA Tour jointly sanctioning it for the first time, with prize money significantly boosted.

Played at the 13th Beach Golf Links south of Melbourne, Canizares fired 10 birdies to one bogey in his 63 to be two ahead of a chasing pack of four Australians—Matt Griffin, Travis Smyth, Jake McLeod and Justin Warren. “I putted really well. It was one of those days where you saw the hole pretty big,” said Canizares. Sagstrom shares top spot in the women’s field after a 65, matching South Korea’s Kang Haeji and Taiwan’s Peiyun Chien.

The Swede, who claimed her first LPGA win two weeks ago in the United States, started with six birdies in her first seven holes before breaking a run of pars with birdies at each of the last three. “I think after my first win it definitely added confidence to everything, just knowing that I can compete out here, knowing that I can win on tour,” she said. Incredibly, two strokes behind is English veteran Laura Davis, who has been on tour for 35 years but was playing her first event in six months after taking time off to look after her ailing mother.

“That’s the best I’ve putted in 20 years,” said the 56-year-old, who has 87 world-wide victories to her name. “I don’t know how many puts I had, but it wasn’t many. This might even be my favorite tournament.” She added. To accommodate the dual fields, there are two cuts—one as usual after round two, and another reducing the men’s and women’s fields to 35 players after 54 holes. — AFP

Spanish Alejandro Canizares
**Kuwait volleyball team to face Oman’s Al-Seeb team**

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT**: Kuwait sports club volleyball team will meet Oman’s Al-Seeb team in the third round of the 37th Gulf Champion Clubs Championship which is hosted by Kuwait Club until February 10. This match will be preceded by a match between UAE’s Al-Ain with Qatar’s Police, followed by a match between Saudi Arabia’s Al-Hilal and Bahrain’s Dar Kulaib.

**Kuwait Club lost**

Kuwait’s team lost to Qatar’s police 3-0 during their match on Wednesday during the second round with the scores of (20-25, 20-25, 17-25). The match was at a medium level. The Qatar’s team had a well organized attack as well as good smashing and blocking skills. Kuwait players attempted to confront the strength and experience Qataris, but all to no avail. Saudi Arabia’s Al-Hilal had its second victory against UAE’s Al-Ain 3-0 (25-19, 25-19, 25-21), while Bahrain’s Dar Kulaib recovered from their loss to the Qatari team by beating Al-Seeb 3-0 (25-18, 25-21, 25-23). Qatar’s police top the table - followed by Al-Hilal with 6 points each; Dar Kulaib grabbed third while Kuwait took the fourth position with Al-Seeb fifth and Al-Ain on the sixth.

Kuwait team is required to recover from their loss to Qatar’s police in order to compete for top positions in case the two front runners suffer setbacks in the remaining rounds. Kuwait’s coach Khalid Baleid said “we still have hope. The loss does not mean we are out of the competition”.

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**Kuwait Stars wins 3rd match against Lebanon Cedars**

**KUWAIT**: Kuwait Stars ice hockey team won a decisive match against Lebanon’s Cedars Club 5-2 on Wednesday, their third consecutive win in the first Kuwaiti open Championship for Arab clubs, in which six sides are participating. Meanwhile, UAE Thebes won a deserved victory in the championship, at the expense of its Saudi counterpart, Jeddah (5-1), to confirm the Emiratis’ determination to compete strongly for the title. On another front, Egypt Pharaohs succeeded in beating its Bahraini counterpart, Bahrain (5-4). The Egyptians achieved their first victory in the championship, while the Bahraini team remained without any victory after receiving its third loss. —KUNA

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**‘NCM Premier League’ Cricket Tournament**

**KUWAIT**: As part of corporate social responsibility initiative towards the society, NCM Investment Company (NCM) is hosting “NCM Premier League” T20 Cricket Tournament during the auspicious occasion of Hala February Kuwait. Tournament will start tomorrow with opening ceremony at 1pm at Sulaibiya Sea side UPL ground and will conclude with Final match on the 7th of March 2020. The league tournament will have eight corporate teams from various sectors. Teams will be distributed in two groups in a T20 league format, facing each other’s. This initiative is to encourage everyone to attend and participate through this cheerful and competitive event as NCM Investment supports the never-ending benefits and importance of sports in our lives.
Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Tennis complex launched

KUWAIT: Rafael Nadal of Spain (right) holds his trophy after winning an exhibition game against compatriot David Ferrer, to inaugurate the Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait, at Shaikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex in the Kuwaiti capital on February 5, 2020. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zeyyat

KUWAIT: Rafael Nadal of Spain signs autographs for fans after an exhibition game to inaugurate the Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait.

KUWAIT: Rafael Nadal of Spain returns the ball to retired compatriot David Ferrer (unseen) during an exhibition game.

Rafa Nadal Academy inaugurated in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex located in Al-Zahraa has been inaugurated and Rafa Nadal Academy at the facility was launched on Wednesday. It is the largest tennis academy in the Middle East launched under the patronage of Kuwait Tennis Federation Honorary President Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

This came during a ceremony to open the complex and launch the academy in the presence of National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jahri, President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director General of Public Authority for Sport Hamoud Flaiteh and his deputy Saqar Al-Mulla, Hawalli Governor Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Sabah and a number of Sheikhs, officials and dignitaries.

The ceremony witnessed an exhibition match held between Spain’s Rafael Nadal and his fellow challenger David Ferrer. Nadal won 19 titles at the four Grand Slam championships. Speaking in a statement on the sidelines of the ceremony, Jahri said that the academy would contribute to improving and reviving grass-roots tennis in Kuwait through training players and national teams under the supervision of well-experienced trainers.

This will help make further sports achievements and disseminating the game on the local level, he added. The academy would be a key sport edifice as it is the only branch of the main facility in Spain, he noted. It will help attract a new generation to make Kuwait a hub for the game on the regional level, and raise awareness on this game, he pointed out.

Meanwhile, President of Arab and Kuwait Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said, in his opening speech, that the academy would allure players and the lovers of the game in Kuwait. The edifice is fruit of partnership between the public and private sectors and in line with His Highness the Amir's ‘New Kuwait Vision 2035’ vision that will help place Kuwait on the global map of tennis.

Furthermore, Mohammad Al-Marzouq, Chairman of Tamdeen Group, which launched the academy in cooperation with the main academy in Spain, said the aim of this facility is to prepare a promising generation of players and developing their talents to be champions. He added cooperation with the academy in Spain would boost and develop the game in Kuwait and the Middle East region.

The ceremony also involved some performances of the Kuwaiti national team juniors. The complex includes 18 tennis courts, the inside main court accommodates 5000 spectators, while the outside one’s capacity is 1500. The complex also contains a hotel with 300 rooms, and special utilities for tennis as well as Kuwait Tennis Federation’s headquarters. The complex will host the first championship next April, as part of the third Gulf sports games.

The facility, built on an area of 70,000 square meters, contains several utilities and services regarding the game. The courts are well equipped in line with world-class standards. The Kuwait Tennis Federation, in cooperation with the academy, is set to organize local tournaments to benefit national teams to take part in international events and raise Kuwait’s status in international arenas. — KUNA
Mueller shines; Bayern squeeze into German Cup quarter-finals

BERLIN: Thomas Mueller weighed in with a goal and an assist as holders Bayern Munich edged a 4-3 thriller with Hoffenheim on Wednesday to reach the German Cup quarter-finals. Mueller's golden run continued at the Allianz Arena to leave him with seven goals and nine assists in the 14 games since Hansi Flick replaced Niko Kovac as coach last November. Not to be outdone, Mueller's strike partner Robert Lewandowski claimed two goals in the third-round tie.

However, Hoffenheim's Israeli forward Munas Dabbur caused Bayern a few nervous moments with two late goals as the visitors threatened a fightback from 4-1 down. "In the second half, we gave too much ball away and let them come back into the game," admitted Bayern winger Serge Gnabry. "We have to look at that, however we had a lot of fun going forward in attack." It was Mueller who had calmed Bayern's early nerves, forcing an own goal from Benjamin Huebner to equalize after Bayern defender Jerome Boateng had turned the ball into his own net.

Mueller then gave Bayern a 2-1 lead before Lewandowski netted either side of half-time to extend their lead before Hoffenheim's late fightback. Bayern were 2-1 up on 20 minutes when David Alaba's cross found Mueller and the German star fired home from close range. Lewandowski then pounced when Hoffenheim goalkeeper Philipp Pentke failed to claim a high ball under pressure from Mueller. The Polish striker was on hand to head the stray ball into an empty net on 36 minutes and appeared to have settled the matter with a well-taken fourth goal after the break.

Lewandowski has scored in all four of Bayern's matches so far in 2020 and boasts a season tally of 35 goals in 29 games in all competitions. Union Berlin are also through after seeing off fourth-tier minnows Verl with a 1-0 win thanks to a late goal by midfielder Robert Andrich. A goal by Argentinean striker Lucas Alario helped Bayer Leverkusen to a 2-1 win at second-division side VfB Stuttgart.

MUNICH: Hoffenheim's midfielder Christoph Baumgartner and Bayern Munich's German defender Jerome Boateng vie for the ball during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) round of 16 football match on February 5, 2020. — AFP

Barcelona visit Real Betis in La Liga on Sunday as coach Quique Setien returns to the club which catapulted him to fame only to cut him loose after a bitter fallout. Setien was seen as a surprise choice to succeed Quique Flores at Valverde at Barcelona last month and was also an unexpected hire when he took over Betis in the summer of 2017, going on to have a successful yet divisive two-year reign at the Seville club.

He achieved the highest win percentage of any Betis coach in the top-flight and oversaw some spectacular displays, including stunning away victories at Barca, rivals Sevilla, AC Milan plus successive wins at Real Madrid for the first time since 1934. Yet his undying devotion to possession football began to alienate fans in the latter half of his second season as results dried up and Betis were thrashed by Leganes and Levante. At the team's lowest ebb, the club's most vocal supporters refused to enter the stadium for a game against Espanyol, protesting outside with a banner reading 'Setien, take your ego out of our club'. Despite beating Real Madrid on the last day of the season, Setien was sacked by Betis with a year left on his contract. The 61-year-old spent over seven months out of work and was walking among cows in a village when he got the call from Barcelona.

His short time with the champions, however, has been far from smooth. Barca have fallen three points behind Real Madrid in the title race after a defeat to Valencia and captain Lionel Messi appears to be at loggerheads with sporting director Eric Abidal. The coach is also short on personnel, with forwards Luis Suarez and Ousmane Dembele ruled out for the rest of the season and influential defender Gerard Pique suspended for Sunday's game against Betis, who are 12th in the standings.

Setien, however, says he has no regrets. "When you arrive at a club like this you expect things to happen and for them to be amplified," he told reporters on Wednesday. "I'm convinced we can keep moving forward on the pitch." Elsewhere in La Liga, leaders Real Madrid visit Osasuna, who have only lost two home league games since April 2018, while Atletico Madrid will be seeking a reaction to last week's derby defeat to Real when they host Granada.

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Payet dedicates win to Marseille's fans

PARIS: Dimitri Payet scored a brilliant goal as second-placed Marseille claimed a 2-0 victory at Saint-Etienne on Wednesday to cut the gap to Ligue 1 leaders Paris Saint-Germain back to 12 points although hundreds of their diehard fans were stopped from watching the game. Andre Villas-Boas' Marseille opened up a six-point lead over third-placed Rennes, who lost 1-0 at Lille on Tuesday, by bouncing back from successive goalless stalemates against Bordeaux and Angers.

The match was delayed by 15 minutes after clashes between the two sets of fans outside the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard. According to firefighters and the Saint-Etienne prosecutors' office, there were no injuries or arrests. However, the game was played without visiting supporters-believed to number around 400 - who left under police escort despite making a round trip of around 650km.

Payet gave Marseille a seventh-minute lead with a magnificent individual goal, shaping to cross before cutting onto his left foot and hammering the ball past bewildered home goalkeeper Stephane Ruffier from what seemed an impossible angle. The former West Ham United star has scored 10 goals and an assist in the 14 games since Hansi Flick replaced Niko Kovac as coach last November. Not to be outdone, Mueller's strike partner Robert Lewandowski claimed two goals in the third-round tie.

However, Hoffenheim's Israeli forward Munas Dabbur caused Bayern a few nervous moments with two late goals as the visitors threatened a fightback from 4-1 down. "In the second half, we gave too much ball away and let them come back into the game," admitted Bayern winger Serge Gnabry. "We have to look at that, however we had a lot of fun going forward in attack." It was Mueller who had calmed Bayern's early nerves, forcing an own goal from Benjamin Huebner to equalize after Bayern defender Jerome Boateng had turned the ball into his own net.

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Nike unveils new footwear for sprints and distance races

LOS ANGELES: A retail version of Nike’s Zoom Alphafly NEXT footwear was unveiled Wednesday by the shoeemaker, only days after new World Athletics rules-tightening on prototype shoes. The Air Zoom Viperfly is aimed for the 100-meter sprint crowd, while Nike’s Air Zoom Victory is designed for 800m to 10-kilometer races, with sales expected to begin this summer. Just five days earlier, the global track and field governing body introduced tougher rules on footwear for competitors. Nike’s controversial Alphafly prototype shoes were worn by Kenya’s Eliud Kipchoge when he broke the two-hour marathon barrier in Vienna last October.

“For runners, records like the four-minute mile and two-hour marathon are barometers of progress. These are barriers that have tested human potential. When someone like Eliud breaks them, our collective belief about what’s possible changes,” says Tony Bignell, Nike’s vice president of Footwear Innovation. “Barriers are inspiring to innovators. Like athletes, when a barrier is in front of us, we are challenged to think differently and push game-changing progress in footwear design.” The NEXT designs are aimed at maximizing sports science with design to boost body performance through technological enhancement.

The latest version adds air pods in the forefoot and foam in the heel. “The groundbreaking research that led to the original Vaporfly unlocked an entirely new way of thinking about marathon shoes,” said Carrie Dimoff, an elite marathoner and member of Nike’s Advanced Innovation Team. “Once we understood the plate and foam as a system, we started thinking about ways to make the system even more effective.” “That’s when we struck upon the idea of adding Nike Air to store and return even more of a runner’s energy and provide even more cushioning.”

Viperfly incorporates an innovative new carbon plate in the shoe sole designed to provide responsiveness and energy, following deep study of race strategy and performance and runner’s needs over the final 20 meters of a sprint. Victory has foam, a carbon fiber plate and a unique welded sole that divides the unit into two separate pockets, provides impact protection and allows for a smooth transition without sacrificing control.— AFP

Son sends Spurs into the FA Cup 5th round

LONDON: Jose Mourinho admitted Tottenham got lucky after Son Heung-min’s late penalty secured a dramatic 3-2 win against Southampton in Wednesday’s FA Cup fourth-round replay. Son’s 12th minutes away from being knocked out after squandering the first-half lead given to them by Jack Stephens’ own goal.

Shane Long and Danny Ings scored as Southampton hit back to take the lead at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. But Lucas Moura equalised for Spurs before Son won and converted the decisive penalty with just two minutes left. “I have to be honest and say I think the best team lost on the pitch but my team were the ones with more heart and went to their limit,” Mourinho said.

“We suffered but we deserved to win because we were in our limits. Southampton were fresher than us but we played with our souls and heart and gave absolutely everything.”

Tottenham, who last won the FA Cup in 1991, will host struggling Norwich in the fifth round on the first week of March. Aiming for the first trophy of his reign, Mourinho, who replaced Mauricio Pochettino earlier this season, will be relieved Tottenham avoided a surprise exit from a competition he has not won since 2007 with Chelsea.

Taking credit for the win in classic Mourinho self-promoting style, he said: “I think I did very well because I had to manage a team with so many difficulties. “The priority is to survive. We have lots of difficulties. I’m not speaking just about Harry Kane, I’m speaking about injuries to Giovani Lo Celso and Erik Lamela. “Today was a team completely unbalanced, really hard to organize it.” Tottenham are without a major trophy of any kind since the 2008 League Cup and Mourinho would dearly love to end that drought, but his team will have to improve significantly on this erratic display.

Mourinho will also have to get Jan Vertonghen back onside after the defender’s dejected trudge off the pitch following his substitution, “I understand his sadness, it is normal. He is always respectful and always professional. It doesn’t make me happy to make a substitution, I did it for the team, Jan is happy for the team,” Mourinho said. Tottenham had won eight of their last nine home games against Southampton, including a 2-1 win in the Premier League earlier this season, and they were in front after 12 minutes.

Ryan Sessegnon’s burst opened up the Southampton defense and when the ball bounced to Tanguy Ndombele on the edge of the area, the midfielder drilled a powerful shot that took a big deflection off Stephens into his own net. Ings should have capitalized when he ran onto James Ward-Prowse’s pin-point pass and got to the ball ahead of the hesitant Hugo Lloris, but the in-form striker’s shot cannoned back off the bar. Southampton’s 34th-minute equaliser carried more than a whiff of blame for Lloris, who limply carried out Nathan Redmond’s shot for Long to slot home.

There was a blow for the visitors before half-time when Ward-Prowse was stretchered off after needing oxygen for a knee injury suffered in a challenge with Sessegnon. Ralph Hasenhuttl’s side deservedly took the lead in the 72nd minute. Redmond made an incisive surge from deep inside his own half and slipped a pass to Ings, who cut past Jacky Tanganga before curling a fine finish into the far corner from 18 yards for his 17th goal of the season.

But Lucas came to Tottenham’s rescue in the 78th minute when he took Dele Alli’s pass and cleverly turned into the space on the edge of the area before drilling a superb strike into the far corner. The momentum had swung in Tottenham’s favor and Son won it in the 88th minute when he charged into the area and went down under minimal contact from goalkeeper Angus Gunn. Son stepped up to take the penalty himself and fired home to send Tottenham into the last 16.— AFP

Sports

‘Mosque on wheels’ rolls in to help Muslims pray at the Tokyo Olympics

TOKYO: For the thousands of Muslim athletes, officials and supporters arriving in Tokyo for the Olympic Games later this year, it may be a struggle for them to find an appropriate place to pray.

The answer might just be found roaming the streets of Tokyo on the back of a truck. By the time the Games start in July, there will be prayer rooms available at the currently under-construction athlete’s village. However, some venues may not have a designated space.

There is also a dearth of prayer spaces in hotels and public areas across the Japanese capital. This is where the Mobile Mosque, a fully-equipped 48-square-metre prayer room that opens up on the back of a parked truck, comes in.

The Yasu Project, the organization behind the Mosque, for the first time with his daughter. He prayed in Japan, particularly outside Tokyo. “It is really difficult to find mosques near your place,” said Uraden. “If you are in the city there is no problem but if you take a road trip outside Tokyo it is difficult, “Sometimes I pray in a park but sometimes the Japanese look at me like ‘what are you doing’?” —Reuters

Son sends Spurs into the FA Cup 5th round

LONDON: Jose Mourinho admitted Tottenham got lucky after Son Heung-min’s late penalty secured a dramatic 3-2 win against Southampton in Wednesday’s FA Cup fourth-round replay. Son’s 12 minutes away from being knocked out after squandering the first-half lead given to them by Jack Stephens’ own goal.

Shane Long and Danny Ings scored as Southampton hit back to take the lead at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. But Lucas Moura equalised for Spurs before Son won and converted the decisive penalty with just two minutes left. “I have to be honest and say I think the best team lost on the pitch but my team were the ones with more heart and went to their limit,” Mourinho said.

“We suffered but we deserved to win because we were in our limits. Southampton were fresher than us but we played with our souls and heart and gave absolutely everything.”

Tottenham, who last won the FA Cup in 1991, will host struggling Norwich in the fifth round on the first week of March. Aiming for the first trophy of his reign, Mourinho, who replaced Mauricio Pochettino earlier this season, will be relieved Tottenham avoided a surprise exit from a competition he has not won since 2007 with Chelsea.

Taking credit for the win in classic Mourinho self-promoting style, he said: “I think I did very well because I had to manage a team with so many difficulties. “The priority is to survive. We have lots of difficulties. I’m not speaking just about Harry Kane, I’m speaking about injuries to Giovani Lo Celso and Erik Lamela. “Today was a team completely unbalanced, really hard to organize it.” Tottenham are without a major trophy of any kind since the 2008 League Cup and Mourinho would dearly love to end that drought, but his team will have to improve significantly on this erratic display.

Mourinho will also have to get Jan Vertonghen back onside after the defender’s dejected trudge off the pitch following his substitution, “I understand his sadness, it is normal. He is always respectful and always professional. It doesn’t make me happy to make a substitution, I did it for the team, Jan is happy for the team,” Mourinho said. Tottenham had won eight of their last nine home games against Southampton, including a 2-1 win in the Premier League earlier this season, and they were in front after 12 minutes.

Ryan Sessegnon’s burst opened up the Southampton defense and when the ball bounced to Tanguy Ndombele on the edge of the area, the midfielder drilled a powerful shot that took a big deflection off Stephens into his own net. Ings should have capitalized when he ran onto James Ward-Prowse’s pin-point pass and got to the ball ahead of the hesitant Hugo Lloris, but the in-form striker’s shot cannoned back off the bar. Southampton’s 34th-minute equaliser carried more than a whiff of blame for Lloris, who limply carried out Nathan Redmond’s shot for Long to slot home.

There was a blow for the visitors before half-time when Ward-Prowse was stretchered off after needing oxygen for a knee injury suffered in a challenge with Sessegnon. Ralph Hasenhuttl’s side deservedly took the lead in the 72nd minute. Redmond made an incisive surge from deep inside his own half and slipped a pass to Ings, who cut past Jacky Tanganga before curling a fine finish into the far corner from 18 yards for his 17th goal of the season.

But Lucas came to Tottenham’s rescue in the 78th minute when he took Dele Alli’s pass and cleverly turned into the space on the edge of the area before drilling a superb strike into the far corner. The momentum had swung in Tottenham’s favor and Son won it in the 88th minute when he charged into the area and went down under minimal contact from goalkeeper Angus Gunn. Son stepped up to take the penalty himself and fired home to send Tottenham into the last 16.— AFP
KUWAIT: Rafael Nadal of Spain returns the ball to retired compatriot David Ferrer during an exhibition game to inaugurate the Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait, at Shaekh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex in the Kuwaiti capital on February 5, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Nadal Academy launched
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